

Regional Europe: European Evaluation Society (EES)

Making a difference: supporting evaluative practice through the EES

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Background

Beginning

The European Evaluation Society (EES) was founded in 1992, and its first founding conference was held at The Hague in December 1994. At the end of this conference, a Transitional Board was elected for organising the election of the first President (Fall 1995) and for drafting the statutes, which were registered in 1996. The main driver for this development was the emerging professional needs of individuals who had an interest or who were engaging in evaluation within the European context but did not have a national expression of this interest. The key players at that time were academics and auditors. The Netherlands Court of Auditors had a special role in the beginning in the provision of secretariat services and some in-kind support, as well as the Belgian Court of Auditors which held the secretariat from 1998 to 2003. After a short period in which some services were provided through a part time secretarial position at his University of Southern Denmark, and from 2004 onwards, the EES entrusted secretariat support to a private association management company.

The Board

According to the statutes of the EES, there are a total of 12 possible members of the Board. Of these, eight are elected positions, 2 of them being the Vice-President and President. From the other 6 elected Board members, the roles of Secretary General and Treasurer are assigned. Since 2011, there is the possibility for the Past-President to remain in the Board for one year, and for co-opting up to three additional Board members for specific tasks. In 2012 the EES has eleven members of the Board.

The EES mission

The goal of the European Evaluation Society is to stimulate and promote theory, practice, and utilisation of high quality evaluation especially, but not exclusively, within Europe. This goal is obtained by bringing together academics and practitioners from all over Europe and from different professional sectors, thus creating a forum where all participants can benefit from the co-operation and bridge building opportunities of the EES. The main vehicle for this knowledge exchange is the biennial conference. In addition, EES works to provide a platform to interact, discuss and network amongst evaluation professionals, through means such as Thematic Working Groups, web-based tools/ forums and ad-hoc events.

Membership

At this point in time the EES has a good balance of academics (30%), free lancers (18%), private consultancy workers (22%), evaluation commissioners and evaluators at governmental institutions (8%), supranational (3%) and international organizations (11%), and NGOs-Non-profit institutions (7%). From survey responses from 326 members in May 2012¹, 82% conduct and/or do evaluation, 42% teach evaluation, 43% carry out research on evaluation, 31% commission and/or manage evaluations, and 4% are students². The disciplinary composition of members is 15% Public Administration, 15% Economy, 13% Political Science, 13% Sociology, 10% Education, 7% Business Administration, and engineers, social workers and psychologists (3% each one; other categories 15%). The EES has as of September 2012, 488 individual members and 30 institutional Members.

Key constituencies are those that make up the European Evaluation community. This embraces evaluators, commissioners, academics, students or new practitioners from other

¹ This is a 'mark all that apply' item, so percentages in each category do not sum up 100%.

² The EES has only recently been promoting students' involvement in the Society.

disciplines. In addition the EES sees the European Union as an important player through which the EES can help support good practice in regional and national evaluation.

In Europe over the last ten years the evaluation community has become increasingly aware of the differentiation of evaluation cultures from country to country. The extent to which evaluation is actually sought by (and built into) civil society and government institutions varies enormously. In some administrations evaluation is done routinely. In others it is virtually absent. The mandatory evaluation of EU-funded programs at EU level but especially in the EU regions, has acted as a major driver in the growth of evaluation practice in Europe.

When EES was founded by individuals, almost no national evaluation societies or networks existed³. Today more than 20 national societies and networks can be identified in Europe. Sharing of experiences and practices as well as organizing training on national level were the main drivers for the establishment of national societies. The EES has helped in the creation of national societies. The EU - a major client and promoter of evaluation in Europe - has significantly fostered the development of evaluation capacity building in Europe in government administrations as well as the civil society.

NESE (Network of Evaluation Societies in Europe)

At the EES Conference in Berlin (2004) a first session with the presidents of national societies took place. In 2008 some evaluation societies in Europe expressed their strong interest in exchange and the French Evaluation Society (*Société Française d'Évaluation - SFE*) initiated, in cooperation with the EES, a gathering within their pre-conference program in July 2008 in Strasbourg. This meeting was followed by a further meeting in Lisbon in October 2008 at the EES international conference at which the broad approach and structure of a network of evaluation societies in Europe was developed. Further meetings in Muenster in Germany in 2009 and Prague in 2010 developed the idea and established a programme of activity. The structure that emerged placed the EES as a core partner and with one other European society or network as co-coordinator for a two year term. To date the NESE co-coordinators along with the EES have been the SFE (The French Evaluation Society), DeGEval (The German Evaluation Society) and the Italian Evaluation Association.

The mission of NESE is to promote quality and independence of evaluation in Europe. NESE is the European forum for national evaluation associations and societies to foster exchange of knowledge as well as good practices and to promote professionalism and quality.

NESE aims to build the capacity of associated evaluation societies to develop sound and independent practice. It provides the arena where evaluation societies can learn and support each other to promote good evaluation practice in their countries. It also gives support to the foundation and growth of new evaluation societies in evolving governance structures, providing value to members, developing standards and guidelines, and organizing conferences.

Strategy and implementation of a programme to strengthen the enabling environment

- The EES and NESE work together to promote national evaluation societies in Europe with a view to strengthen the evaluation culture of national governments and the civil society. The main vehicle the EES uses for this is the promotion and co-ordination of NESE (see above).
- The EES produced a general statement on Ethics and Standards in 2004. This document encouraged the creation of standards in national societies, but explicitly ruled out the formulation of 'European standards'. Next, the EES developed an evaluators' capabilities framework that was validated through two surveys. Again, the intent was not to impose Europe-wide standards but rather to encourage professional development and the promotion of an evaluation culture adapted to country contexts.

³ The Swedish Evaluation Network which preceded the Swedish Evaluation Society started in 1989 and by the mid-90s had around 350 members.

- The EES capabilities initiative responds to a groundswell of interest in evaluation competencies⁴. With growing pressures for more accountability in government, the private sector and the voluntary sector, demand for evaluation services has increased rapidly and expectations have risen regarding evaluation quality. In response, many European evaluation societies have issued guidelines focused on evaluation ethics and processes⁵. All such guidelines assume that evaluators are equipped to meet appropriate standards of professional practice⁶. In line with this presumption, a voluntary set of capabilities associated with the practice of evaluation in Europe is intended to complement existing ethical guidelines and put the capping stone on the trilogy of ethics, standards and qualifications that underlie all professional designations.
- The EES has influenced ongoing and dominant evaluation debates and discourses by the provision of statements and manifestos. An example of this is the influential statement on impact evaluation in 2007 titled “The importance of a methodologically diverse approach to impact evaluation”.

Developing/strengthening a sustainable strategy to enhance individual capacities

- The EES has promoted specialized and high quality training in conferences (pre-conference workshops) at each of 10 conferences to date.
- Outside the conferences, there have been international master classes on specific themes (Odense in 2009 and Seville 2007)
- Within Europe, the EES, in collaboration with other partners or singly, have set up evaluation events. The most recent was in collaboration with the European Commission in Brussels in 2011 titled ‘The Vision and Logic of Evaluation’. Before, we organized events at the University of Southern Denmark, Odense and in Fribourg, Switzerland in the non-conference years of the EES.
- The EES has encouraged specialised university based programmes in evaluation. The USPE University Based Programmes in Evaluation Group was set up in London with 5 programmes, now six (Bern, London, Lyon, Madrid, Odense and Saarbrücken). The EES, in collaboration with Bern undertook a survey of education programmes in Europe. There is a document, describing 11 master programmes in Europe, on the EES website under ‘Training and Jobs’/Master Programmes on Evaluation which is frequently consulted.
- In the 9th and 10th EES Biennial Conferences (Prague 2010; Helsinki 2012) prizes for best papers and posters have been awarded. There has been a special student award in both occasions, and in Helsinki three categories of best papers were awarded: for the best contribution to evaluation research and methods, to improved evaluation practice, and to improve public policy and governance.
- The EES closely collaborates with the Journal *Evaluation*. Each EES member receives a copy of *Evaluation*, as well as electronic access as part of his/her membership. The Journal was launched to promote dialogue in Europe and internationally and to build bridges within the expanding field of evaluation, so the society and the Journal mutually support and feed each other. After each EES

⁴The DAC Evaluation Network, the United Nations Development Program, the UK Evaluation Society and the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom (among others) have addressed or are working on various facets of evaluation competencies. The International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) has issued a competency framework for development evaluators. .

⁵Robert Picciotto, *The Value of Evaluation Standards*, Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation: JMDE (3) 30 ISSN 1556-8180

⁶ See for example, the UKES guidelines at <http://www.evaluation.org.uk/resources/guidelines.aspx...> They define the distinctive accountabilities and reciprocal obligations of different categories of evaluation stakeholders.

Biennial conference, a special issue of the Journal on it is prepared in collaboration with the society.

Strengthening equity-focused and gender-sensitive evaluation systems and evaluations

- Influencing through the development of Thematic Working Groups (TWGs): this initiative can be potentially influential. The most advanced TWG is on 'Gender and Evaluation.' It works together establishing links with UN Women, the European Community of Practice in Gender Mainstreaming and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).
- In the 2010 EES international conference in Prague, there were several sessions on gender issues, and this has been a trend towards Helsinki, where there were other sessions on equity and empowerment.
- The EES Board is attentive to gender and evaluation. The EES has started some gender analysis on the membership and the activities performed through the Society. For example, the EES is trying to find out why the figures of male-female members are 60-40% when there is a profession with a certain feminization tendency, when in other societies the usual proportion is 31-69% (in the AEA), and in many training and university programmes the tendency is even more clear (25-75% at the *Universidad Complutense de Madrid* (UCM) Programme, for example). A more in-depth comparative analysis is needed.
- The EES has made big efforts, since Lisbon (2008), to get bursaries for evaluators in developing countries to attend its biennial conferences. Thank to several donors, 75 bursary recipients have attended the 10th biennial conference in Helsinki in October 2012, helping us to make it a real international event especially sensitive to equity issues.
- A new Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Evaluation of International Engagement in Fragile Situations has also been launched. This group aims at working in the diverse and complex force fields that affect development effectiveness in fragile states and conflict situations, including a focus on equity.

Institutional capacity to be able to deliver on the three issues identified above:

- The capacity of the EES itself, in particular its Board, has been a continual area of development and improvement. The EES has overcome earlier problems with its secretariat services.
- The work of the EES Board is distributed through working groups and activities. Each activity or group has a dedicated person of responsibility for their area and reports on developments at the EES Board meetings which are mainly held virtually, to save costs. While these groups and activities may change over time to respond to changing circumstances, a typical array of groups and activities are:
 - Conference
 - TWGs around general areas of strategic interest.
 - Members' services
 - Newsletter- 'Connections'
 - Professional development and capacity building
 - Communications
 - Non-conference years and 'ad-hoc' events
 - Relations with the *Evaluation* journal
 - Recruitment and fund raising
- One of the most important strategic priorities, apart from the professionalization of EES service providers and a dedicated Board, is the analysis of the community and membership. It is vital to know better the community the EES targets, that is,

who are EES members and what profile do they have, including background characteristics and main interests. There was little information before 2009 on this issue, and what the work demonstrated was intuitive and not systematized.

- The EES has used surveys as a tool which enables communication and getting active participation from members and for getting useful information on members. The NESE surveys (2008; 2010) are a case in point as is the background information survey to members (2009). In that way the EES is building a better profile of its members.
- In 2011, the EES systematized the information addressed in the 2009 survey, doing an 'Individual Member Profile' in the Member Area of the web site. This is where each member can put his/her information in a survey style, so now it is very easy to recover that info at any moment for analytical purposes.
- The EES will continue with more 'in-depth' analysis of its membership

Bottlenecks/challenges:

1. The EES has a relatively small membership which fluctuates depending on conference years. The small membership results in a weak budget for other activities apart from the conferences. The EES could do much more with a better recruitment and funding activity.
2. The EES should develop stronger ownership and a more substantial participation of members in the society. The challenge is to make membership understand that the EES is more than a service provider; the Society is collegial in which there are many possibilities of doing things as a community. Our aim is to follow the principle of -"It is not only about what the society can do for you, but what you can do for the Society".
3. There should be continuous communication with and among members; the Society is intensively present during conference times, but there is a need to be more present and utilize more efficiently the possibilities Social Networks and new IT's allow. The EES has improved, but there is much to do in this regard. The 10th Biennial Conference's Theme (Evaluation in the Networked Society: New Concepts, New Challenges, New Solutions') was indicative of this concern and commitment.
4. The EES, a regional-supranational player with clear and interesting opportunities as such, faces also the challenge of developing an 'European Evaluation Space', i.e., defining a clear picture of EES territory vis-à-vis national societies and how to coordinate action between them. NESE is grappling with this issue.

Progress and results:

1. *The Biennial Conferences*

The EES has steadily improved conference quality and organization, number of delegates, number of papers, international presence, and donors for bursaries for evaluators in developing countries, etc. Due to the financial crisis in Europe some evaluators have been affected by budget cuts and restrictions not being able to participate in Helsinki 2012.

2. *Developing events in non-conference years*

The Seminar 'The logic and vision of Evaluation' held in Brussels in early December 2011 was a success as has been the case with other non-conference years events of the EES. The whole event was filmed and made available to a wider audience on the EES website (www.europeanevaluation.org).

3. *Thematic Working Groups*

The EES has four TWGs: 'Gender and Evaluation', 'Evaluation in Fragile Situations', 'Professionalization' and 'Sustainable Development Evaluation'. The hope is that more new TWGs will be formed in coming years.

4. *Improved Secretariat and service provider*

5. *Communication*

The EES Board is intensifying the communication side, especially in the communication with members: EES Website which is constantly updated; periodic presidential letters; the newsletter 'Connections'; a LinkedIn Group and Twitter and Facebook accounts used for interacting and news, for which it has received very positive feedback from its membership bases.

6. Membership policy

The membership policy has two main aims: (1) to foster the entrance of new blood into the membership and (2) to increase membership and retain existing members. As concerns the first, the EES has implemented a reduced conference fee for students in 2012 (duration of three years maximum), organizes a student paper award at the biennial conference and a volunteer program for students in conferences. There are signs that this is working and a future increase of 'new blood' in EES membership is to be expected. To respond to the second aim, the EES has started to organize, in 2011 for the first time, additional activities outside the conference years. As indicated above, the access to the membership area of the website and the inclusion of the *Evaluation* journal are other ways to make the EES attractive to its members.

Key enabling factors:

1. The regional nature and the possibility of influencing at the supranational level
2. A strong set of partners and allies, both at the international (IOCE and others) and national level (through NESE and national societies)
3. Dedicated Boards over the years. The EES has not had a problem in recruiting active and committed members to the Board which is an indicator of the potential for regional organizations for evaluators.
4. The opportunity of having a professionalized service provider who is open to on-the-job training.
5. A natural route to influence at regional government level with good relations with the relevant EU contacts and 'gatekeepers'.

Innovations and lessons learned:

1. The EES experience suggests it is important to develop a dedicated set of activities beyond conferences to build 'presence' in the European constituency.
2. Explore and use the possibilities of new IT's, Social Networks, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0
3. Work and coordinate strategically with partners and allies NESE, IOCE, International agencies.
4. Think strategically and in a policy based action (the EES is already an 18 years old organization, with certain path dependency): question, know what you want and go for it. This may involve periodic 'blue-sky thinking' sessions to check on mission.

Next steps:

1. Increase the number and the continuity of members, as well as their sense of identification with the community and their Society. The EES is working towards a renewed membership policy which fosters this type of participation. The main strategy for this is to increase presence in the way outlined above.
2. Develop a new communication strategy by using a wider array of technologies including social networking media.
3. TWG strategy in which strategic work can be focused with dedicated leaderships
4. Explore the possibility of a training strategy to run alongside and between conferences exploring training possibilities through webinars, on-line training, etc.
5. Look for donors inside Europe
6. Recover EES history: this will require requests from past presidents and Board members to provide archive material they may have in folders and documents they possess.