

# 12<sup>th</sup> EES Biennial Conference

Evaluation Futures in Europe and beyond  
Connectivity, Innovation and Use

26 - 30 September, 2016  
MECC Maastricht, the Netherlands



The very first European Evaluation Society (EES) conference took place in The Hague 1994 with the Algemene Rekenkamer (The Netherlands Court of Audit) as the driving force. As the EES returns to the Netherlands more than two decades later, evaluation is a very different enterprise. In describing it we are confronted with two different, and partly contradicting, pictures. One picture shows us that evaluation has spread within Europe and around the world. Today, evaluation is a form of social praxis that permeates our societies. It is often described as an essential tool for achieving socioeconomic development, good governance, sustainability and equity. The importance of evaluation is advocated by Powerful institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, EU and OECD. The second picture is darker. It focuses on the limits of evaluation, its possible negative side effects and the possibility that evaluators, like many other occupational groups, disguise their self-interest behind a façade of social betterment.

The time has therefore come when we need to critically interrogate what evaluators do and explore the fundamental assumptions and theories that lie behind the role taken by evaluation in different settings.

Such a critical perspective, one could say a evaluative approach to evaluation itself, is a necessity as we speculate about the futures of evaluation. This theme is therefore prominent in the agenda of the Maastricht conference.

The diffusion of evaluation in Europe, and specifically within the public sphere, was not about a rationalistic approach towards politics and administration. Such a concept had already taken root in parts of Europe well before evaluation crossed the Atlantic. Evaluation came as a specific social praxis developed in the United States in the 60s. It overshadowed earlier European traditions, which we need to revisit. Furthermore, and without dismissing the importance of the US-tradition, we are duty bound to ask if the spread of evaluation around the globe also has meant a diffusion of notions about society, the role of government, how policies are developed, the role of public administration etcetera which reflects the situation in one country during a specific time.

The diffusion of evaluations has also meant that evaluation has been seen as a specific form of knowledge production. It can be questioned if this partly explains a widening gap between evaluation and other forms of knowledge production. The theme for the conference 2016 therefore reflects the ambition to open up for a dialogue about how evaluation can better connect with different disciplines, other forms of knowledge production and accountability mechanisms.

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