

Evaluation Practice of Regional Operational Programmes in Poland

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Primary submission: 09.10.2013 | Final acceptance: 20.07.2014

Abstract

Purpose: The study concentrated on the process of evaluation of public programs currently implemented with the support of European Union funds in Poland. The aim was to show how the evaluation practice was adopted in the regional administration within programming and implementation of Regional Operational Programs 2007–2013 (ROP). The author analysed what types of decisions are primarily supported by evaluation and what functions evaluation serves.

Methodology: The quantitative analysis was based on data drawn from documentation of the full population of ROP evaluations completed in 2007 to 2012, which was acquired from 16 ROP evaluation units.

Findings: The practice of evaluation was well adopted in regional administration and has grown rapidly in recent years. 236 studies, costing more than 16 million PLN, were completed by the end of 2012. However, most studies were of limited value as they concentrated on the implementation process, not on the effects and justification of intervention.

Implications: This study focused on quantitative aspects of the knowledge production process (evaluation reports). It omitted the question of actual evaluation use, which together with evaluation process quality and development of evaluation culture should be a subject of further investigation.

Originality: This study was the first review of ROP evaluations in Poland. It went far beyond the scope of data collected previously by the Ministry of Regional Development and proposed novel categorizations of evaluation subjects that may be useful for other than ROP evaluations.

Keywords: regional operational programmes, cohesion policy, evaluation

JEL: R58

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| Introduction²

Evaluation is commonly defined in the literature as a set of measures employed to determine or judge merit, worth, or significance of a certain object, process, intervention: evaluand (Scriven 2007, p. 1; Farrell et al. 2002, p. 8; Rossi et al. 2004, p. 2). The most popular context for discussing evaluation is public policies, as evaluation is considered to be a promising tool for improving management of public interventions. Evaluation ensures better understanding of programmes (Korporowicz 1997), fosters improvement of ongoing and future interventions (Chelimsky 1985; Cronbach 1981; Weiss 1998; all cited by: Olejniczak 2008) and supports rational decision making (Alkin 1990, p. 83).

The idea of using evaluation as a management tool, especially for strategic management, seems apparent. As management comprises making decisions with a view to achieving organizational goals (Griffin 1998) and strategic management responds to rising uncertainty in the decision-making process (Ansoff 1985), evaluation may serve both as an instrument for systematically collecting and analysing data (Patton 1997; Lincoln and Guba 1985) and for informing and supporting decisions (Stufflebeam 2001; Royse et al. 2001).

Evaluation is often listed in literature among the elements of a strategic management process (Thompson and Strickland 1990; Steiss 2003; Rumelt 1980). The widest scope for evaluation use is offered by the evolutionary school of strategic management (Obłój 1998). When management means continuous adaptation, evaluation serves it as a source of feedback about the quality of actions and their effects on every stage of program/policy cycles. That information triggers reflection and appropriate modifications/adaptations.

Evaluation in Polish administration is a fairly new concept, introduced after European Union (EU) accession, as one of the management standards required for structural funds implementation (Żuber and Bienias 2008; Olejniczak 2009). Despite the lack of former tradition, the evaluation practice has started growing rapidly since then³. The number of commissioned evaluations has risen from 5 in 2004 to about 50 per year in 2006–2007 and more than 120 per year after 2007 (National Evaluation Unit and Skórska 2011, p. 201). The annual research budget of approximately 400,000 PLN in 2004 and 2.2 million PLN in 2006 has risen to over 25 million PLN in recent years (Bienias et al. 2009, p. 157).

The first stage of this dynamic development was driven by central level administration. Credit for the second stage, dating from 2008, goes largely to regional administration. Under the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 (NSRF), sixteen separate regional operational programmes (ROPs)

² The analysis was performed as part of the project implemented by the Kozminski University with the financial support of the initiative Santander Universidades.

³ However, it is still limited to the field of cohesion policy in Poland.

managed independently by regional self-governments⁴ were created. One of the consequences was the establishment of 16 regional evaluation units responsible for evaluating ROPs.

The article presents a handful of data characterizing quantitatively development of evaluation practices on the regional level from its beginning in 2007 up to the end of 2012. The aim of the conducted analysis was to answer the following questions:

- Has the practice of evaluation been well adopted in the regional administration?
- What type of decisions are primarily supported by ROP evaluation (strategic/operational) and what functions does evaluation serve?
- How is the area of interest of ROP evaluation correlated to the main fields of ROP intervention?
- Are there any significant differences in the operation of ROP evaluation units?

Most of the findings were based on desk research of complete documentation (acquired directly from marshal offices in February 2013) of all evaluation projects carried out by all 16 ROP evaluation units from 2007 to 2012.

Subsequent sections of the article present changes in the number and cost of conducted evaluations, their typology (including purpose, subject, function, realization time) and detailed classification of covered topics. The presentation manner was intended to allow comparison of evaluation units and capture changes over time.

Number and cost of completed evaluations

By the end of 2012, ROP evaluation units completed 236 evaluation studies, giving an average of 14.8 per voivodship (region). The vast majority of completed studies (224 or 95%) were commissioned from external contractors. The total expenditure on external studies amounts to 16 million PLN, an average of about 1 million PLN per region (voivodship)⁵ and 70 thousand PLN per study.

Analyzing the data for particular regions, significant differences were observed both in terms of the number and cost of evaluation studies (Table 1). Most evaluations were carried out in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship (22), and the least in Podlaskie (8). The highest expenditures were incurred in Warmia and Mazury (2 million PLN), and the lowest in Pomorskie (383 thousand PLN), which completed 12 evaluations but as many as five of them were internal studies. Except for Pomorskie, only four more evaluation units declared implementation of internal evaluations. Warmia and Mazury were distinguished not only by total evaluation expenditure but also by the highest average value of the research at 143 thousand PLN, more than twice the national average. The cheapest studies at an average of 48,3 thousand PLN were in Lubuskie.

⁴ In actuality, by Voivodship Boards.

⁵ The terms "region" and "voivodship" are used interchangeably throughout the text.

Table 1 | Number and value of ROP evaluation studies

Voivodship	Total number of studies	Internal studies	Total value of external studies (PLN)	Average value of external studies (PLN)
Kujawsko-pomorskie	22	2	1,615,347	80,767
Zachodniopomorskie	21	0	1,428,338	68,016
Łódzkie	20	0	1,328,190	66,410
Lubuskie	19	3	772,804	48,300
Małopolskie	16	0	802,054	50,128
Śląskie	16	0	1,290,964	80,685
Podkarpackie	15	1	1,120,271	80,019
Lubelskie*	14	0	864,035	61,717
Mazowieckie	14	0	1,275,636	91,117
Warmińsko-mazurskie	14	0	2,006,741	143,339
Opolskie**	12	0	833,371	69,448
Pomorskie	12	5	382,904	54,701
Wielkopolskie	12	0	712,465	59,372
Świętokrzyskie	11	0	597,122	54,284
Dolnośląskie	10	1	516,108	57,345
Podlaskie	8	0	463,556	57,945
Total	236	12	16,009,906	
Average	14.8	0.8	1,000,619	70,225

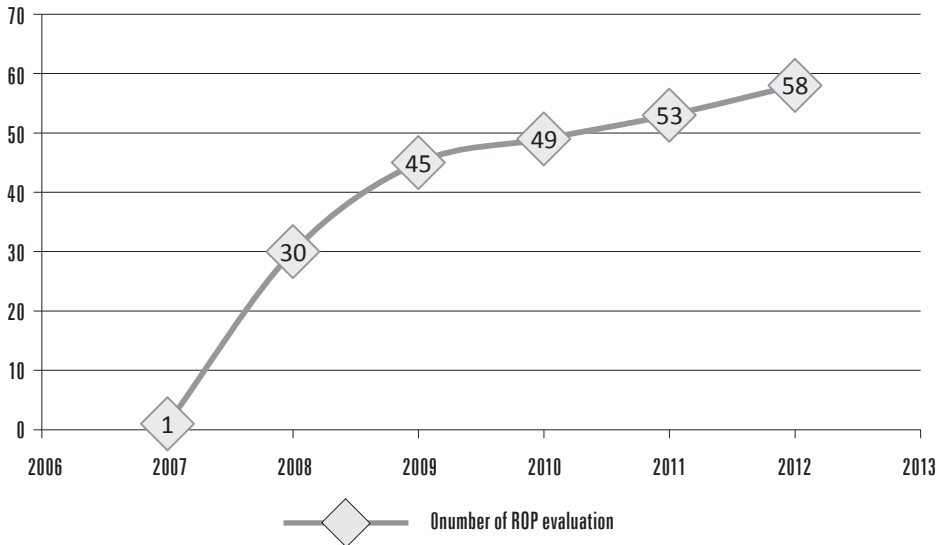
Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

* In most cases, the value of the contract included report printing (80–100 pcs).

** Some of the studies were combined evaluations of ROP and the Human Capital Operational Programme. Therefore, part of the expenditure was covered from that programme.

In the first year of the current EU financial perspective (2007), ROP Managing Authorities priorities were to complete operational programmes, their negotiations with the Ministry of Regional Development (MRD) and the European Commission, building organizational and human potential as well as preparing implementation procedures. Therefore, the first year of the actual activity of evaluation units was 2008 when 30 evaluations were carried out. The following year, the number of studies was 45 (an increase of 50%). In subsequent years, the situation stabilized and one can see a slight annual increase in the number of studies of less than 10%. Systematically increasing was also the share of ROP evaluations in the number of all evaluations of operational programs under the NSRF. In 2008, it was 20% and in 2011 it reached to 48%.

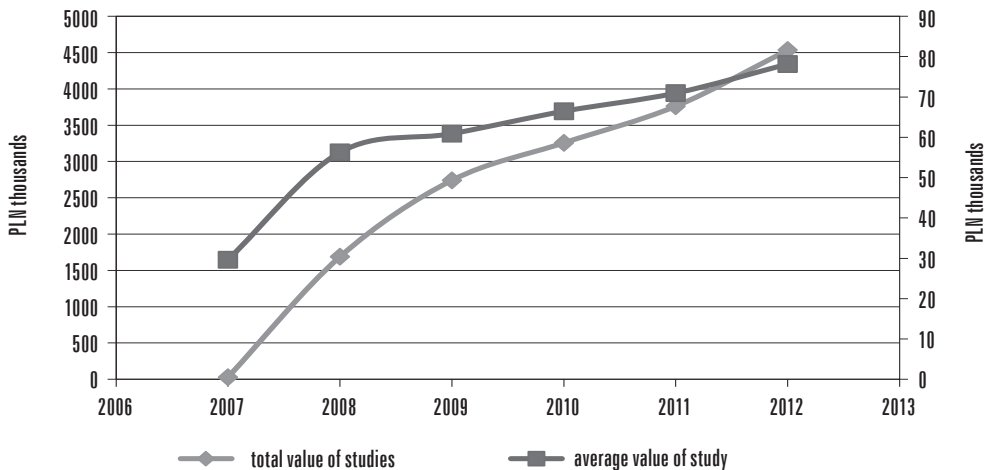
Figure 1 | Number of completed ROP evaluation studies, 2007–2012



Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

Growing faster than the number of studies was the total annual expenditures on ROP evaluations. In 2008, expenditures amounted to 1,688 thousand PLN, and in the following year it was already 2,741 thousand PLN (an increase of 62%). In the next three years, spending on evaluations increased on average by 18% and in 2012 it reached a value of 4,533 thousand PLN. The more dynamic increase in spending in relation to the number of studies was caused by the growth of the average value of a single evaluation. Between 2008 and 2012, that figure rose from 56 thousand PLN to 78 thousand PLN. Throughout the studied period, the average research price increased steadily by about 10% per year.

Figure 2 | Total and average value of ROP evaluation studies, 2007–2012



Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

To sum up, it is worth mentioning that evaluation expenses were just a drop in the ocean of total costs incurred by the process of ROP implementation. According to MRD, total ROP expenses under technical assistance priorities in the same period were 1,865 million PLN (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, 2013). The share of expenditures on evaluations within this amount was only 0.86%.

Typology of evaluation studies

Evaluation versus diagnosis

Up to this point by the term “ROP evaluation” we meant all studies conducted by ROP evaluation units. However, a closer look at their contents revealed that some of those research studies were not evaluations and some evaluations were not ROP evaluations. 22 studies (9%) does not contain any judgment of implementation or effects of intervention (e.g. operational programme). Among subjects of those studies were demand of enterprises for capital, SME innovations, development challenges of municipalities and regions and regional cohesion. Apart from those studies, which were typical diagnoses of the situation in the region, ten more studies were identified that contained elements of evaluation and diagnosis⁶. Out of those 32 diagnoses, 12 were to support decisions in the perspective of 2007–2013, and the rest were conducted for the purpose of programming ROP 2014–2020. Most studies of this type were conducted in Łódzkie, and only Małopolskie and Podlaskie did not conduct any.

Among the rest of the 214 studies that were evaluations, most were ROP evaluations (193 or 90%). The focus of 12 studies was ROP and other operational programme(s), and in 9 cases only different programmes or regional strategies were subjects of evaluation. There were just 3 voivodships that conducted only ROP evaluations (Lubelskie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie). The lowest share of ROP evaluations among all conducted studies were found in Łódzkie (50%) (Table 2). Pomorskie and Opolskie (67%). The first two carried out a number of diagnoses, and the latter is an interesting example of voivodship that set up one evaluation unit for ROP and Human Capital Operational Programme that evaluates elements of both programmes in the same studies.

Moment of evaluation completion

The vast majority of conducted evaluations were ongoing studies (93,5%) that is evaluations supporting currently implemented ROPs. Ex post evaluations⁷ accounted for 3%, and ex ante evaluations⁸ for 1% of the studies. Subjects of ex post evaluations included effects of operational programmes from the 2004–2006 perspective. Ex ante studies analyzed information and promotion measures planned under ROPs and expected macroeconomic effect of ROPs. The 5 remaining studies combined different types of evaluations (ex post with ex ante or ex post with ongoing).

⁶ Diagnostics components did not serve as a basis for evaluation, but as an independent source of conclusions.

⁷ Studies of completed interventions.

⁸ Analyses of the anticipated impacts of the planned programmes.

Table 2 | Studies conducted by the ROP evaluation units, depending on the subject

Voivodship	Evaluations			Other studies*	Total	Share of ROP evaluations in all studies
	ROP	ROP and other programmes	Other programmes			
Dolnośląskie	8	1	0	1	10	80%
Kujawsko-pomorskie	17	2	1	2	22	77%
Łódzkie	10	3	2	5	20	50%
Lubelskie	14	0	0	0	14	100%
Lubuskie	18	0	0	1	19	95%
Małopolskie	15	1	0	0	16	94%
Mazowieckie	11	0	0	3	14	79%
Opolskie	8	4	0	0	12	67%
Podkarpackie	13	0	1	1	15	87%
Podlaskie	8	0	0	0	8	100%
Pomorskie	8	0	0	4	12	67%
Śląskie	15	0	1	0	16	94%
Świętokrzyskie	11	0	0	0	11	100%
Warmińsko-mazurskie	11	0	0	3	14	79%
Wielkopolskie	11	0	0	1	12	92%
Zachodniopomorskie	16	2	1	2	21	76%
Total	194	13	6	23	236	76%

Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

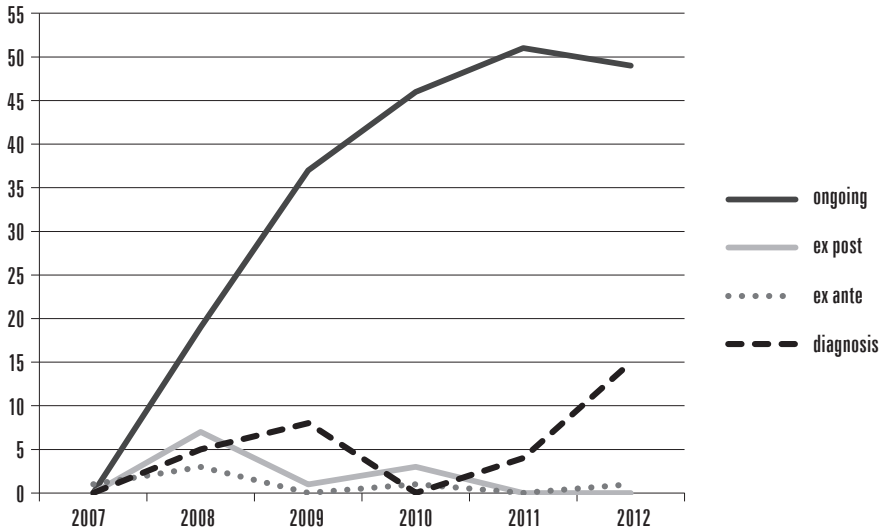
* Contains diagnoses and evaluations that did not focus on EU programmes. Studies combining diagnosis and evaluations were counted as evaluations.

More than half of the few ex ante and ex post evaluations were realized in 2008 when the evaluation units achieved the capacity to carry out evaluations, and still small progress of ROPs allowed the findings from the previous perspective programmes to be used to better target support in the next EU perspective.

All the examined years of ROP evaluation unit operations were dominated by ongoing evaluations (Figure 3). Their number grew steadily in the years 2007–2011 (although this increase gradually slowed in 2009–2011). 2012 was the first year in which the number of ongoing evaluations declined slightly. That seems to be due to the fact that evaluation units involved to a greater extent in the implementation of diagnoses that serve as the basis of programming ROP 2014–2020. So far, most

of the ex post and ex ante evaluations were conducted in Łódzkie (7) and Zachodniopomorskie (3). Seven voivodships did not carry out any evaluation of these types.

Figure 3 | Number of ROP evaluation by type



Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

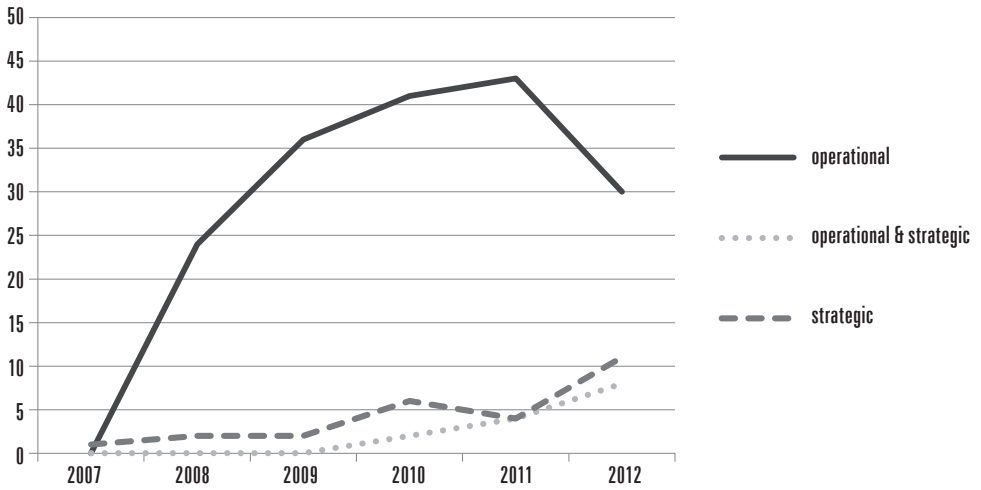
Purpose of evaluation

In principle, the ongoing evaluations address current needs of those involved in the implementation of the programmes. Therefore, from the “evaluation purpose” point of view the vast majority of completed ROP evaluations can be classified as operational – closely associated with the implementation and monitoring process, designed to support the institutions responsible for the implementation of the programme in achieving its operational objectives (financial and material) through providing useful conclusions and solutions to current problems. There were 174 studies of this kind, which was 81% of the total number of ROP evaluations.

Strategic evaluations, focusing on the relevance of intervention general directions determined at the programming phase and supporting the learning process, constituted only 12% (26 studies). These evaluations focused on the impact of ROP on the regional competitiveness and development, objectives of the regional strategies and changes in various sectors of the regional economy. Another 14 studies (7%) combined operational and strategic purposes.

The number of conducted operational evaluations rose steadily during 2007–2011, but the increase was slowing down, and in 2012 there was a sharp decline (Figure 4). The number of strategic and strategic-operational evaluations remained low until 2009. During this time, the subject of

Figure 4 | Number of ROP evaluations by purpose



Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

strategic evaluations was primarily the effects of operational programmes in the 2004–2006 perspective. The increase of strategic studies since 2010, and especially their high number in 2012, mark the moment where the first results of the ROPs could be captured, and at the same time, the knowledge for programming the next EU perspective (2014–2020) became needed.

Subject of evaluation

In terms of the subject, evaluations can be divided into effects and process studies. All strategic evaluations were based on the assessment of the programmes (mostly ROPs) effects (Table 3). Operational evaluations typically analyzed process, implementation procedures and the way institutions operate. However, there was a large group of operational studies that drew conclusions on improvement of operational processes by analyzing current or anticipated programme effects. Evaluations of effects were therefore much more numerous than strategic evaluations. Again, there was a substantial number of studies that combined effects and process.

Implementation process and procedures were the exclusive subject of 128 evaluations (62%), while 34 evaluations (17%) focused on programme effects. More popular were studies combining process and effects (21%). Most of the process evaluations were conducted at the beginning of the implementation process, when improving procedures (e.g. project selection, monitoring system, building competence, communication) was most appropriate. Since 2010, interest of evaluation units turned to the first emerging ROP effects. The number of process evaluations began to decline and was accompanied by an increase in evaluations of the effects, which barely existed until 2009. In 2012, the numbers of process, effects, and combined evaluations was basically equal (Figure 5).

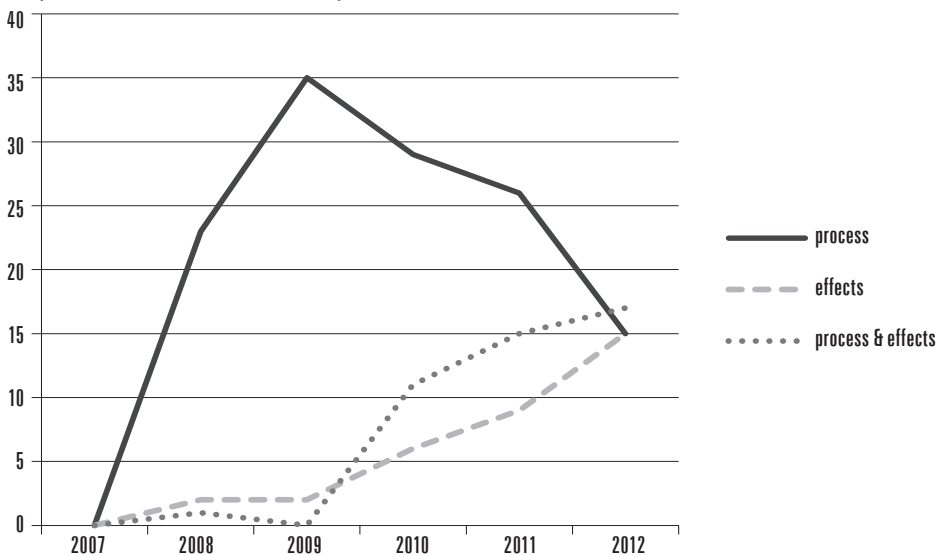
Table 3 | ROP evaluation breakdown by purpose and subject

Subject\Purpose	Process	Effects	Process and effects	Total
Operational	128	9	37	174
Operational – Strategic	0	7	7	14
Strategic*	0	18	0	18
Total	128	34	44	206

Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

* 8 studies of macroeconomic effects were not included as they did not address processes or effects.

Figure 5 | Number of ROP evaluation by subject



Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

In the regional breakdown most strategic evaluations were carried out in Opolskie, Wielkopolskie and Łódzkie (Table 4). At the other extreme were Podlaskie and Pomorskie with only operational studies. Łódzkie and Zachodniopomorskie conducted most ex ante and ex post studies, while half of the voivodships possessed only ongoing evaluations. In four voivodships (Pomorskie, Małopolskie, Opolskie, Lubuskie), more than half of the studies included programme effect analysis, and in three (Lubelskie, Zachodniopomorskie, Podlaskie), this share was below 25%.

Evaluation functions

Apart from evaluation purposes, the literature distinguishes evaluation functions. Popular sets include (Batterbury 2006; European Commission, 2012) improving implementation, improving

Table 4 | ROP evaluations in voivodships by purpose, implementation moment and subject

Voivodship	Evaluation purpose****				Implementation moment***				Evaluation subject			
	Operational	Strategic	Operational-Strategic	Share of strategic*	Ongoing	Ex post	Ex ante	Share of ex post & ex ante	Process	Effects	Process & effects	Share of effects**
Dolnośląskie	8	1	0	11%	9	1	0	10%	6	2	1	33%
Kujawsko-pomorskie	17	2	1	15%	19	1	0	5%	14	3	3	30%
Łódzkie	11	4	0	27%	10	5	2	41%	8	4	3	47%
Lubelskie	12	0	1	8%	13	0	1	7%	11	0	2	15%
Lubuskie	17	0	1	6%	18	0	0	0%	9	2	7	50%
Małopolskie	14	1	1	13%	16	0	0	0%	7	5	4	56%
Mazowieckie	8	1	1	20%	11	0	0	0%	6	1	3	40%
Opolskie	8	1	3	33%	12	0	0	0%	6	3	3	50%
Podkarpackie	10	2	1	23%	13	1	0	7%	9	2	2	31%
Podlaskie	8	0	0	0%	8	0	0	0%	6	0	2	25%
Pomorskie	7	0	0	0%	7	0	1	13%	3	1	3	57%
Śląskie	13	1	2	19%	15	1	0	6%	9	2	5	44%
Świętokrzyskie	7	0	2	22%	11	0	0	0%	6	1	2	33%
Warmińsko-mazurskie	10	1	1	17%	12	0	0	0%	7	4	1	42%
Wielkopolskie	7	3	0	30%	11	0	1	8%	6	3	1	40%
Zachodniopomorskie	17	1	0	6%	17	2	1	15%	15	1	2	17%
Total	174	18	14	16%	202	11	6	8%	128	34	44	38%

Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

* Share of strategic and operational-strategic evaluations in all evaluations

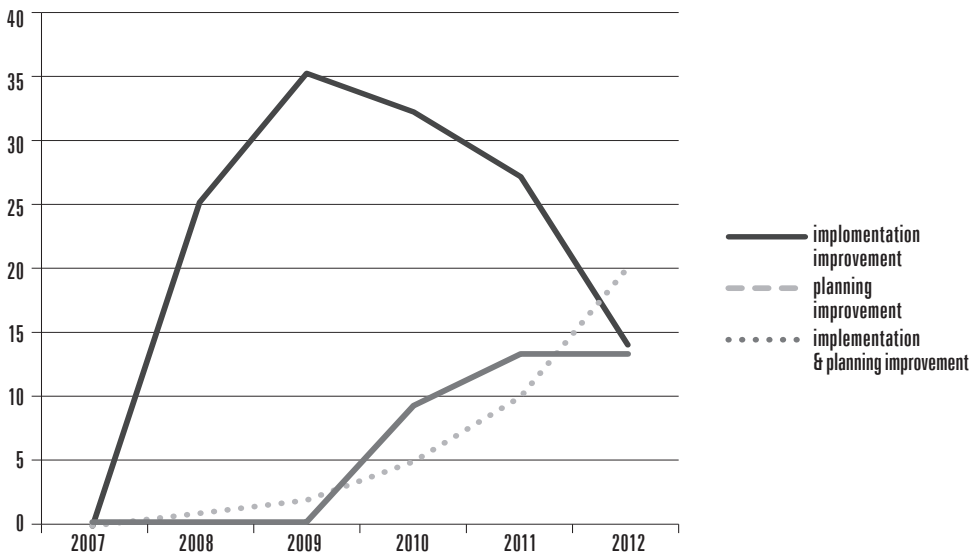
** Share of effects and product & effects evaluations in all evaluations

*** Evaluations combining few types (e.g. ongoing & ex post) included in both categories

**** Among strategic evaluations, studies of macroeconomic impact were not included

planning, improving accountability, knowledge production and institutional strengthening. Only the first two of those functions were directly linked to ROP evaluations (improving planning or implementation). The rest were fulfilled in a very few cases and only indirectly, while pursuing other core functions.

Figure 6 | Number of ROP evaluations by function



Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

The trend of the number of evaluations fulfilling different functions was very similar to the trend of evaluation subjects. In the first years of ROP implementation rapidly growing was number of studies improving implementation (Figure 6). Despite the decline since 2010, those studies dominated until 2011. The number of evaluations rationalizing planning began to grow in 2010 and those studies were most numerous in 2012. In total, evaluations improving implementation process made up 65% of all evaluations. Evaluations improving planning accounted for 18%, and similar in number were studies combining both functions.

Summarizing the ROP evaluation typology, it is worth noting that in addition to evaluations that can be assigned exclusively to a single category, there was also a considerable number of studies that performed more than one purpose (operational & strategic orientation), fulfilled more than one function (improvement of implementation & planning), whose subject was both process and effects, or that connected assessment of completed interventions with ongoing or planned ones. It is allowed to conduct such evaluations, and in many cases, they are justified by the actual needs and possibilities. As Mark et al. (1999) stated, evaluation objectives and functions are not separable, and if the evaluator is competent and has sufficient resources, more than one objective can be addressed in one study.

Themes of evaluation studies

The only existing thematic classification of cohesion policy evaluation topics in Poland is based on “strategic thematic fields” proposed by MRD in the evaluation plan for NSRF (Krajowa

Jednostka Oceny, 2007). However, this classification was designed from the point of view of the whole NSRF and mainly of national level operational programmes. It did not take into account the characteristics and richness of regional evaluations. In that classification most ROP evaluations were classified in one category, regional and territorial development, which gave no indication of the actual evaluation topic. Therefore for the purpose of this study and for presenting the scope of topics covered by ROP evaluations, a new classification needed to be developed.

At the most general level, ROP evaluations can be divided (as already done above) into studies of implementation process and effects. Process studies focus on the assessment of operations and elements comprising the operational programme management system. Topics of particular studies of this type were grouped as follows:

- Monitoring system – utility, effectiveness, relevance of the indicators used to measure progress in achieving ROP goals, as well as project level indicators, used by applicants to characterize their projects (23 completed studies in all 16 voivodships).
- Selection system – system of project selection criteria and its ability to select optimal projects in terms of ROP goals (18 studies in 14 voivodships).
- Management and implementation system – institutional and organizational settings, human capacity, material and financial resources and procedures governing particular operations (27 studies in 11 voivodships).
- Implementation barriers – identification and indication of the proposals to remove application and project implementation barriers on both institution and applicants sides (7 studies).
- Key projects – the state of preparations for implementation, capacity of beneficiaries for implementation and the soundness of the application process (7 studies).
- Information and promotion activities – their impact on availability of information on ROP for beneficiaries, local community, institutions involved in implementation, as well as assessing potential of the ROP trademark (30 studies in all voivodships).
- Potential of local governments – capacity to apply for support and implement projects (10 studies).
- Complementarity – the mechanisms and tools to ensure coordination and complementarity of support within the ROP and with other support instruments, identifying areas of potential complementarity (14 studies in 11 voivodships).

Evaluations of ROP effects can be divided into 4 subcategories: social infrastructure, technical infrastructure, economy and regional development. Evaluation of social infrastructure involved:

- Education (7 studies),
- Culture (6),
- Tourism (7),

- Health (5),
- Sport (4).

The studies primarily focused on the impact of the investment in social infrastructure on socioeconomic development, reducing access barriers to social services and improving living conditions. The vast majority of the evaluations examined investments in several (2 to 4) types of infrastructure (most popular combination was tourism and culture). Social infrastructure evaluations were carried out in 10 voivodships.

Evaluations of technical infrastructure were the least numerous subcategory of effects evaluations. Subjects included in this subcategory were:

- Environment – impact of ROP investment on environmental infrastructure and quality of natural environment (6 studies).
- Transport – impact of projects in the field of road infrastructure and public transport on socioeconomic growth and regional competitiveness (4 studies).
- Information Society – the issue of ensuring access to high-speed Internet, development of e-services and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to improve the efficiency of public administration (3 studies).
- RES – analysis of the potential of renewable energy sources, and judging support options for projects in the field of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency (2 studies).

Evaluations in the field of economy were grouped into:

- SMEs – impact assessment of investment subsidies, counselling and promotion support for competitiveness and innovation (16 studies in 12 voivodships).
- R&D and technology transfer – analysis of support for research and development, technology transfer and innovation. The reference point for assessing the effectiveness was the increase in innovativeness and competitiveness of the regional economy (7 studies).
- Financial engineering – assessing the utility of supported loan and guarantee funds compared to other market instruments and grants as well as identifying financial gap (9 studies).
- Investment attractiveness – assessing the impact of projects creating investment areas, economic activity zones and business promotion on investment attractiveness and regional economic growth (3 studies).
- Employment – impact assessment of structural funds interventions on the employment level in the region (2 studies).

The regional development category gathered all evaluations that refer to impact of the ROP from the territorial rather than sectoral perspective (e.g. urban/rural development), regional cohesion and competitiveness. That included:

- Urban and rural areas – assessment of the ROP impact on urban development, rising potential of capital districts and developing metropolitan functions, as well as analysis of metropolitan area cohesion and transformation of rural areas (5 studies).
- Regional and local development – ROP impact on regional disparities, local development, diagnosis of regional cohesion and competitiveness and identifying development challenges (6 studies).
- Mid-term – general reviews of implementation status, effects and ROP goals achieved to this point (14 studies in 11 voivodships).
- Regional development strategy – impact of operational programmes on implementation of regional strategy, progress of strategy goals, as well as problematic diagnoses for the update of strategy (4 studies).
- Lisbon Strategy and the EU 2020 strategy – analyzes of implementation of both strategies through ROP projects (7 studies).
- Macroeconomic effect – analyses presenting econometric modelling results, predictions of ROP macroeconomic impact on region (9 studies in 8 voivodships).

Figure 7 shows a summary of the presented classification of ROP evaluation subjects indicating the number of completed studies of each type (in parentheses).

Figure 7 | ROP evaluation subjects

PROCESS	EFFECTS			
Management system	Social infrastructure	Technical infrastructure	Economy	Regional development
Monitoring system (23)	Education (7)	Environment (6)	SMEs (16)	Urban and rural areas (5)
Selection system (18)	Culture (6)	Transport (4)	R&D and technology transfer (7)	Regional and local development (6)
Management and implementation system (27)	Tourism (7)	Information Society (3)	Financial engineering (9)	Mid-term (14)
Implementation barriers (7)	Health (5)	RES (2)	Investment attractiveness (3)	Regional development strategy (4)
Key projects (7)	Sport (4)		Employment (2)	Lisbon & EU2020 strategies (7)
Information and promotion (30)				Macroeconomic effect (9)
Potential of local governments (10)				
Complementarity (14)				

Source: prepared by the author, based on desk research.

As indicated, studies of effects were less frequent than of process. Still they covered almost every field of ROP intervention; however, the degree of interest in particular fields varied substantially. The largest number of studies were horizontal, referring to ROP impact on regional development (45). The second most populous category was economy (36), and within especially it the support for SMEs (16). The least interest was demonstrated in the fields of social and technical infrastructure (15 studies each). It is surprising especially in the case of technical infrastructure that absorbs over 45% of ROP funding⁹. What is also worth noting was that no evaluation explored the issue of urban regeneration, which absorbs a fair share (7.5%) of ROP funding.

| Conclusions

Polish regional administration had no previous experience with public policies evaluation at the time it was burdened with the task of ROP management and evaluation in 2007. Despite that, the practice of evaluation was apparently well adopted and has grown rapidly since then. 236 studies costing more than 16 million PLN were completed by the end of 2012. Even though there were noticeable differences in the number of completed studies between regional evaluation units (from 8 to 22), those with the least studies might still be considered active enough to confirm that evaluation has been well received in all 16 voivodships. Different evaluation units adopted different strategies, i.e. portfolios of evaluation and diagnosis types, evaluated programmes and main purposes and functions assigned to particular studies. That might suggest that evaluation was regarded as a useful tool serving individual needs, and not just a formal obligation. Such a conclusion seems even more justified if one takes into account the large number of conducted studies and that almost none of them were required by any EU or national regulation.

Some concern might be raised by the vast majority of studies focusing on the quality of the implementation process and its technical and financial aspects (operational studies). Evaluation is often used to learn how to spend money smoothly. Only a limited number of studies tried to answer if the ROP interventions were justified, tailored to the local needs, and tell us about the impact of the ROP on the regional competitiveness and development (strategic studies). Such a situation may considerably reduce the overall utility of evaluation. First, as stated in the previous studies of the cohesion policy implementation system in Poland (EGO, 2013, p. 6; EGO, 2010, p. 8), in a well designed system, the direction headed (strategic decisions) is more important than the velocity (operational decisions). Additionally, in the case of operational evaluation, the subject of the study is much better known to users/clients than evaluators. As a consequence, most conclusions drawn from this type of studies are obvious to users and somewhat insignificant.

Although evaluations of effects covered a wide range of ROP intervention priorities, it is interesting to note that very few studies are available in the fields of transport, environment, information

⁹ Calculations were based on Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego (2013).

society, or urban regeneration, which in total consume more than 50% of ROP funds. This is another indication that so far, evaluations are not designed to inform about the merit of public intervention in areas where accountability and learning should be most expected.

What appears to be certain at this point is that ROP evaluation units have already gained appropriate capacity and competence to produce a large quantity of evaluation reports. The challenge for the future is investigation of evaluation process quality (do evaluation provide knowledge), evaluation (knowledge) use and development of the evaluation culture.

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