



Monitoring and Evaluation in Objective 2 Programmes: Progress and Challenges

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Improving the Quality of Structural Fund
Programming through Exchange of
Experience***

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Preface

'IQ-Net': Networking to improve the quality of Objective 2 programmes

Launched in early 1996 and managed by the *European Policies Research Centre* (EPRC) at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, the network '*IQ-Net*' facilitates exchange of experience in the development, implementation and evaluation of Objective 2 programmes. Funded by a consortium of 13 Objective 2 areas and the European Commission (DG XVI), the network meets twice a year to examine issues of practical relevance to programme-makers and share examples of good, innovative and distinctive practice from across the EU. The first two meetings were held in Glasgow, in association with Strathclyde European Partnership (February 1996), and in Cardiff, hosted by the Welsh Office and Welsh Development Agency (September 1996). Meetings provide the opportunity to discuss the results of a structured programme of applied research and debate, which is steered by the network's partner regions:

- Steiermark and Niederösterreich, Austria
- Nordjylland, Denmark
- Päijät-Häme and South Karelia, Finland
- Aquitaine and Rhône Alpes, France
- Nordrhein Westfalen and Saarland, Germany
- Ångermanlandskusten and Fyrstad, Sweden
- Industrial South Wales and Western Scotland, UK

IQ-NET Thematic Papers

This document is one of four thematic papers produced by EPRC in 1996 as part of *IQ-NET*'s 1996 applied research programme:

- Series 1, No 1: Managing the Structural Funds.
- Series 1, No 2: RTD/Innovation policies in Objective 2 programmes.
- Series 1, No 3: Generating Good Projects.
- Series 1, No 4: Monitoring and Evaluation.

Focusing on topics selected by the network's partner regions, each paper places issues in their international context, raises questions for debate and highlights distinctive and innovative practices. For the convenience of readers, executive summaries are included in French, German and English.

The papers were first drafted on the basis of field research (encompassing interviews with Objective 2 programme managers and partners at regional, Member State and Commission levels) and substantial desk research. They were then modified to reflect the discussions of the Cardiff *IQ-Net* meeting and the comments of network sponsors. The papers are being distributed to a wide group of people nominated by the sponsors, and the EPRC welcomes comment and feedback on them.

Readers are reminded that the content of the papers does not necessarily represent the official position of either the partner regions or the Commission, and that errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the authors alone.

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Further Information

Additional copies of the papers and further information on IQ-Net can be obtained from John Bachtler and Sandra Taylor, managers of the network, at the EPRC. The December 1996 edition of '*IQ-Net Bulletin*', a newsletter co-financed by DG XVI and available from EPRC, also contains synopses of the papers.

Monitoring and Evaluation in Objective 2 Programmes: Progress and Challenges

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Executive Summaries

*Monitoring and Evaluation in Objective 2 Programmes:
Progress and Challenges*

Contrôle et Évaluation

Begleitung und Evaluierung

1. MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN OBJECTIVE 2 PROGRAMMES: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

1.1 Introduction

This paper explores how monitoring and evaluation are addressed in Objective 2 areas, drawing out the main issues and selected examples of distinctive or best practice. The first section outlines some views from the regions, Member States and the Commission on the monitoring and evaluation of Objective 2 programmes. The second section turns to the main component of the paper: a review of current practice. Examples of good or interesting practice are provided on a number of specific issues. The main paper also contains a list of working definitions for some of the main concepts of monitoring and evaluation, and provides some sources of further information in this field.

1.2 Perceptions of Monitoring and Evaluation

There are many ways in which monitoring and evaluation can benefit the implementation of Objective 2 programmes.

- Monitoring provides hard data to back up intuition on how much progress has been made and what implementation problems are being experienced.
- This data may provide the necessary evidence when programme managers are making a case to national or Commission officials with regard to adjusting a programme.
- Monitoring and evaluation should provide partners with the necessary information to enable effective implementation; regular reporting of monitoring information, wide participation in evaluation studies and broad access to evaluation findings are required for this to be the case.
- Regular reporting on progress not only boosts the morale of the partners, but also allows for the regular provision of accurate and up-to-date information to the media.
- The openness expressed through open access to monitoring and evaluation reports also helps to highlight a programme as being transparently and fairly managed.

At the same time, there are various reservations concerning the Commission's expectations of how monitoring and evaluation should be carried out. Although the situation is improving, past problems have been associated with insufficient coherence or clarity in the requirements of the Commission. Further difficulties relate to the rate of evolution of structural policies and the complexity of the partnerships involved - particularly as each player interprets the regulatory requirements for monitoring and evaluation in the light of their own interests.

In terms of evaluation, the *ex-ante* stage appears to pose most problems but is acknowledged to be important since:

- it strengthens the overall balance and coherence of programmes;
- it is only by making some projections of impact, no matter how conditional or implicit, that intelligent policy choices can be made; and

- accurate monitoring and evaluation are virtually impossible if adequate steps are not taken early to ensure that appropriate objectives are formulated, which allow progress towards their achievement to be tracked. There should also be sufficient base data for this to be practical.

With regard to *intermediate* evaluation some concerns are evident regarding its timing and there is also some debate over its appropriate subject-matter. The programming period for Objective 2 programmes is normally three years. Delays in implementation of up to one year may occur at the start of a programme and consequently virtually no immediate output may be evident halfway through its theoretical lifespan. In such circumstances one solution has been to use the intermediate evaluation to assess the start-up phase itself, concentrating essentially on administrative issues. Another option could be to carry out a slightly delayed 'intermediate' evaluation producing findings which could feed into any subsequent programming period; such work could be launched two years after the theoretical start of a programme and produce a final report six months before the programme's theoretical conclusion.

The problem of implementation delays is also relevant to *ex-post* evaluation, as is the problem of time-lag in achieving impacts. In the current context of Objective 2 programming, *ex-post* evaluation may be becoming more thorough, systematic and significant, but time constraints severely constrain its ability to inform programming decisions.

1.3 Review of Practice

1.3.1 Introduction

National administrative contexts have an inevitable influence on how the requirements for monitoring and evaluation are interpreted and applied. At the same time, there is almost as much variation between regions within the *same* Member State as there is between regions in *different* Member States. Each Member State offers both examples of good practice and cases where monitoring and evaluation could be improved. One notable pattern is that the effort devoted to, and the quality of, monitoring and evaluation bears little evident relationship to the size of programmes.

1.3.2 Approaches to monitoring

Commission officials confirm that *financial* monitoring has improved dramatically in most Objective 2 regions in recent years but that monitoring of *output* information is generally less well developed. The unspoken assumption in many cases is that monitoring is almost exclusively concerned with *financial* administration. While it is imperative to establish financial control systems which effectively meet regional, national and EU requirements, monitoring information systems could also provide more information on outputs. A variety of approaches have evolved to meet this need, including requiring project administrators/managers to supply output information in order to receive further tranches of project funding.

Monitoring reports are prepared at six-monthly intervals, to coincide with monitoring committee meetings. As financial monitoring systems have improved, so the quality and completeness of these reports has improved in

many cases. An important addition has been sections interpreting the patterns observed - at programme and individual measure level. It is only by such interpretation that the data becomes meaningful in an operational context.

1.3.3 Resources and techniques

a. Human resources for monitoring and evaluation

Usually, monitoring tasks are completed by programme administrators, while evaluation is carried out by external consultants, but managed by the partnership and its secretariat. Having staff whose roles include clearly defined monitoring and evaluation tasks enables the Commission's requirements to be met more easily. This ensures that the tasks receive adequate priority and that relevant skills are available or can be accumulated to complete tasks sufficiently. Technical assistance funding is a valuable contribution to supplying and training personnel, but evidence indicates that it sometimes needs to be exploited creatively. This is particularly true where public expenditure limitations diminish the ability to find match funding and where programmes are administered by civil servants, whose positions cannot be co-financed by the Structural Funds.

b. Management Information Systems

It is becoming increasingly clear that computerised management information systems offer enormous potential for assisting effective monitoring and implementation of programmes. Information is provided on a number of such systems, and some of the ways in which they have been put to most effective use. They present some limitations, being resource intensive to put in place, for example, but these are far outweighed by their potential benefits, enabling a vast amount of data not only to be stored but also manipulated easily and quickly. This enables programme managers - and in some cases the wider partnership - to track progress on a day-to-day basis and take timely action if problems are being experienced.

c. Advice and information sources on monitoring and evaluation

The influence of national practices on techniques adopted in monitoring and evaluation is perhaps most obvious in the case of the use made of statistical expertise and techniques. This appears to be more variable in relation to evaluation methodologies. Some use is made of Commission guidance on evaluation methodologies, but the support available principally from the 'MEANS programme' could be better publicised. While members of the secretariat do not usually undertake evaluation themselves, the better the understanding they can gain of the process and its limitations, the more effectively they can manage the process.

1.3.4 Partnership

The principle of implementation through *partnership* is central to the EU's structural policies. The application of this principle can stimulate both a need for increased evaluation, which is on occasion more significant than the need to respond to formal regulatory requirements, and the potential to make such evaluation more comprehensive and balanced. Unfortunately, it can also lead to uncertainty. This was evident in the responses of many of those

interviewed who were uncertain who exactly was responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of a programme, who was entitled to be involved in the design of these activities and who was to be given access to their results. The negotiations between partners of both the programmes themselves and the provisions for their monitoring and evaluation can easily lead to a lack of selectivity and coherence in, for example, programme objectives and the terms of reference for evaluations and care should be taken to avoid this.

1.3.5 The use made of the results of monitoring & evaluation

Whilst it is critical to understand what the practical outcomes of monitoring and evaluation have been on programmes, it is difficult to get an accurate impression of this. In some specific instances there is evidence that monitoring activity is moving beyond a preoccupation with immediate financial management issues. However, the apparent continued strong reliance on informal mechanisms to obtain feedback for the management of programmes indicates that there is still a need for approaches to programme monitoring and evaluation to be further refined and developed so that they are practical, scientifically valid and a genuinely integrated component of programme management.

1.4 Further Issues for Debate

The paper concludes by raising a range of questions which merit further debate. These include what administrative arrangements best enable effective monitoring and evaluation, and how all programmes can be enabled to gain maximum benefit from their monitoring and evaluation efforts.

2. CONTROLE ET ÉVALUATION

2.1 Introduction

Cet exposé a pour objectif d'examiner la façon selon laquelle le suivi et l'évaluation sont perçus et abordés dans les zones d'Objectif 2, en dégagant les principaux aspects ainsi que des exemples choisis de pratiques caractéristiques ou optimales. La première section indique certaines vues émanant des régions, des Etats-membres et de la Commission sur le suivi et l'évaluation des programmes d'Objectif 2. La seconde section est consacrée à la principale composante de l'exposé: un examen des pratiques actuelles. Des exemples de bonnes pratiques ou de pratiques intéressantes sont fournis pour un certain nombre de questions spécifiques. L'exposé principal contient aussi une liste de définitions de certains des principaux concepts dans le domaine du suivi et de l'évaluation et fournit des sources d'informations supplémentaires dans ce domaine.

2.2 Les Perceptions du Suivi et de l'Évaluation

Le suivi et l'évaluation peuvent avoir un effet positif sur la mise en œuvre des programmes d'Objectif 2, et ce de nombreuses façons.

- Le suivi fournit des données réelles pour étayer l'intuition sur les progrès réalisés et sur les problèmes rencontrés dans le cadre de la mise en œuvre.
- Ces données peuvent fournir les preuves nécessaires lorsque les responsables de programmes démontrent la nécessité d'ajuster le programme auprès des instances nationales ou au niveau de la Commission.
- Le suivi et l'évaluation doivent fournir aux partenaires les informations nécessaires pour permettre une mise en œuvre efficace. Des comptes rendus réguliers sur les informations obtenues dans le cadre du suivi, une large participation dans le cadre des études d'évaluation et un large accès aux informations révélées par l'évaluation sont nécessaires pour cela.
- Un compte rendu régulier des progrès a non seulement un effet positif sur le moral des partenaires, mais permet également de fournir régulièrement aux médias des informations exactes et à jour.
- L'ouverture exprimée à travers le libre accès aux comptes rendus du suivi et de l'évaluation contribue aussi à mettre en évidence le fait qu'un programme est géré de façon transparente et équitable.

Cependant, il y a quelques réserves concernant les attentes de la Commission en ce qui concerne la façon d'effectuer le suivi et l'évaluation. Bien que la situation s'améliore, les problèmes passés ont été associés à un manque de cohérence et de clarté dans les exigences de la Commission. La rapidité de l'évolution des politiques structurelles et la complexité des partenariats mis en jeu posent d'autres difficultés - particulièrement dans la mesure où chaque "acteur" interprète les exigences réglementaires pour le suivi et l'évaluation selon ses propres intérêts.

En termes d'évaluation, c'est le stade *ex-ante* qui semble poser le plus de problèmes mais son importance est reconnue dans la mesure où:

- elle renforce l'équilibre général et la cohérence globale des programmes;
- ce n'est qu'en effectuant des projections d'impact, si conditionnelles ou implicites soient-elles, que l'on peut faire des choix de politique intelligents; et
- un suivi et une évaluation précis sont quasiment impossibles si des mesures adéquates ne sont pas prises dès le début afin que des objectifs appropriés soient formulés, ce qui permet de suivre les progrès de leur réalisation. Il doit aussi y avoir suffisamment de données de base pour que ceci soit possible.

En ce qui concerne l'évaluation *intermédiaire*, son opportunité suscite des inquiétudes manifestes, et son objet donne lieu à des débats. La période de programmation pour les programmes d'Objectif 2 est normalement de trois ans. Des retards de mise en œuvre, jusqu'à un an, peuvent survenir au début d'un programme et il est donc possible que pratiquement aucun résultat immédiat ne soit apparent à mi-chemin de sa vie théorique. Dans de telles circonstances, une solution a consisté à utiliser l'évaluation intermédiaire pour apprécier la phase initiale elle-même, en se concentrant essentiellement sur les aspects administratifs. Une autre option pourrait consister à effectuer une évaluation "intermédiaire" légèrement retardée qui donnerait des résultats utilisables pour une éventuelle période de programmation qui suivrait; ce travail pourrait commencer deux ans après le démarrage théorique d'un programme et un compte rendu final pourrait être produit six mois avant la conclusion théorique du programme.

Le problème des retards de mise en œuvre apparaît aussi dans l'évaluation *ex-post*, de même que le problème du retard de l'apparition d'impacts. Dans le contexte actuel de la programmation d'Objectif 2, l'évaluation *ex-post* est peut-être en train de devenir plus rigoureuse, systématique et significative, mais les contraintes temporelles limitent sérieusement sa capacité à fournir des informations susceptibles d'aider la prise de décisions de programmation.

2.3 Examen des Pratiques

2.3.1 Introduction

Les contextes administratifs nationaux exercent une influence inévitable sur l'interprétation et l'application des exigences du suivi et de l'évaluation. En même temps, il existe presque autant de variations entre les régions au sein d'un *même* Etat-Membre qu'entre les régions de *différents* Etats-Membres. Chaque Etat-Membre offre à la fois des exemples de bonnes pratiques et des cas où le suivi et l'évaluation pourraient être améliorés. Une tendance notable est que les efforts consacrés au suivi et à l'évaluation et la qualité de ce suivi et de cette évaluation ne semblent pas dépendre de la taille des programmes.

2.3.2 Les différentes approches du suivi et du contrôle

Les fonctionnaires de la Commission confirment une amélioration spectaculaire du contrôle *financier* dans la plupart des régions d'Objectif 2 au cours de ces dernières années, mais indiquent que le suivi et le contrôle des informations *concernant les résultats* sont en général moins bien développés. Dans de nombreux cas il est supposé implicitement que le contrôle porte

presque exclusivement sur l'administration *financière*. Bien qu'il soit impératif d'établir des systèmes de contrôle financier qui répondent effectivement aux exigences régionales, nationales et européennes, le suivi et le contrôle des systèmes d'information pourraient aussi fournir d'avantage d'informations concernant les résultats. Diverses approches sont apparues pour répondre à ce besoin, y compris le fait d'exiger des administrateurs/responsables de projets qu'ils fournissent des informations concernant les résultats obtenus afin de recevoir d'autres tranches de financement du projet.

Les comptes rendus du suivi sont préparés tous les six mois et coïncident ainsi avec les réunions du Comité de Suivi. L'amélioration des systèmes de suivi financier s'est dans de nombreux cas accompagnée d'une amélioration de la qualité et de l'exhaustivité de ces comptes rendus. Les sections interprétant les tendances observées au niveau du programme et au niveau des mesures prises individuellement ont représenté un ajout important. Ce n'est que grâce à une telle interprétation que les données deviennent significatives dans un contexte opérationnel.

2.3.3 *Ressources et techniques*

a. *Ressources humaines pour le suivi et l'évaluation*

En général, les administrateurs de programmes se chargent des tâches de suivi, tandis que l'évaluation est confiée à experts-conseils externes, mais gérée par le partenariat et son secrétariat. Un personnel ayant pour rôle, entre autres choses, de remplir des tâches clairement définies de suivi et d'évaluation, permet de répondre plus facilement aux exigences de la Commission. Ainsi les tâches reçoivent un niveau de priorité adéquat et les aptitudes nécessaires sont disponibles ou peuvent être accumulées afin d'effectuer les tâches de façon suffisante. Un financement par l'assistance technique représente une contribution précieuse s'agissant de fournir et former le personnel, mais les faits montrent qu'il est parfois nécessaire de l'exploiter de façon créative. Ceci est particulièrement vrai lorsque les limitations des dépenses publiques font qu'il est difficile de trouver un financement correspondant et lorsque les programmes sont administrés par des fonctionnaires dont les postes ne peuvent pas être co-financés par les Fonds Structurels.

b. *Systèmes informatiques de gestion*

Il devient de plus en plus manifeste que les systèmes informatiques de gestion offrent un potentiel énorme pour aider au suivi et à la mise en œuvre efficaces des programmes. Des informations sont fournies sur plusieurs de ces systèmes et sur certaines des façons dont ils ont été utilisés le plus efficacement. Ils présentent des limitations dans la mesure par exemple où leur mise en place exige beaucoup de ressources, mais ces limitations sont largement compensées par leurs avantages potentiels, dans la mesure où ils permettent non seulement le stockage mais aussi la manipulation aisée et rapide d'une grande quantité de données. Ceci permet aux responsables de programmes - et dans certains cas au partenariat dans son ensemble - de suivre les progrès au jour le jour et d'intervenir à temps en cas de problèmes.

c. *Sources de conseils et d'informations sur le suivi et l'évaluation*

L'influence des pratiques nationales sur les techniques adoptées pour le suivi et l'évaluation est peut-être tout particulièrement manifeste dans le cas de l'utilisation de l'expertise et des techniques en matière de statistiques. Ceci semble plus variable s'agissant des méthodologies d'évaluation. Les conseils de la Commission sur les méthodologies d'évaluation sont utilisés dans une certaine mesure, mais on pourrait mieux faire connaître le soutien principalement fourni par le "programme MEANS". Bien que les membres du secrétariat n'effectuent pas normalement l'évaluation eux-mêmes, une meilleure compréhension du processus et de ses limitations leur permettrait de le gérer plus efficacement.

2.3.4 *Partenariat*

Le principe de la mise en œuvre par un *partenariat* est central dans les politiques structurelles de l'Union européenne. L'application de ce principe peut stimuler à la fois un besoin d'évaluation accrue, ce qui est parfois plus important que le besoin de répondre aux exigences réglementaires formelles, et le potentiel de rendre cette évaluation plus exhaustive et équilibrée. Malheureusement cela peut aussi engendrer des incertitudes. Ceci était manifeste dans les réponses de nombreuses personnes interrogées, qui ne savaient pas avec certitude qui était responsable du suivi et de l'évaluation du programme, qui avait le droit d'intervenir dans la conception de ces activités et qui devait avoir accès aux résultats. Les négociations entre les partenaires des programmes et des dispositions pour leur suivi et leur évaluation peuvent facilement engendrer un manque de sélectivité et de cohérence, par exemple dans les objectifs du programme et les cahiers des charges pour les évaluations, chose qu'il convient d'essayer d'éviter.

2.3.5 *Utilisation des résultats du suivi et de l'évaluation*

Bien qu'il soit crucial de comprendre les résultats sur le plan pratique du suivi et de l'évaluation des programmes, il est difficile de s'en faire une idée précise. Dans certains cas spécifiques, il apparaît que l'activité de suivi dépasse une préoccupation concernant les questions de gestion financière immédiate. Cependant, il semblerait que l'on continue à beaucoup compter sur les mécanismes informels pour obtenir un *feed-back* pour la gestion des programmes, ce qui indique le besoin d'affiner et de développer encore les démarches de suivi et d'évaluation des programmes, de sorte qu'elles soient pratiques et scientifiquement valables et constituent une composante véritablement intégrée de la gestion du programme.

2.4 **Autres Questions de Débat**

L'exposé soulève en conclusion diverses questions méritant des discussions plus détaillées, par exemple, quelles sont les dispositions administratives les plus propices à un suivi et à une évaluation efficaces, et comment permettre à tous les programmes de profiter au maximum de leurs efforts en matière de suivi et d'évaluation.

3. BEGLEITUNG UND EVALUIERUNG

3.1 Einleitung

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist zu erforschen, wie Begleitung und Evaluierung in Ziel-2-Gebieten betrachtet und behandelt werden, wobei die wichtigsten Themen und ausgewählte Beispiele einer besonderen oder sehr guten Praxis herausgestellt werden sollen. Der erste Abschnitt umreißt einige Ansichten von seiten der Regionen, Mitgliedsstaaten und der Kommission über die Überwachung und Evaluierung von Ziel-2-Programmen. Der zweite Abschnitt wendet sich den Hauptkomponenten der Arbeit zu: einem Überblick über die derzeitige Praxis. Beispiele guter oder interessanter Praxis werden zu einer Reihe spezifischer Themen gegeben. Die Hauptarbeit enthält auch eine Liste von Definitionen für einige der Hauptkonzepte der Begleitung und Evaluierung und nennt einige Quellen für weitere Informationen auf diesem Gebiet.

3.2 Beobachtungen über Begleitung und Evaluierung

Begleitung und Evaluierung können auf vielerlei Weise der Umsetzung von Ziel-2-Programmen nützen.

- Die Begleitung liefert die Fakten zur Bestätigung der Intuition, inwieweit Fortschritte erzielt und welche Probleme bei der Umsetzung angetroffen wurden.
- Diese Daten können als Beweise dienen, wenn Programmverwalter sich gegenüber nationalen Beamten oder Beamten der Kommission für die Änderung eines Programms aussprechen wollen.
- Begleitung und Evaluierung sollten die Partner mit den notwendigen Informationen versorgen, um eine effektive Umsetzung zu ermöglichen; dazu sind eine regelmäßige Berichterstattung von Begleitungsinformationen, eine große Teilnahme an Evaluierungsstudien und allgemeiner Zugang zu Evaluierungsergebnissen erforderlich.
- Regelmäßige Fortschrittsberichte geben nicht nur den Partnern Auftrieb, sondern ermöglichen auch eine regelmäßige Vergabe genauer und aktueller Informationen an die Medien.
- Die Offenheit, die sich in einem unbeschränkten Zugang zu Begleitungs- und Evaluierungsberichten ausdrückt, betont auch, daß ein Programm durchschaubar und gut verwaltet ist.

Gleichzeitig bestehen verschiedene Vorbehalte bezüglich der Erwartungen der Kommission über die Durchführung der Begleitung und Evaluierung. Die Situation hat sich zwar gebessert, doch wurden in der Vergangenheit einige Probleme mit ungenügender Kohärenz oder Klarheit in den Vorschriften der Kommission assoziiert. Weitere Schwierigkeiten beziehen sich auf die Evolutionsrate der Strukturpolitik und die Komplexität der beteiligten Partnerschaften - insbesondere wenn jeder Teilnehmer die Ausführungsvorschriften für Begleitung und Evaluierung im Hinblick auf seine eigenen Interessen interpretiert.

Was die Evaluierung anbelangt, so scheint die *Ex-ante*-Phase die meisten Probleme zu bieten, doch anerkannterweise wichtig zu sein, da:

- sie das Gesamtgleichgewicht und die Kohärenz der Programme stärkt;
- nur durch gewisse Wirkungsprojektionen, ganz gleich wie bedingt oder implizite sie sind, eine intelligente Wahl der Maßnahmen stattfinden kann; und
- genaue Begleitung und Evaluierung praktisch unmöglich sind, wenn nicht schon früh geeignete Schritte unternommen werden, um dafür zu sorgen, daß entsprechende Ziele formuliert werden, deren Werdegang verfolgt werden kann. Außerdem sollten genügend Grunddaten vorhanden sein, damit dies praktisch möglich ist.

Was eine *Zwischenevaluierung* angeht, so bestehen einige Bedenken bezüglich des geeigneten Zeitpunkts, und ihr Inhalt ist ebenfalls Gegenstand von Diskussionen. Die Programmperiode für Ziel-2-Programme beträgt normalerweise drei Jahre. Zu Beginn eines Programms kann sich die Umsetzung um bis zu einem Jahr verzögern und folglich ist u.U. für die Hälfte der theoretischen Geltungsdauer praktisch keine eigentliche Leistung festzustellen. Eine Lösung unter solchen Umständen ist, daß die *Zwischenevaluierung* zur Beurteilung der Gründungsphase verwendet wird, und sich im wesentlichen auf administrative Themen konzentriert. Eine andere Möglichkeit wäre eine leicht verzögerte "*Zwischenevaluierung*", deren Ergebnisse für jede nachfolgende Programmperiode verwendet werden könnten. Eine solche Arbeit könnte zwei Jahre nach dem theoretischen Start eines Programms beginnen und sechs Monate vor dem theoretischen Abschluß des Programms einen Abschlußbericht produzieren.

Das Problem von Verzögerungen bei der Umsetzung ist auch für die *Ex-post*-Evaluierung relevant, ebenso wie das Problem eines Nachhinkens der erzielten Wirkungen. Im derzeitigen Kontext der Ziel-2-Programme wird die *Ex-post*-Evaluierung eventuell gründlicher, systematischer und wichtiger, doch hemmen zeitliche Beschränkungen ernstlich ihre Fähigkeit, Programmentscheidungen zu beeinflussen.

3.3 Überblick über die Praxis

3.3.1 Einführung

Nationale administrative Kontexte haben einen unvermeidlichen Einfluß darauf, wie die Vorschriften für Begleitung und Evaluierung interpretiert und angewendet werden können. Gleichzeitig gibt es fast genauso viele Variationen innerhalb *desselben* Mitgliedsstaates wie zwischen den Regionen *verschiedener* Mitgliedsstaaten. Jeder Mitgliedsstaat bietet sowohl Beispiele guter Praxis als auch Fälle, wo Begleitung und Evaluierung verbessert werden könnten. Erwähnenswert ist das Schema, daß die Bemühung um und die Qualität von Begleitung und Evaluierung offensichtlich wenig mit der Größe der Programme zu tun hat.

3.3.2 *Ansätze zur Überwachung*

Beamte der Kommission bestätigen, daß die *finanzielle* Begleitung sich in den letzten Jahren in den meisten Ziel-2-Regionen dramatisch verbessert hat, daß aber die Begleitung bzw. Überwachung der *Leistungsinformationen* im allgemeinen weniger gut entwickelt ist. In vielen Fällen wird stillschweigend angenommen, daß die Begleitung sich fast ausschließlich auf die *finanzielle* Verwaltung bezieht. Es ist zwar höchst wichtig, finanzielle Kontrollsysteme einzurichten, die regionalen, nationalen und EU-Vorschriften effektiv entsprechen, doch könnten die Begleitungssysteme auch mehr Informationen über Leistungen bieten. Eine ganze Reihe verschiedener Ansätze haben sich entwickelt, um diesem Bedürfnis zu entsprechen, wie u.a. die Forderung, daß Projektverwalter/leiter Leistungsinformationen liefern sollten, um weitere Tranchen der Projektmittel zu erhalten.

Begleitungsberichte werden halbjährlich in Übereinstimmung mit den Sitzungen der Begleitausschüsse vorbereitet. Wie sich die finanziellen Begleitungssysteme verbessert haben, so ist auch die Qualität und Vollständigkeit dieser Berichte in vielen Fällen besser geworden. Ein wichtiger Zusatz sind die Abschnitte, die beobachtete Muster interpretieren - auf der Ebene der Programme und der einzelnen Maßnahmen. Nur durch eine solche Interpretation erhalten die Daten in einem betrieblichen Kontext Bedeutung.

3.3.3 *Ressourcen und Techniken*

a. *Humanressourcen zur Begleitung und Evaluierung*

Gewöhnlich werden die Begleitungsaufgaben von den Programmverwaltern erfüllt, während die Evaluierung durch außerbetriebliche Berater durchgeführt, doch von der Partnerschaft und ihrem Sekretariat geleitet wird. Durch Angestellte, zu deren Rolle eindeutig definierte Begleitungs- und Evaluierungsaufgaben gehören, können die Vorschriften der Kommission leichter eingehalten werden. Dadurch wird den Aufgaben die angemessene Priorität zuteil und sind relevante Fähigkeiten vorhanden oder erreichbar, um die Aufgaben zu vollenden. Die Finanzierung technischer Hilfe ist ein wertvoller Beitrag zur Bereitstellung und Ausbildung von Personal, doch muß sie erfahrungsgemäß manchmal kreativ ausgenützt werden. Dies gilt vor allem, wenn die Beschränkungen der öffentlichen Ausgaben die Möglichkeit verringern, geeignete Finanzmittel zu finden und wo die Programme von Beamten verwaltet werden, deren Stellen durch die Strukturfonds nicht mitfinanziert werden können.

b. *Management-Informationssysteme*

Es wird zunehmend deutlich, daß computerisierte Management-Informationssysteme ein enormes Potential für die Förderung effektiver Begleitung und Umsetzung von Programmen bieten. Über eine Reihe solcher Systeme und einige der Methoden, wie sie am effektivsten verwendet werden, stehen Informationen zur Verfügung. Sie zeigen einige Beschränkungen, da z.B. ihre Einsetzung mittelintensiv ist, doch werden diese bei weitem durch ihre potentiellen Vorteile übertroffen, indem riesige Mengen von Daten nicht nur gespeichert, sondern leicht und schnell manipuliert werden können. Dadurch können die Projektmanager - und in einigen Fällen die größere

Partnerschaft - Fortschritte tagtäglich verfolgen und rechtzeitig reagieren, wenn Probleme auftauchen.

c. *Beratungs- und Informationsquellen für Begleitung und Evaluierung*

Der Einfluß nationaler Praxis auf die für Begleitung und Evaluierung gewählten Techniken zeigt sich vielleicht am deutlichsten bei der Verwendung statistischer Expertise und Techniken. Dies scheint in bezug auf Evaluierungsmethoden variabler zu sein. Die Richtlinien der Kommission zur Evaluierungsmethodik werden ebenfalls verwendet, doch könnte die Unterstützung, die hauptsächlich durch das MEANS-Programm erhältlich ist, besser publiziert werden. Die Mitglieder des Sekretariats unternehmen zwar gewöhnlich nicht selbst die Evaluierung, doch je besser sie den Prozeß und seine Beschränkungen verstehen lernen, desto effektiver können sie den Prozeß leiten.

3.3.4 *Partnerschaft*

Das Prinzip der Umsetzung durch eine *Partnerschaft* steht im Mittelpunkt der Strukturpolitik der EU. Die Anwendung dieses Prinzips kann sowohl die Notwendigkeit für erhöhte Evaluierung stimulieren, was gelegentlich bedeutender ist als die Notwendigkeit, auf formelle Durchführungsvorschriften zu reagieren, als auch das Potential, eine solche Evaluierung umfassender und ausgeglichener zu machen. Leider kann dies auch zu Ungewißheit führen. Dies zeigte sich in zahlreichen Interviews, wo die Befragten unsicher waren, wer eigentlich für die Begleitung und Evaluierung eines Programms zuständig war, wer das Recht hatte, an der Planung dieser Aktivitäten beteiligt zu sein, und wer Zugang zu ihren Ergebnissen haben sollte. Die Verhandlungen zwischen Partnern sowohl über die Programme als auch ihre Begleitung und Evaluierung kann leicht zu einem Mangel an Selektivität und Kohärenz z.B. bei den Programmzielen und dem Aufgabenbereich für Evaluierungen führen und sollte dringend vermieden werden.

3.3.5 *Die Verwendung der Ergebnisse von Begleitung und Evaluierung*

Es ist zwar wichtig zu verstehen, was die praktischen Ergebnisse von Begleitung und Evaluierung für die Programme bedeuten, doch ist es schwierig, einen genauen Eindruck zu gewinnen. In einigen speziellen Fällen zeigt sich, daß die Begleitungstätigkeit über eine Beschäftigung mit Fragen des finanziellen Management hinausgeht. Doch deutet das anscheinend weiterhin starke Vertrauen auf informelle Mechanismen, um Nachrichten über das Management der Programme zu erhalten, darauf hin, daß die Ansätze zur Begleitung und Evaluierung noch weiter verbessert und entwickelt werden müssen, so daß sie praktisch, wissenschaftlich akzeptabel und eine echte integrierte Komponente der Programmverwaltung werden.

3.4 **Weitere Themen zur Debatte**

Die Arbeit endet mit einer ganzen Reihe von Fragen, die einer weiteren Debatte bedürfen, wie z.B., welche administrativen Arrangements am besten effektive Überwachung und Evaluierung ermöglichen und wie alle Programme

den größtmöglichen Nutzen aus ihren Begleitungs- und Evaluierungsanstrengungen ziehen können.

Thematic Paper

*Monitoring and Evaluation in Objective 2 Programmes:
Progress and Challenges*

Monitoring and Evaluation in Objective 2 Programmes: Progress and Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how the tasks of monitoring and evaluation are both viewed and addressed in Objective 2 areas, drawing out some of the main issues and selected examples of distinctive or best practice.¹ In section 2, the paper outlines some views from the regions, Member States and Commission on their experiences of monitoring and evaluating Objective 2 programmes. The opinions obtained reflect not only the variety of interests at stake but also a variety of understandings of the basic nature of and requirements for monitoring and evaluation, and some working definitions of the key relevant concepts are provided in section 3. Section 4 turns to the main component of this paper: a review of current practice. Rather than attempting to catalogue all the variations in the monitoring and evaluation of the 81 Objective 2 programmes, it provides examples of good or interesting practice in relation to a number of specifically identified key issues. Finally, sources of further information on monitoring and evaluation are listed in section 5.

The research on which this paper is based provided ample evidence that the monitoring and evaluation of Structural Funds operations are complex and demanding processes which are fundamentally shaped by several factors.

- The particular (national *and* regional) administrative context of each individual programme has a critical influence on both the ideal and actual provisions made for its monitoring and evaluation.
- The structural policies of the EU are not static, but are evolving with respect to the regulatory, conceptual and operational requirements in the monitoring and evaluation field.
- Interventions assisted by the Structural Funds are made in contexts where other national and regional policies are frequently much more influential. The 'counterfactual' and additionality of EU measures can rarely be identified easily.
- Policy evaluation is a discipline which is still in its infancy, and standards for the design, conduct and quality assessment of evaluation are not universally agreed.

¹ This paper is one of a series of thematic papers produced by the EPRC as part of the *IQ-NET* programme of exchange of experience. Like the other papers in the series it has been drafted on the basis of interviews with Objective 2 programme managers and partners at regional, Member State and Commission levels as well as through substantial desk research. The papers were discussed at the September 1996 meeting of *IQ-NET* in Cardiff and modified to reflect the discussion at the meeting and subsequent comments of *IQ-NET* sponsors. They are being distributed to a wide group of people nominated by the sponsors. The EPRC welcomes comment and feedback on any aspect of them. Any errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the authors alone.

2. OPINIONS ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Whereas a decade ago, monitoring and evaluation were not undertaken actively throughout the EU, virtually all countries with designated areas are now engaged with these tasks. From a Commission perspective, the fact that there is agreement (or at least acceptance) among programme partners that the monitoring and evaluation of Objective 2 programmes is valuable has been an important achievement. The interviews carried out in preparing this paper certainly confirm that there is widespread appreciation in the Member States and Regions of the various ways in which monitoring and evaluation should be of benefit in the implementation of these programmes. Several advantages are noted by programme managers and partners.

- The fundamental benefit of monitoring and evaluation is the provision of hard data to back up intuition for both tracking progress (*important in view of time pressures on allocating and spending funds*) and assisting in the development of solutions to problems.
- Monitoring helps programme managers develop more accurate project selection criteria and may also provide them with evidence for making a case to national or Commission officials with regard to adjusting a programme.
- Monitoring and evaluation are particularly useful in confirming the value of innovative policy responses to structural problems and, indeed, the more systematic use of evaluation should improve the overall level of policy innovation and level of effectiveness of policy.
- Monitoring and evaluation should provide all of the partners involved in a programme with the information that they need to contribute to the effective implementation of their programme; regular reporting of monitoring information and access to evaluation findings are required for this to be the case.
- The steady tracking of progress (even if it is not dramatic) through regular reports boosts the morale of the partners, and facilitates the provision of accurate and up-to-date information to the media (*important in many cases to promote absorption of assistance*). It can also provide a public demonstration of the fairness of the management of the programme.

However, while the value and even necessity of monitoring and evaluation appears to be generally acknowledged in principle and practice, there are various reservations concerning the Commission's apparent expectations of how the activities should be carried out. Responding to expectations seems to have been complicated by the fact that, according to interviewees, requirements have not always been coherent or clearly expressed, and the advice provided on interpreting and complying with them has been of variable quality and usefulness.

While such comments are both general and subjective, Commission officials do acknowledge that they have only recently been in a position to offer clear advice (see section 5). Further, there is some recognition that both the Commission's requirements and the guidance they are able to offer have become clearer, more pragmatic and so more useful over time, suggesting that

the overall process is maturing. A variety of reasons may be suggested for the difficulties which have been experienced previously and they may be worth bearing in mind if only to inform continued developments in this area.

- The regulatory requirements for monitoring and evaluation are at times open to interpretation and it is only to be expected that different Member States, regions and services of the Commission will interpret them in light of their own particular interests at any point in time.
- The EU structural policies are evolving and their mode of implementation will inevitably also continue to evolve.
- One of the key principles of the structural policies is partnership, but the individual partnerships which develop are rarely among equals. National patterns of administrative relationships are frequently hierarchical and remain of critical importance even if influenced by the specific requirements of managing an Objective 2 programme.

Commission officials are also aware that the need to report on progress in implementing programmes is frequently a source of irritation to implementers. Interviews with partners frequently record terms such as onerous, over-frequent and bureaucratic. Such opinions may be valid but, at the same time, the degree to which requirements are perceived as excessively onerous seems to relate to the extent to which programmes have: (a) been equipped to deal with them (eg. through computerised management information systems); and (b) found the process of reporting to be of benefit to their own task of programme implementation.

Although national and regional officials are generally willing to acknowledge the value of monitoring and evaluation in principle, this does not in all cases mean that monitoring and evaluation is fully integrated into the programming process. In some cases it is seen as an add-on extra of, at best, secondary importance, as certain comments indicate. One interviewee stated that “evaluation will certainly be undertaken when it is needed but for now we are too busy getting things done” and another that “the priority is to make programmes run - then we can worry about making them run well”. Under such circumstances, requirements for monitoring and evaluation will always be viewed as irritating and bureaucratic.

There are more specific differences apparent in relation to particular Commission demands. These are sometimes of a technical nature and quite legitimate. One more general and potentially problematic area of contention relates to the timing and subject matter of evaluations. In order to deal with this, it is most straightforward to consider the three stages of evaluation chronologically.

The *ex-ante* stage of evaluation appears to pose most problems. In some traditions this is seen as being little more than the prior appraisal of projects. In others an antipathy to making projections of impact undermines commitment to *ex-ante* evaluation in general. There is also a tendency in some cases to characterise monitoring and evaluation needs as being less relevant in the early stages of programming in the belief that they can be met retrospectively, later in the implementation period, when they are “really”

relevant. It is not appropriate to go into too much detail on these issues at present but the following points might be noted.

- A substantial amount of any *ex-ante* evaluation needs to be devoted to the overall balance and coherence of the programme concerned.
- It is only by making some projections of impact, no matter how conditional or implicit, that intelligent policy choices can be made.
- Accurate monitoring and evaluation is virtually impossible if adequate steps are not taken in the earliest period of programming to ensure that objectives are formulated in a way which allows progress towards their achievement to be tracked subsequently and establishes sufficient information for this to be practical.

With regard to *intermediate* evaluation some concerns are evident concerning its timing and there is also some debate over its appropriate subject-matter. The programming periods for Objective 2 programmes are currently three years. At the same time, it is not unusual for delays in implementation of up to one year to occur at the start of a programme and consequently for virtually no immediate output to be evident halfway through its theoretical lifespan. In such circumstances one solution has been to use the intermediate evaluation to assess the start-up phase itself, concentrating essentially on administrative issues. This had been done in a number of regions (e.g. for the Finnish programmes). An exercise involving a review of the socio-economic situation in the region concerned and the degree of continued relevance of the programme's objectives might also be helpful. Another option could be to carry out a slightly delayed 'intermediate' evaluation which produces findings that could inform any immediately subsequent programming period. Such studies could be launched two years after the theoretical start of a programme and lead to the completion of a final report six months before the programme's theoretical conclusion.

The problem of implementation delays is also relevant to *ex-post* evaluation as is the problem of time-lag in achieving impacts. Available evidence indicates that the *ex-post* evaluation of Objective 2 programmes may be becoming more thorough, systematic and significant, but that the programming calendar does not allow the results of such evaluation to be easily taken into account in the preparation of new programmes.

A final issue relates to the opinions of the different partners on monitoring and evaluation. One commentator suggested that even when provisions for monitoring and evaluation work well at the political level, by giving a programme a 'clean bill of health', they may not be making a useful contribution at the technical or management level. In such circumstances national administrators might be satisfied with the same arrangements causing frustration for regional officials and programme implementers. This could explain the opinion of one programme manager that the Commission should demand more detailed and clearly defined indicators from the regions. It also helps to explain the greater degree of enthusiasm among some programme managers (e.g. in Denmark and Sweden) for evaluation related to specific types of measure rather than to evaluation of programmes in general. In

Germany and Austria there appeared to be particular scepticism towards the latter approach.

Different opinions on the overall value of monitoring and evaluation underline the observation made earlier that the nature of each partner's commitment to monitoring and evaluation will be related to their own specific and legitimate interests. Provisions for monitoring and evaluation should neither ignore or attempt to hide this variety of interests but rather adopt an approach which takes it into account and so may produce results which are more likely to be of some value to all concerned. A necessary first step in the development of any such approach is to agree on basic concepts and terms and it is to this subject that we now turn.

3. CLARIFICATION OF BASIC CONCEPTS

This section is confined to providing working definitions of the most basic concepts in monitoring and evaluation on which agreement needs to be reached among the partners. The definitions used draw on work which has been carried out in the context of the MEANS programme (see section 5).

- *Monitoring:* Monitoring entails the systematic collection of information related to the resources used by and outputs obtained from structural interventions. It allows judgements to be made on whether the implementation of an intervention is proceeding as originally envisaged and appropriate adjustments to be made if necessary.
- *Evaluation:* Evaluation provides judgements on how structural interventions use resources to meet needs. It makes use of the information provided by monitoring but also requires or should generate information on the actual or expected impact of the intervention. Evaluations must therefore go beyond the prior appraisal or ex-post evaluation of individual projects to judge the overall strategic balance and coherence of an intervention.
- *Audit (control):* Audit checks whether interventions conform to fixed standards such as legal texts, budgets and professional rules. It obtains information on and judges structural interventions according to the amount of resources which they use to obtain specified effects and on the fashion in which these resources are implemented.
- *Outputs:* Outputs are what is produced immediately by an intervention and their attainment is the primary responsibility of the programme managers. For example, outputs could include the development of industrial estates or training capacity regardless of the demand for the sites or courses involved.
- *Impact:* Impacts include the less direct and immediate the consequences of a programme; they may not emerge until months or even years after a programme's implementation. The emergence of impacts often involves third parties who are not the direct or intended beneficiaries of an intervention. For example, they could include increases of employment attributable to new or improved industrial estates or to a better qualified potential workforce which has taken advantage of increased training opportunities.

4. REVIEW OF PRACTICE

4.1 Introduction

It is clear that, while various national administrative contexts have an inevitable influence on how the requirements for monitoring and evaluation are interpreted and applied, there is almost as much variation between regions within the same Member State as there is between regions in different Member States. This situation may change in future however, since a number of Member States (e.g. the UK and France) report increasing co-ordination at a national level in both technical and policy questions. Each Member State offers both examples of good practice and cases where monitoring and evaluation could be improved. One notable pattern is that the effort devoted to monitoring and evaluation and the quality of the results bears little evident relationship to the size of the programme concerned.

4.2 The type of information most frequently collected in monitoring

Commission officials confirm that financial monitoring has improved dramatically in most Objective 2 regions in recent years but that monitoring of output information is generally less well developed. Examination of the responses of the other interviewees confirmed this. In many instances, the unspoken assumption was that monitoring was almost exclusively concerned with financial administration.

While it is imperative to establish financial control systems which effectively meet regional, national and EU requirements, monitoring information systems also need to provide information on outputs. A variety of approaches have evolved to meet this need. In many UK regions, recipients of assistance are increasingly being required to provide information on actual outputs as part of the established process of claiming payments. In some cases, this information is verified by programme managers checking a sample of the assisted projects. In France, detailed financial data is complemented in some regions' monitoring reports by more qualitative reports of progress achieved, including more detailed accounts of selected themes or projects. In Denmark, while the ongoing monitoring information system concentrates on financial information, this is complemented by regular reviews of the general socio-economic situation of the region concerned and questionnaire-based reports on effects.

4.3 Resources and techniques

A shortage of financial resources does not appear to pose an obstacle to making adequate provision for monitoring and evaluation. This may be related to the fact that monitoring and evaluation can now be financed under the Technical Assistance heading of Structural Fund allocations. However, using available resources in the most efficient way is itself a demanding task.

4.3.1 *Human resources for monitoring and evaluation*

The availability of Technical Assistance alone is not sufficient to resolve manpower issues. First, it is not possible to fund *existing* staff through the Structural Funds and second, securing the co-financing to take on *additional* personnel is not always possible, especially in a context of restricted public

sector spending. Where co-financing is available, as in Finland, where programme management offices are based in regional councils with their own revenue raising powers, staffing restrictions are a minimal constraint. In France, where programme management is carried out by civil servants, the situation is more difficult. Solutions which have been pursued include the use of people on temporary placements to fulfil certain tasks and the establishment of a separate office housed within the European administration department, for monitoring and evaluation officers who are not employed formally as civil servants. In England, a practice frequently pursued (following a pilot project in North East England), is the use of technical assistance to take staff on secondment from partner organisations to supplement Government Office resources. Technical assistance funding is a valuable contribution to supplying and training personnel, but in some cases the evidence indicates that most benefit can only be gained from it if there is a will on the part of the programme administrators to exploit it creatively.

Having staff whose roles include or consist entirely of clearly defined monitoring and evaluation tasks appears to enable the Commission's requirements to be met more easily than where these tasks are not clearly allocated. A further attractive feature of the former approach is that it does not necessarily imply that substantial resources are required; examples include the use of a single graduate student in a temporary position to deal with the statistical requirements of a programme.

Established national approaches to monitoring and evaluation of policy were obviously influential in determining the techniques adopted in each instance. Frequently, these practices need to be adapted to suit the particular requirements of an individual Objective 2 programme. The evaluation methodologies adopted in individual cases may be worth examining further.

4.3.2 Management Information Systems

It is becoming increasingly clear that the establishment of computerised management information systems has enormous potential to enable programmes to be monitored and implemented effectively. Indeed, in countries and regions where such systems are fully operational the prevailing opinion is that it is impossible to manage the volume of data needed for the effective management of a programme without recourse to an appropriately designed computerised system. The systems are not just a means to store records, but are also powerful data manipulation tools. They can be used, for example, to generate much of the data required for programme management and monitoring committee meetings, in some cases in minutes or hours, rather than the days and weeks required to gather statistics from manual information storage systems. Developing or commissioning such systems has entailed a considerable investment by some Member States and regions, but this appears usually to have been worthwhile. There are some notable cases where perseverance has led to such systems transforming the way in which programmes can be managed and run. Examples of systems in the Objective 2 regions include:

- The **EVI** system, developed in 1991-1993 in **Bremen** - an early but potentially quite powerful system which has met Bremen's needs very well

but has not proved attractive to other Objective 2 regions in Germany although it has apparently informed the development of a new system in Austria under the ERP Fund.

- The system developed by the **Strathclyde** European Partnership, which has now been applied across Scotland, has attracted interest from other UK regions and was an important influence on the Dutch system.
- The system commissioned by a group of French Objective 2 regions from the software company 'SIAGE', and adopted with some success by **Aquitaine**.
- Approaches being developed in each of the **new Member States** - by NUTEK in Sweden, the Ministry of the Interior in Finland (REUHA) and in Austria (see below).

Experience clearly shows that it is ill-advised to attempt to impose systems developed for one region rigidly onto another - even within the same Member State. At the same time, the examples available can be used to highlight a range of interesting and sometimes exemplary practices of potential wider interest, as well as some of the problems encountered in developing and using these systems.

- The establishment of such systems may require considerable *perseverance*. Commissioning a system is only the first step: there may be a long teething process before it is fully operational and able to fulfil the functions required of it effectively. During the changeover from the former system, it may be necessary for the former and the new administrative provisions to be fulfilled in parallel, which has onerous resource implications. These difficulties have, in some cases, led programmes to abandon their efforts.
- Such systems are not fixed entities. It is useful if they can be modified over time in response to changing requirements.
- In some cases, the same system is used for all the Structural Fund programmes underway in a region. It enables expenditure over the whole territory - and ultimately impacts - to be tracked and analysed, and means that individuals working on or with different programmes only need to learn how to use one system.
- In one case, the database system was networked to all the partners. Since these partners are able to input project data onto the database themselves, the workload of the central administrative office, and the duplication of tasks between the central office and the partners have both been reduced. In addition, the partners can manipulate the database to answer their own questions regarding the programme's implementation (e.g. which of their projects is late applying for a tranche of funding), and in this way, they are able to ensure that effective progress is made. The degree of openness reflected in permitting open access to the database also helps to inspire a sense of real involvement and commitment among the partners.
- One problem with some database solutions is that separate and not always compatible systems are used for ERDF and ESF information. This affects the ease with which synthesised data can be generated and increases the hardware and software resource requirements.

- It is also rare that the same system is used by all the programming areas of any single Member State (notable exceptions being the Netherlands and Finland). This is arguably an area in which Member States - or indeed the Commission - could have taken the lead to ensure minimum expense and duplication of effort. However, the incremental and *ad hoc* approach which has been taken must be recognised as the product of the simultaneous and rapid changes taking place in information technology and in the monitoring and evaluation requirements of Structural Fund programmes.
- Among the good examples of co-ordination is the Austrian monitoring system which has been developed in parallel with the implementation of a more general policy evaluation initiative by the Federal Chancellery, "Checkpoint Evaluation", which is intended among other things to initiate evaluation projects and encourage the exchange of experience on evaluation.
- Too much should not be expected of management information systems. They do help in meeting the reporting requirements of the Commission and in enabling the close monitoring of programmes, but are only a tool assisting the process. The information they generate only really becomes useful when it is interpreted by programme managers and partners and put into active use. A qualitative analysis of the data is still required for monitoring reports, for example, and this will draw upon the expertise of the partners and programme managers. In turn, the systems only have a limited role in meeting evaluation obligations, efficiently generating some of the financial and statistical data upon which evaluations can then build.

4.3.3 *Advice and information sources on monitoring and evaluation*

The influence on techniques adopted in monitoring and evaluation of national practices is perhaps most obvious in the case of the use made of statistical expertise and techniques and appears to be more variable in relation to evaluation methodologies. EU statistical resources appear not to be used by the regions in which interviews were conducted. Some use is made of Commission guidance on evaluation methodologies, but the support available could be better publicised. Some interviewees, for example, were unfamiliar with the main relevant Commission initiative, the 'MEANS programme'. Those who were aware of this programme generally acknowledged the quality of the documents which it produced but some found them to be too technical to be of practical value. A more positive approach was taken in Aquitaine. Here, 'MEANS' reports are regarded as illustrating ideal approaches. While the secretariat does not have the resources or expertise to reach those 'ideals', the documents do offer ways in which they can practically improve their practices and so move closer to them.

4.4 **Reporting**

A clear distinction was drawn by interviewees between reporting practices for monitoring and those for evaluation. Monitoring reports tended to be provided to the programme Monitoring Committees every six months. Occasionally reports were said to be provided less frequently (e.g. once a year) but this practice was generally evident only in regions experiencing difficulties with

their monitoring provisions. In Finland, where there is only one Objective 2 Monitoring Committee at national level, it seems to be of benefit to some regions to supplement the comprehensive monitoring reports for the national committee with less detailed reports for the more frequent meetings of their own programme management committees - which in one case meets every three months.

The frequency and content of evaluation reports which regions intend to prepare reflects the Commission's requirements. Three are to be produced during the lifetime of the current programmes. As discussed above, this schedule is seen as being excessive by some of those interviewed, especially in the context of a three-year programming period.

Consideration of the issue of the timing and frequency of reports is obviously related to three issues.

- *The quality of provision for monitoring and evaluation.* If inadequate provision is made for monitoring and evaluation in the first place, this failing cannot be remedied by the adoption of even the most conscientious reporting procedures.
- *The use which is actually made of the output from these activities.* If the results of monitoring and evaluation are not somehow fed back into programming, reporting is a meaningless ritual (the scope for use of this output is considered below).
- *The relationship of the partners in each individual instance.* Monitoring and evaluation reports should be made available to all of the partners. However, as has been noted earlier, the nature of the partnership which is responsible for any Objective 2 programme has wider implications which deserve consideration.

Reporting formats and their target audiences

Communication medium	Audience						
	Monitoring Committee	Programme managers	European Council	European Parliament	European Commission	National government	Citizens & others
Meetings		*					
Provisional report	*	*					
Unpublished report	*	*					
Published report	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Synthesis			*	*	*	*	*
Leaflet paper			*	*	*	*	
Seminar	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Press conference							*

Source: MEANS Handbook on Intermediate Evaluation for Programme Managers (1996), C3E, Lyon

4.5 Partnership

As noted above, the principle of implementing programmes through *partnerships* is central to the European Union's Structural policies. Even if relationships within such partnerships are less equal than is acknowledged, the application of this principle can have significant implications, not least with

regard to monitoring and evaluation. The challenge posed by partnerships to the established hierarchy of administrative relationships within Objective 2 regions does not always strengthen the position of locally based actors against national authorities, but the novelty of the resulting situations stimulates a need for increased evaluation which is on occasion more significant than the need to respond to formal regulatory requirements.

Unfortunately, the novelty of such situations also leads to uncertainty. This was evident in the responses of many of those interviewed, who were uncertain as to who exactly was responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of a programme, who was entitled to be involved in the design of these activities and who was to be given access to their results. It may be argued that in an ideal situation all of the partners should be involved in the monitoring and evaluation process from the outset. Local partners (including the programme managers) are directly committed to individual programmes and more complete use is made of their expertise if they are afforded the opportunity to influence the strategy adopted, the definition of its objectives and the scope and focus of monitoring and evaluation. In practice however, political tensions tend to pose obstacles to this ideal being achieved; tensions not only related to the local-national-European axis of the relationships concerned but also to more “horizontal” differences between representatives of various local constituencies or different departments of national government. Such tensions, and the problems which they generate, were noted by many of those interviewed and in general it seems to be best to confront them early and explicitly in making provisions for monitoring and evaluation - without necessarily having any illusions about being able to resolve them completely.

The appropriate response to another type of difficulty, also directly related to partnership is less easy to identify even at a general level. The negotiations between partners of both the programmes themselves and the provisions for their monitoring and evaluation can easily lead to a lack of selectivity and coherence in, for example, programme objectives and the terms of reference for evaluations. Partially as a consequence of this phenomenon, some of those interviewed suggested that monitoring should be primarily the responsibility of the implementing agency for the programme concerned while evaluations should fall more to national and/or Commission officials and involve the use of external professionals. To adopt a rigid position on this issue would be pointless, especially when the true nature of partnerships varies considerably and is evolving.

4.6 Use of monitoring & evaluation results

Whilst it is important to understand what the actual influence of monitoring and evaluation has been on programmes, it is difficult to get an accurate impression of this. In some specific instances there is evidence that monitoring activity is moving beyond a preoccupation with immediate financial management issues. One example is the use of output data as a trigger for funding, as mentioned earlier. In a number of cases, evaluation findings have led almost directly to a re-formulation of the strategies of existing programmes or to the definition of new programmes for the regions concerned. For example, in North East England a number of evaluations carried out over three successive programming periods produced

recommendations, some of which - even if they were not welcomed by all of the partners or applied immediately - have been adopted to the overall benefit of the programme. In other cases (e.g. a joint evaluation of the business development measures in the programmes for both the West and East of Scotland) thematic evaluations have led to distinct changes to the types of individual projects being supported.

However, even in regions where the value of evaluation studies in enhancing programme effectiveness is acknowledged, it remains true that, in many cases, "the practical experience of managing and implementing programmes is more useful in overall policy (re)formulation". A process of constant evaluation of programmes is underway on the part of programme managers, and there continues to be a strong reliance on such informal evaluation at all political levels. The challenge for formal evaluation is to provide management information in the ongoing, timely and sensitive way afforded by the best informal approaches, while also bringing the added value of a comprehensive, rigorously methodical and transparent approach.

A final suggestion to enhance the practical relevance of evaluation to programming, emphasised in Denmark, Sweden and France, is to devote more resources to thematic evaluations. Such work would not only provide detailed information on particular aspects of a programme but also make it easier to accurately delineate a programme's relationship to national policies.

5. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Commission has published a number of working papers on various topics relevant to the monitoring and evaluation of Objective 2 programmes, of which the most relevant to this paper is the "Common Guide to Monitoring and Intermediate Evaluation" which was published in 1996.

In 1993, the Commission conducted a pilot programme aimed at improving "Methods for Evaluating Structural Policies" (MEANS), as a result of which a second MEANS programme was launched at the end of 1994. This is to run for three years, with the overall objective of providing Commission representatives with a coherent body of guidelines and methods for the evaluation of the Structural Policies. The programme has produced more than 20 different reports and handbooks to date on various aspects of this subject - most of which are widely available. A major conference on the evaluation of European regional policy was held in Brussels in December 1995 as part of the MEANS programme and a second conference was held in Berlin in December 1996.

DG XVI chairs a Technical Working Group on the evaluation of the EU's Structural Policies which meets every few months and occasionally approves the publication of informal guidelines.

In addition, a number of national administrations provide not only guidelines on policy evaluation in general but also on their interpretation of the specific requirements for implementing programmes assisted by the Structural Funds e.g. "Vade-Mecum sur la Mise en Oeuvre des Fonds Structurels

Communautaires en France - 1994-1999" issued by DATAR and GAMES-F manuals in the UK.

6. SUMMARY

While monitoring and evaluation requirements and practices are still evolving in Objective 2 programmes, and still pose considerable unresolved challenges, the legitimate place of these activities in the programming process is acknowledged. Even those who are most sceptical about the value of some aspects of evaluation acknowledge that there is a need to try to clarify and better understand the links between policies and their effects. There has been a sincere effort on the part of many regions not only to fulfil obligations, but also to use the processes creatively to inform strategy formulation, policy definition and approaches to management and implementation. Considerable experience has been accumulated by all the players, including the Commission, Member States and regional actors, and this forms a valuable resource to inform future practice.

The processes of monitoring and evaluation are gradually becoming more integrated into the general management of structural interventions. The establishment of baseline indicators and the collation of data to develop more useful management information systems on the foundation of these baselines is improving. However, a number of important issues have been raised in the course of these developments. While it would be unreasonable to expect the definitive resolution of all of these issues, the resolution of many of them deserves further effort and will demand the active participation of all of the partners on the regional, national and European level.

This paper has provided a brief review of some of the main issues currently being raised in the field amongst Objective 2 regions, and also highlighted interesting practices or approaches in these areas. Issues raised by the paper, which may merit further examination include the following:

- *How can greater benefit be obtained from the results of evaluation studies?* Enhancing the value of evaluation is related to issues such as the timing of studies, the definition of objectives and tasks, the provisions made to ease data collection, the use of standard methodologies and formats within given Member States, the choice of evaluator, the relationship established with the evaluator, the involvement of the wider partnership, the involvement of the Commission.
- *How can the potential benefits of monitoring to the programme be maximised?* Enhancing the value of monitoring is likely to involve ensuring that provisions made for gathering and verifying information on project progress, the methods used for interpreting that information, the practices in regard to dissemination of the information and the practical use made of it are all as effective as possible.
- *What administrative arrangements contribute to enabling effective provision for monitoring and evaluation?* Answering this question could involve consideration of the value of establishing sub-committees for monitoring and evaluation, co-opting technical experts onto the monitoring committee, recruiting specific staff to be responsible for the field,

installing management information systems and designing a 'technical assistance' strategy in advance.

- *How can monitoring and evaluation be developed to provide a response to the varying interests of the different partners in any given instance?* Answering this question would involve developing both a more detailed definition of the legitimate role of monitoring and evaluation and an agreed definition of the extent to which and manner in which the interests of the partners can be taken into account by these activities.