



EVALUATION FOR MORE RESILIENT SOCIETIES

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF EVALUATION IN TURBULENT TIMES

Letter from the Conference Programme Coordinators

The political, economic, technological, and cultural landscapes of Europe and beyond are changing rapidly and unpredictably, leaving conventional wisdom, values, and establishments trailing behind. After a decade of escalating instability, we now live in the era of the Brexit rupture, the sustained humanitarian fallout of the European migrant crisis, the taxing threat of terrorism, all of which question the ability of our political systems to govern effectively and safely. Add to this the growing environmental damage caused by global warming and climate change, the push for fervent nationalism over globalisation. These turbulent forces are not in the form of isolated, singular events of the past; they reflect ongoing and unfolding dynamics, the full reach and implications of which have yet to be realised, even though fortunately sparks of optimism arise here and there.

Turbulent times are nothing new in evaluation

From its emergence as a distinct field of social and political practice in the mid-sixties to its development of alternative approaches in the 1970s and 1980s – and further diversification in the 1990s and beyond to address the issues of globalisation and technological development – evaluation has always been embedded within changing political, financial, social, and cultural contexts. Evaluators have always had to be resilient to evaluate in such conditions. However, the scale of the turbulence has reached sufficient proportions to pose threats to our social and political life. In addition and underlying the current challenges is the emergence of a post-truth society of “alternative facts” that threatens the very basis of evidence-based decision making that we believed political and social intervention was grounded upon. It is time to think again what contribution we can make in our evaluation practice to advance a more just society.

It is time to ask some fundamental questions

Against this backdrop, it is time to ask some fundamental questions, of central importance for evaluation theory and practice, for practitioners, commissioners, and beneficiaries:

- What is the most useful role for evaluation in the turbulence we face in Europe and beyond? What are the implications for evaluators as individuals and collectively in how we best contribute to the public good?
- Will current evaluation theories and methods meet present challenges? Should new approaches be developed in order to cope with a turbulent and fast-changing world? To what extent will evaluation have to get out of traditional routines and practice to confront those developments? And how to confront them?
- Do we need to reconsider prevailing customs and practices that configure evaluation around standardised requirements and criteria, prespecified logics, and results chains? Do we need to push for more acceptance of adaptive, outcome-focused and less preordinate approaches?



- How can evaluation advance understanding of crisis and impact – and contribute to policy making addressing crises.
- How can evaluation help make beneficiaries and wider societies more resilient? Can it do so in a responsive and timely way, with appropriate approaches?

Speaking directly to these questions, re-thinking *Evaluation* in turbulent times is the leading theme of the EES2018 biennial conference. The Conference offers 5 days of debates on evaluation in times of financial, geopolitical, environmental and humanitarian crises. At the same time, it will provide the traditional opportunities for exchange on evaluation politics, capacity, systems, methodologies, communication and use. The conference is divided in two days of pre-conference training (1-2 October 2018) and three days of main conference (3-5 October 2018). The pre-conference training principles and organisation can be found [here](#).

Conference objectives

The objective of the EES 2018 Conference is to serve as a catalyst for innovative thinking on the role, purpose, and response of evaluation to turbulence and resilience within societies.

The conference will explore contemporary conditions and emerging challenges for evaluation. It will solicit promising approaches to overcoming limitations of current practices in turbulent times. It will focus on innovations and evaluation responses. We will also look ahead and through dialogue and debate collectively try to define actions for the future. The programme will be organised in three strands:

- **Strand 1:** Evaluation systems and approaches in turbulent times
- **Strand 2:** Rethinking evaluation methods and methodologies
- **Strand 3:** Developing the field of Evaluation to promote resilience and action in critical times

The following **keynote speakers** have confirmed, and more are to come:

- **Caroline Heider**, Director-General of the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group
- **Vincent Cochetel**, Head of European Operations for the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)
- **Thomas Schwandt**, Professor of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
- **Elliot Stern**, Professor of Evaluation Research at Lancaster University and founding member of the UK Evaluation Society (UKES)



Emerging ideas for **panels** – far from exhaustive – include the following:

- a. Emerging technologies, Big Data and networked societies: promises and risks for evaluation
- b. The defeat of the mind in the post-truth society and the emergence of “alternative facts”
- c. The role and purpose of theory in unfolding turbulence
- d. Institutionalisation of evaluation, standards and criteria – how far should we go?
- e. Adaptive, foresight and outcome approach to evaluations in contexts of instability

We look to the EES Membership and the future conference delegates to come up with further proposals. On top of the regular conference sessions (panel, paper, and posters) and the innovations that were introduced in Maastricht (Fish Bowl and World Café), new “disruptive” formats will be applied – for the time being still kept as a surprise, and will be revealed through subsequent **EES2018 Conference Newsletters**.

In many ways, of course, the programme and success of the conference will depend on what **YOU** can bring to the conference in terms of papers, panels, posters, and new innovative formats and ideas. Everything’s possible!! The registration and abstract submission is open now. Please contact the programme coordinators would you want to test some ideas. The abstract submission guidance will shortly be posted [here](#) and we are very much looking forward to receiving your proposals for presentations, panel sessions, and roundtables, by 15 March 2018.

WE HOPE TO WELCOME YOU AT THE CONFERENCE!



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Note: programme still subject to change