Participatory Evaluation: The Virtues for Public Governance, the Constraints on Implementation

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Abstract   Participatory evaluation relies on the principle of active participation by major stakeholders, including the least organised groups, as being fundamental to good evaluation practice. This process presents a number of advantages which can nonetheless become crippling if certain prerequisites are not fulfilled. The goal of our paper is to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of participation and to examine the conditions necessary for participatory evaluation to achieve its objectives.

Keywords   Participatory evaluation · Public policies · Participation · Democracy · Empowerment

1 Introduction

Discussing the advantages and disadvantages of such and such an approach to evaluation (evaluation of the evaluation in a way) will suppose to relate to a referenceframe. When considering the positive aspects of participative evaluation as opposed to management-based evaluation, we will refer to a specific idea of public policy evaluation, to its social function. Should the utility of an evaluation be judged only upon the efficiency of its results or also its ability to empower stakeholders, by promoting debate and discussion, even if this draws light upon irreconcilable situations? In fact, the very

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choice of the referenceframe will provide answers and direct the evaluation! Such an exercise is not value-free but value-engaged. Our approach to the question of participation given in this paper is largely influenced by our own idea of what the purpose of an evaluation should be, and also, our prejudices in favor of participation. This will clarify the scope and limits of any ensuing debate about the virtues and drawbacks of participation.

After an introduction to participatory evaluation and its advantages and limitations, we will define the prerequisites and conditions necessary for an effective participatory process within the framework of evaluation. We will also touch on the consequences of participation on the final outcome of the evaluation, as well as the role of the evaluator.

2 Participatory Evaluation: A Set of Approaches, Some Shared Values

Participatory evaluation has developed primarily in the sectors of social, educational and health care services and has undergone major growth on an international scale over the past 15 years. Various evaluation approaches fall along the broad spectrum of participatory evaluation applications. All of these approaches agree on the common principle of active participation by major stakeholders as being fundamental to good evaluation practice. The major stakeholders may include public decision makers, technical appraisers, direct and indirect beneficiaries involved in the public policy under evaluation, and representatives of the community. Pollitt (1999) refers to several forms of participatory evaluation as the following set of approaches:

- Empowerment Evaluation (Fetterman et al. 1996),
- Fourth Generation Evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 1989),
- Critical Evaluation (Everitt 1996),
- Utilization-focused Evaluation (Patton 1997),
- Pluralist Evaluation (Duran et al. 1995),
- Democratic Evaluation (Floc'hlay and Plottu 1998).

A more extensive overview of other forms of collaborative evaluation and inquiry can be found in Cousins and Whitmore (1998).

Our aim is not to explore each form deeply, but to demonstrate their main differences and common characteristics. Like Cousins and Whitmore (1998), we can place each participatory approach inside or outside of two principal streams that correspond to two principal functions of evaluation.

The approach of Practical Participatory Evaluation aims primarily to foster the utilisation of the evaluation. The core premise of Practical Participatory Evaluation is that stakeholder participation in evaluation will enhance the relevance, ownership, and thus the utilisation of the evaluation.

The approach of Transformative Participatory Evaluation aims primarily to empower individuals or groups through their participation in the evaluation process. It focuses on learning inherent in the process and on any social action and change that may result.

Weaver and Cousins (2004, p. 23) propose five distinguishing characteristics of participatory evaluation:

1. 'The control of technical decision making: Who controls such decision-making? Members of the research community, members of the non-researcher stakeholder community or a balance between the two of them?'
2. 'Diversity among stakeholders selected for participation: How diverse is the range of stakeholder interests among the participants?'
3. 'Power relations among participating stakeholders: Do those with an important stake in the evaluation vary in terms of their power to enact change?'
4. 'Manageability of evaluation implementation: To what extent do logistical, time and resource challenges impede the manageability of the research process?'
5. 'Depth of participation: Is the participation of non-researcher stakeholders limited to consultative interactions or do participants engage directly in all of the technical research tasks?'

According to the second characteristic, we can note that among the different participatory evaluation approaches, the number of participants involved will vary, as does their weight and impact in the participation process. Some evaluators aim to bring together all the stakeholders (Guba and Lincoln 1989, pp. 191–204) or the broadest representation possible (Duran et al. 1995, pp. 52–55). Others emphasise the underprivileged groups or the most powerful groups, especially project managers (Patton 1997), in the decision-making process.

According to the fifth characteristic, we will notice that the position of participation in the evaluation process varies. Participation can be limited to some involvement in discussions in the early stages of the evaluation process. Alternatively, it may involve interest groups, as well as citizens (not as representative of any interest groups), in the evaluation process itself. Participation can include evaluation design, selection of methods, conduct of fieldwork and data-processing, setting recommendations and defining conclusions for the final report. It can also include self-evaluation, for example, self evaluation by students in educational science.

In addition to the five distinguishing characteristics of participatory evaluation proposed by Weaver and Cousins, we aim to highlight the role played by the evaluator. In utilization-oriented evaluation, the evaluator holds a privileged and special position that allows him to shape the evaluation process because of his skills and specialist knowledge. In empowerment-oriented evaluation, the evaluator is in the stakeholders' service, especially that of underprivileged groups, so as to empower them. We will return to the role of the evaluator further on in this paper.

Above and beyond these distinctive characteristics, approaches to participatory evaluation share common values. They seek to break with the managerial tradition of evaluation which sees itself as neutral, and is based on the work of the evaluator as an independent expert using objective quantified methods. This traditional design of evaluation 'solid, scientific, quantitative', provides "hard figures" useful for the decision maker, 'hard figures' backed up by transparent and systematic methods (Pollitt 1999, pp. 154–155). The goal here is to produce an evaluation process, claimed to be 'value free', which provides the most objective possible views on the problem of evaluation and the consequent decisions. In this regard, this approach aims to be independent of the value systems and objectives sought by any particular stakeholder.

In contrast to the managerial tradition of evaluation, approaches to participatory evaluation are based on the supposition that any human intervention in a process is not neutral and therefore conveys a set of values which helps determine the process i.e. the evaluation process is 'value engaged'. Any evaluation process cannot be value free and cannot assume 'a neutral, non-politicized bystander position, protected from idiosyncratic predispositions of the evaluator or the context, producing credible information that is not unduly biased by its sponsor or by bad decisions of the evaluator' (Greene 2002, pp. 2–3). The evaluator as a stakeholder will contribute to the evolution of the decision process and the construction of the final choice. 'It is not possible for evaluators to assume a position on the sidelines…in the hopes that our practice will not perturb the situation or influence it via some form of unwanted bias' (Greene 2002, pp. 2–3).

Because evaluation is the projection of a system of values as a frame of reference, and the expression of a peculiar point of view on action, it is necessary to favour the expression of diverse points of view on public action in order for the social legitimacy of the evaluation to be as wide as possible. Approaches to participatory evaluation seek to bring together, widely and actively, the diverse stakeholders in the evaluation exercise. The principles of inclusion, dialogue and deliberation developed by House (2005) contribute to achieving this objective and providing the common base for different participatory evaluation approaches:

- Inclusion: Inclusion means working with under-represented and powerless groups as key stakeholders in the evaluation process, not just sponsors and well-organised groups. This does not mean that every interest, value or view concerned will be given equal weight, merely that all relevant ones should be considered in the design and conduct of the evaluation.
- Dialogue: The evaluation study should encourage extensive dialogue between, and within interest groups. The aim is to enhance understanding of interests, values and views amongst the various participants.
- Deliberation: The aim is to achieve, through rational discussion, a set of outcomes, values and conclusions involving all those concerned. It may be only through participation in the process that stakeholders are able to formulate and construct their interest in interaction with others.

The greater the importance given to the principles of inclusion, dialogue and deliberation, the greater the active participation of stakeholders will be in the evaluative process. These differing levels of engagement by participants give rise to three principal forms of democratic evaluation (Hanberger 2006, pp. 25–28):

- Elitist Democracy oriented Evaluation (EDE),
- Participatory Democracy oriented Evaluation (PDE),
- Discursive Democracy oriented Evaluation (DDE).

According to analysis by Hanberger, these correspond to three forms of democracy:

- Democracy for the people
- Democracy by the people
- Democracy with the people

This is elaborated upon in Table 1.

The form of evaluation relying on a democracy *for* the people, which Hanberger calls Elitist Democracy, is close of the managerial design of evaluation. The citizen is not given a direct role in the evaluation process. This form of evaluation relies on a representative democracy where citizens, through elections, can control their government by choosing among competing elites. The main purpose of Elitist Democracy Evaluation is to control (to audit). The evaluator responds to the decision maker's information and knowledge needs. The evaluator provides the expertise in investigating whether or not a proposition works, without questioning the stated goals.

The two other orientations of democracy, *by* the people and *with* the people, give rise to two forms of participatory evaluation. First of all, Participatory Democracy assumes that citizens are encouraged to participate in the policy process before a policy is decided or launched. Thus their engagement is primarily in the planning process. Participatory Democracy is when freedom of choice and responsibility have been delegated to communities. It can be seen as 'democracy by the people'. The main functions and intended use of Participatory Democracy oriented Evaluation are self determination, empowerment and learning. This specific approach to evaluation is more focused on whether or not concerned and affected citizens or clients are included in and empowered by the proposal itself, as well as through the evaluation process. The evaluation is designed by the people with assistance from the evaluator, and the evaluator's role is to facilitate self-reflection. In that sense the evaluator acts as an advocate for self-determination.

Discursive Democracy, sometimes called deliberative democracy,[1] is a mode of decision making on matters of public policy that can only be achieved through discussions among free and equal citizens. It is a 'democracy with the people'. The main purpose of Discursive Democracy oriented Evaluation is to promote practical knowledge, learning, public debate and accountability. Discursive Democracy oriented Evaluation seeks to include major stakeholders, including citizens, in the evaluation and the assessment of the project according to criteria considered relevant by them. The evaluator is a counsellor helping the participants to engage in the practice of evaluation. The evaluator is also a mediator helping the ordinary citizen to exchange ideas, and to participate in public debates. This last form of evaluation incorporates the three principles of inclusion, dialogue and deliberation. The entire process seeks to involve all legitimate stakeholders and citizens in particular. The objective here is to improve understanding of the reality of a situation by favouring the expression of, and taking into account, the needs and aspirations of local stakeholders, and to propose useful solutions to all parties.

3 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Participatory Evaluation

Participatory evaluation is difficult to put into place. It can prove to be counterproductive: the supposed advantages of one approach being transformed in severe limitations and deficiencies. Each supposed advantage has a critical counterpoint. Five aspects in particular require discussion (Plottu and Plottu 2009, p. 346):

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[1] Deliberative democracy is used as a synonym for discursive democracy.

Table 1 Characteristics of three democratic evaluation orientations

Democratic orientation	Intended use/function	Evaluation focus	Inclusion	Dialogue	Deliberative/ discourse	Evaluators role
EDE—*For* the people	Accountability	Intended outputs and outcomes, goal achievement	Policy and programmes makers	Not important	Not important	Expert
PDE—*By* the people	Self determination, empowerment, learning	Goal development, process learning and progress	Programme implementers, affected citizens/clients	Very important	Not important	Advocate, facilitator
DDE—*With* the people	Practical knowledge, learning, accountability, public debate	Stakeholders criteria, learning, outcomes	All legitimate groups	Very important	Very important	Mediator counsellor

Source: Hanberger (2006, p. 27)

- External validity of the evaluation
- Utilisation of the results of an evaluation
- Collaborative public engagement
- Contribution to participatory and discursive democracy
- Cost of participation and expected benefits for society

3.1 The External Validity of the Evaluation

Participatory evaluation is supposed to offer greater external validity to evaluation, because stakeholder discussion favours expression of a diversity of points of view. Evaluative judgement is built upon a multiplicity of informed opinions. Stakeholder participation in the evaluation exercise is seen as the guarantee of a better consideration of society's engagement in the goals of future projects. This gives such projects greater external legitimacy. The fact that stakeholders are part of the evaluation process makes this one more relevant to them, because it addresses their particular concerns. Using adequate evaluation methods can also increase the credibility of the evaluation process and therefore its external validity (Eckley 2001, p. 3).

Conversely, the integration of stakeholders into the evaluation process, in particular direct and indirect beneficiaries, can harm the external validity of evaluation. In effect, the parties involved will have only a partial vision of the stakes of the public action under evaluation and no evaluation skills or experience. This can lead to a weakening of the quality of the evaluation with regard to a process based on scientific approach. Rutherford (2000) notices for example that using inexperienced people to conduct fieldwork and data-processing results in a lack of scientific standards and therefore a loss of rigour and precision in data. The external validity of the evaluation will suffer from the lack of strength of the results and the conclusions obtained.

3.2 The Utilisation of the Results of an Evaluation

The results of an evaluation have more chance of being used if the stakeholders have taken part in the different stages of the evaluation process, and consequently have better understood the results of the evaluation. Moreover, stakeholders will be more likely to adhere to the results of an evaluation if they have themselves participated in its formulation and implementation. Consequently, we could imagine that recommendations will be more easily put into place and that resistance to solutions proposed will be weaker. Participation is particularly well suited to formative evaluation and favours operational change to the proposals under evaluation by bringing collective knowledge into the programme. 'Some researchers provide evidence of the capacity of participation to enhance evaluation use' (Patton 1997, pp. 87–113).

On the other hand, stakeholder participation can disadvantage the evaluation process if a lack of evaluation skills and experience leads to poor quality conclusions and results. A poor quality evaluation will not be used. Approximations and poor analysis may result in in-action because they can be used as arguments to justify the status quo. Under these conditions, using traditional, less participative, evaluation will be easier if it is based upon scientific data which clearly demonstrates incontestable elements which can be relied on to highlight a decision.

3.3 The Collaborative Public Engagement

Through the organised exchange of points of view, participatory evaluation allows the evaluative process to become a collaborative exercise of public engagement. Confrontation of one point of view with that of another, better understanding of what motivates other stakeholders, highlighting of points of convergence and areas of insurmountable conflict, will enable the collective definition of the decision making problem. In effect, this is about gambling on collective intelligence beyond the difficulties raised by the conflicting points of view so as to collaborate in the decision problem and to envisage a shared solution.

By way of a contrast, participation can act as a barrier to public action and favour immobility. If participants act as representative of established interest groups and have long-established views on a topic, their participation can result in a sterile confrontation of points of view blocking any decision through participants sticking to their guns. The outcome of such confrontation is the status quo.

Even more so, one can anticipate that through such a process participants agree on the lowest common denominator, to the exclusion of the most critical points of view (Lethonen 2006, p. 188). In the event the participation process, which is supposed to bring added value to the construction of actions, results in a decision which is neither particularly ambitious nor innovative. Preventing such risk requires careful planning.

3.4 The Contribution to Participatory and Discursive Democracy

Through seeking to give voice to those traditionally excluded from public debate, in particular the least favoured groups, participatory evaluation aims to widen and enrich public debate. Moreover, through participation in the evaluative process, citizens will become better informed and involved and more able to judge and exercise control upon public action. At this point, we can note the emancipatory goal expected of participatory evaluation. Warren (1993) underlines that citizen participation depends on the quality of the individual as a social actor. Through simple participation a citizen will lose his or her feeling of apathy, isolation and powerlessness. Evaluation therefore contributes to participatory and discursive democracy.

If conflicting points of view are insufficiently managed, participation can, on the other hand, lead to a false sense of democracy. Discussions will finally be lead by the most powerful stakeholder groups who will impose their points of view upon the weakest. The outcome will be a paradoxical situation whereby the weakest are excluded from a process whose entire existence is to enable them to be heard.

3.5 The Cost of Participation and the Expected Benefits for Society

Two types of benefits are expected from the participatory process:

Firstly, the benefit to society of a better informed citizen who will be more involved in public action, prepared to debate his ideas with others.

Secondly, the benefit for the community as a result of easier implementation of the recommendations of an evaluation. It can be expected that the conclusions of an

evaluation which has been widely discussed early on in the project will be easier to implement and will meet less resistance, conflict and obstruction from participants involved than the conclusions of a non participative process.

The field of urban and rural planning provides numerous examples of conflict linked to an absence of consultation upstream (for example, in France, the high speed rail Mediterranean line, construction of the A85 highway…). The cost of participatory evaluation linked to information, mobilisation, training and supervision of all participants is compensated by the avoidance of the cost linked to delay and obstruction which can stem from a non participative process. It is more efficient to take the time to debate, confront points of view and identify areas of conflict upstream of a decision than to manage insurmountable conflict downstream, which is costly for the community.

A number of prerequisites must be observed if participatory evaluation is to achieve its objectives. Citizens must be informed of, motivated and trained for the evaluation. The evaluative process must then be supervised. The costs of such actions are often judged to be prohibitive with regard to the supposed benefits of participation, which are difficult to quantify.

More importantly, because evaluation is subject to constraints of time, in particular the need to achieve results and to make decisions within a given timeframe, the necessary upstream phases of information, motivating, training and supervision of participants, are generally neglected or carried out in a hurry. Because of this lack of forward-planning and preparation (the upstream phase of an evaluation is generally under-estimated), participatory evaluation has every chance of failing to deliver its expected benefits.

These examples demonstrate that the expected advantages of participation can become drawbacks. Participatory evaluation must be properly organised. In order to achieve its objectives, participation presupposed that a certain number of conditions be brought together.

4 Conditions for the Implementation and the Applicability of Participatory Evaluation

Participation should be the outcome of a process which is defined, organised and supervised by the evaluator. A certain number of prerequisites are necessary to ensure the effective functioning of a participatory evaluation. Informing, motivating and training participants, allowing interest groups to construct a shared vision and balancing expression of points of views, are indispensable if participation is to be successful.

4.1 Informing, Motivating and Training Participants (Particularly Weaker Interest Groups) to Take Part in Evaluation

One main challenge of participatory approaches is to give voice to groups of stakeholders who are generally excluded from the evaluation process. However, it goes without saying that bringing weaker groups to the table is not enough to ensure their participation. Community engagement and participation cannot be imposed. Expressing an opinion requires, as a minimum, willpower as well as the ability to seize the

opportunity to participate. For this reason, the weakest groups are generally isolated and unable to promote their point of view with others.

Clear information, concerning the terms of the evaluation and the opportunity to make a point of view heard, is necessary in order to mobilise different groups of individuals, particularly weaker groups, and to bring them into the evaluation process. Balanced participation would pre-suppose that all groups possess a comparable amount of information about the stakes of the evaluation, as well as the skills to formulate and argue about future collective projects, according to these terms.

Balanced participation also pre-supposes that different groups have been instructed in the evaluation of public policy. Training sessions are often necessary in order to introduce the limits and expectations of an evaluation, its time-frame, the stakes and what is to be expected from participants.

4.2 Enabling Underprivileged Groups to Build a Common View

Motivating certain groups is a first step forward, but does not automatically ensure the ability to participate. At this level, it is often easier for individuals or groups to mobilise themselves than to have the resources needed to organise themselves and build a shared vision. Reacting to a decision is one thing, anticipating the impact of a decision requires an information process of a completely different nature. It is far easier to group together in defence of public property or heritage when it is threatened than to build in advance a shared vision of a local or regional dynamic. The prelude to any participatory process consists in getting people to discuss and define a common view point. This stage is essential, particularly for the most underprivileged groups. Such groups are generally in a position of inferiority in confronting opposing points of view and the negotiation process. In effect, they do not often possess a clear vision of the problem as a whole, nor do they have a common position to be voiced in negotiation due to lack of sufficient organisation and thought about a common project beforehand.

'The Empowerment Evaluation' (Fetterman et al. 1996) deals precisely with making people aware of the existence of common interests and bringing them together around a collective view (Miller and Campbell 2006). This stage is important for enabling people to express the values they share according to the purpose of a project. Empowerment evaluation requires a significant time to give expression to these values and has an identity-forming function for the community. It is only through the 'Empowerment Evaluation' phase that representatives of the community as bearers of a shared vision of a locality or region can debate with confidence and defend their 'project' before other stakeholders such as public decision makers, funding agencies, etc (Floc'hlay and Plottu 1998, p. 266).

During this phase the evaluator has a very different role to that which he is normally given in the conventional design of evaluation. He is not the agent of an external appraisal, but on the contrary, is a part of the assessment resource, engaged in the process. He can be by turn a 'facilitator', a term used in 'empowerment evaluation' (Fetterman et al. 1996) or 'maieutician' allowing stakeholders to meet and express themselves, so as to bring out the realities of the situation. He does not represent the stakes of the participants, but favours democracy by giving voice to these

groups of participants and by making sure that the widest possible range of perspectives and values are represented. He has also a role in helping disagreements and conflicts in a community to be articulated. In order to better understand the logic behind each group of participants, the evaluator has to fully understand the communities represented by these groups. This point allows us to deal with the question of citizen representation in participatory evaluation approaches. It is easier to associate different stakeholders when the evaluation concerns projects on a local scale *by* and *with* the people, whereas it is not always possible to include all citizens concerned in the evaluation for projects of a national scale. Therefore a system of representation is needed in this situation which closely resembles a democracy *for* the people.

If people feel too reluctant to participate, the evaluator must convince them of their interest to participate, either directly or through representation. If people participate, they have even more chance of seeing their points of view taken into account. Moreover, the experience will strengthen their links with the community. The evaluator must firstly find a way of identifying and engaging with the people involved. It is important to establish motivation through individual contact. To do this, the evaluator needs to seek the help of key people on the ground, local opinion leaders, who will be more likely to convince future participants due to the fact that they are already known to them. The evaluator must then motivate people to participate through clear explanation of the objectives, the roles of each party, the responsibilities of each one, so as for them to feel involved. This can take the form of meetings, workshops and more convivial sessions. The aim is to create a dynamic and friendly atmosphere so as to give the project a sense of social engagement. Using a variety of tools and by means of simple methods accessible to all will bring about immediate sharing of results with all key stakeholders. This in turn will lead to a greater commitment and a greater local learning. If certain participants are afraid to reopen debates on questions that are known to involve clear disagreement within the community, the evaluator must convince them that it is better to deal with disagreement early on, in order to avoid deeper conflict at a later date. It is better to build collectively at the early stages rather than become immobilised by sterile conflict which benefits no one.

4.3 Ensuring Conditions for a Balanced Expression of View Points

Establishing an awareness of common interests, as well as disagreements, is necessary, but not sufficient, for effective and balanced participation. Different participants must be able to express and to defend their point of view. Consequently, the unequal capacity of groups to defend their point of view can result in the situation whereby whoever shouts the loudest imposes their vision to the detriment of the expression and due consideration of the views of the weakest groups. The evaluator has to provide for an equal expression of the participants' points of view and to organize the confrontation of interests. His role is to mediate, to facilitate by proposing methods and tools as an aid to negotiation, and helping participants to conduct the evaluation. In this type of intervention, results are never guaranteed. In

order to reach its objectives, or at least some of them, the evaluator needs to be both trained and experienced in achieving dialogue. He or she must also employ any appropriate tools and communication media necessary to help with the task in hand.

At this stage, it's necessary to favour simple and visual tools, tools easy to use by participants and which make exchanges between participants easier. Such tools can be colour voting methods. This method consists in using a predefined set of colours to represent possible answers, allowing participants to give their point of view on a certain number of points. The colours used are the international standard of traffic light (dark green, amber, red) to which are added light green and pink to nuance answers, as well as white for a 'don't know' and black for an abstention. This provides a scale of seven colours in which dark green represents the answer 'I agree totally', light green 'I agree', amber 'I have mixed feelings', pink 'I do not agree', red 'I disagree totally', white 'I don't know' and black 'I do not wish to reply'. This can be transposed to a coloured matrix giving instant visibility to points of consensus and disagreement and allows for debate among participants during which anyone may change his or her colour and justify his or her opinion. Colour voting methods have been used in town and country planning for small scale projects at neighbourhood level.

When projects are on a large scale and include a wide range of stakeholders, more formalised methods using software such as the MACTOR method may be used. The MACTOR method of analysing the behaviour of participants seeks to gauge the balance of power between actors and study their convergence and divergence when faced with a certain number of associated stakes and objectives. By means of this analysis, the MACTOR method aims to assist in making decisions so that participants can give voice to their agreement and disagreement about the project, and build alliances. The MACTOR method has been used by local authorities and the state to assist in taking strategic decisions.

First, each participant reveals their objectives, their goals for the project, both existing and developing, their motivations, constraints and internal means of action, and their past strategic behaviour. Then, the meeting of participants according to their goals, objectives and means of action identifies a certain number of strategic outcomes on which actors have convergent or divergent aims. The MACTOR method helps to position participants in relation to a hierarchy of objectives and to identify convergence and divergence by means of diagrams. Balance of power between participants is calculated by the MACTOR software package and integrated into the analysis of convergence and divergence between the participants. New diagrams of possible convergence and divergence between all participants can thus be obtained. The comparison between the series of diagrams enables one to observe how potential alliances and conflicts become distorted by taking account of the hierarchy of objectives and the balance of power amongst participants. The MACTOR method brings to light the interplay of potential alliances and conflicts among actors and in this way helps to facilitate a negotiated solution. It is obvious that if the participants desire a successful outcome to negotiations they have every interest in being honest.

Multicriteria Decision Aid (Roy 1996) is one among the many possible methods that can be useful in conducting participatory evaluation. It is interesting, because

it offers a formal framework and methods to provide a structure for the negotiation process, enabling the negotiation process to result in a concrete decision. Multicriteria Decision Aid is a method of identifying and selecting rival projects. It brings about an exchange between participants on evaluation criteria to be taken into account for decision-making. It enables the different opinion of participants to be transcribed into quantitative and qualitative criteria, not simply a single indicator which is usually in monetary form. The use of quantitative and qualitative criteria enables all the dimensions of a project to be taken into account, rather than the exclusive use of those which are easy to assess in quantitative and monetary form. Each participant, aware of the different stages of the process, is asked to reveal his system of values, defining a specific weighting of criteria for each, if he wants his opinion to influence the final decision. This requirement avoids selfish strategic behaviour. In this way, the negotiations do not aim to discuss the systems of value but rather to define the solutions which are acceptable to each participant. The system of values of each party will not be questioned and the negotiation can therefore be of a cooperative nature and encourage the search for new solutions. At this level, the decision-making process is based on deliberation. The aim is to establish a climate of confidence and share a common contribution to the problem (Roy 1999). The possibility of a veto enables everyone to define the scope of what solutions are considered as unacceptable. By comparing the solutions which are acceptable to each actor, taking different vectors of weighting into consideration, we can show whether a negotiated solution exists or not (for a presentation of the stages of Multicriteria Decision Aid and an applied example, see Floc'hlay and Plottu 1998). Multicriteria Decision Aid had been used at national and local level for the construction of dams, waste disposal sites, airports, motorways etc.

Hierarchical Evaluation (Plottu 1999), using Multicriteria Decision Aid, goes one step further to ensure conditions for a balanced confrontation of view points. Hierarchical Evaluation bases itself on the identification and definition for each participant group of the nature of impact of the project under evaluation upon land and community. Three hierarchical levels of impact (heritage, strategic and profitability) are distinguished and can be used in particular on a local scale for the evaluation of town or country planning projects.

- Heritage or patrimonial impact: defines the impact, whether negative or positive, of the project on an essential component in the self-identification of a group as a single community (for example on cultural and environmental assets).
- Strategic impact: is the positive or negative impact on the future development of a community, e.g. the impact on a local key resource such as an economic activity, or an environmental resource, that represents an opportunity for development and an 'uncommitted potentiality for change' (Bateson 1972).
- Profitability impact: is the positive or negative impact on short term scale that affects individual satisfaction according to economic utility. It does not query the potential of future development or challenge elements of the identity of the community,

A project can engender positive or negative impacts of a different nature, such as heritage, strategic, or profitability impact, depending upon the participant groups. This

can lead to conflicts which are more or less serious according to the nature of these impacts.

One of the evaluator's objectives is to allow each participant group to unveil the nature of the stakes underpinning their position. Highlighting the nature of the stakes raised by each group exposes the unequal skills of stakeholders to argue their position. Certain strongly defended positions may represent only minor stakes, whereas stakes of a more vital nature represented by weak groups will be heard with more difficulty. Hierarchical Evaluation allows to find a solution of the controversial debate by prioritising a principle which favours the most significant issue. Should a conflict arise, an heritage impact held up by some parties would be given priority over a strategic or profitability impact held up by some others parties, regardless of any hierarchical order between the decision-making parties. For a group, the act of setting out the nature of the interests at stake can prevent closed attitudes to negotiation. The goal is to make the outcomes of participation derive more from the force of argument than the force of persuasion, preventing powerful groups from taking over the participatory process.

Hierarchical Evaluation can be used for the evaluation of town or country planning projects, such as transport infrastructure projects. We have used Hierarchical Evaluation to examine the choice of route for the A85 highway in France. This major project brought about conflict between the technical appraisal which defined one particular route, and the local population in favour of another. Here, evaluation based on the qualification of impacts (heritage, strategic, profitability) brought about a result which was contrary to that of the technical appraisal based only on a quantification of impacts (a comparison of the financial impacts of the loss of agricultural land and forests). By highlighting the hierarchy of impacts of each route, it was possible to demonstrate that the route favoured by the technical appraisal bore a negative impact on local heritage, being incompatible with a local project supported by all of the community and aimed at preserving its rural identity (for a more complete presentation of this case, see Plottu and Plottu 2007).

All these tools can be used in the three steps (empowerment, negotiation, decision making) of the Model for the Operationality of Democratic Evaluation (M.O.D.E.) that we proposed in Floc'hlay and Plottu (1998). Colour vote methods can be used at the stage of empowerment evaluation to get underprivileged groups to discuss and to build a common view point. Hierarchical Evaluation can be used during the dynamic process of negotiation between the participants, and Multicriteria Decision Aid Methods provide a means of progressing from negotiation to decision making.

It is clear that even if obtaining a common position is an ideal, consensus is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. The existence and goal of participation are not to build consensus at any rate. Highlighting irreconcilable points of view has just as much merit. Identification of areas of disagreement and potential conflict is of great use to the decision maker, who is free to take his or her own decision in full view of the facts. Even if the outcome is not consensus, debating all ideas leads to better understanding of arguments and as a consequence constitutes the first step in accepting other ideas and differences, and building tolerance towards the values of other people in society.

4.4 Prioritisation in the Field of Application

The implementation of participatory evaluation pre-supposes time and means. Participatory evaluation cannot be improvised on the job. If the necessary resources are not available for the planning and implementation of participatory evaluation, it is surely preferable to adopt other methods as a matter of priority. The application of participatory evaluation should be reserved for situations where it will be most productive. The contributions of participatory evaluation vary according to the areas evaluated and the desired result of the evaluation. In particular whether the evaluation is to take place upstream, in support of strategic decision making, on-going, as a navigation tool, or downstream i.e. retrospective evaluation of public action.

In the framework of ex-ante evaluation, one discuss the opportunities for undertaking a public action. Participation represents a priori a certain interest for the community in the evaluation of major long term projects or programmes such as infrastructure or planning projects. When it comes to projects concerning the future of a community, it seems to be important to prioritise an evaluation process which enables confrontation of as wide a sample of points of view as possible, as well as diverse visions of the future and different models of society. Therefore, participatory evaluation can be prioritised in the fields of the environment, sustainable development and planning or even development support (see Estrella and Gaventa 1998 for a review of literature covering experiments in participatory evaluation).

In an on-going evaluation, stakeholder participation, by the effects of learning it generates, will help to readjust an action which takes place. In the case of sustainable development, it can be noted that participatory evaluation, through its emancipatory function for the weakest participants, constitute itself an action in favour of sustainable development. It also contributes to participatory and discursive democracy, concepts at the heart of sustainable development.

When the evaluation is a managerial evaluation i.e. 'value for money' and/or the evaluation takes place downstream from public action, the question of participation has less purpose. Stakeholder participation will help to formulate a different view of what has taken place, but cannot change the past. Nevertheless, their point of view are interesting because they will help to change the definition and the implementation of the futures policies. In so far as it is essential to confront diverse points of view in order to build a common future, the desire to cast the most objective possible light onto what has already taken place can result in a process which is even less participative. Evaluation will therefore prioritise methods relying on quantified data in order to learn for the future. Under these conditions, the cost and effort of implementing participatory evaluation in terms of training and supervising all parties should be considered in the light of the expected benefits.

5 The Emergence of the Necessary Conditions for Developing Participatory Democracy: The French Context

Experience in France illustrates the difficulties of providing the necessary conditions for the development of participatory democracy. While participatory evaluation pro-

cesses were first developed in the USA from the 1960s, a similar situation in France did not occur until the 1990s, in particular, with the publication of the Viveret report (1989). At this point in time the idea of democratising participation in the evaluation of public decision-making was adopted. An initial reconciliation between evaluation and participatory democracy was first visible some 15 years ago in the area of evaluation of transport infrastructure projects, into which the principle of community participation is clearly written in legislation.

Two documents (the Bianco circular, 15th December 1992 and the Barnier Law, 2nd February 1995) have modified the formal evaluation procedures for transport infrastructure projects. The Bianco law establishes upstream studies of possible routes, and debate around the role and benefits of a particular transport infrastructure project. The Barnier law, concerning environmental protection, favours the widest possible public participation upstream of town and country planning decisions.

These documents were followed by the Vaillant law in 2002 on the neighbourhood democracy. Voted in on the 27th February 2002, this law marks a supplementary stage by transforming the National Commission of Public Debate (NCPD) established by the Barnier law in 1995, into an independent, administrative authority. This authority guarantees public information and participation in the drawing up of planning projects that incorporate major socio-economic stakes, or having a significant impact on the environment, or on town and country planning.

The NCPD was partly inspired by public consultation practices used by the Quebec Office of Public Audience on the Environment ('BAPE'). The NCPD is responsible for organising and chairing public debate. It also has the task of making public the documents associated with a particular debate. This could lead in particular to a counter-appraisal, allowing for the involvement of other participants in the debate. Public debate takes place in the early stages of the evaluation process. It is neither the place for decision, nor for negotiation, but a time for dialogue during which the population can acquire knowledge and express themselves on the project in accordance with the rules defined by the NCPD. NCPD does provide neither decisions, nor recommendations, but only a careful account of the debates conducted during the process.

Debates led to date by the NCPD concern major national and regional town and country planning projects, for example, transport infrastructure, town and country planning, motorways, high speed rail lines, high tension electricity cables, landfill sites. For infrastructure projects of a smaller scale, participation is limited to a public enquiry during which the community is invited to comment on the project. However, such consultation takes place far downstream of the evaluation and decision stage and causes frustration among the public, who wants to be heard further upstream with regard to the choice of options. For this reason, many local conflicts arise around motorway or high speed railway projects (Floc'hlay and Plottu 1998). The gap between the desire for participatory evaluation and practice, which is limited to consultation, is growing. At the start of the 1990s, the General Council of Bridges and Highways, a key agency in France related to public choice, re-affirmed the principle of maintaining separation between consultation and decision. More evidence of the difficulty of reconciling participatory democracy and evaluation of public choices is provided in the National Evaluation Committee annual

report ([1999](#)) which contains a chapter expressing vehement criticism of participatory evaluation.

A favourable evolution of attitudes and practices towards more participatory evaluation did not come about in France until the start of the 2000s. For a long time, participation has suffered from a lack of venue for discussion. A formalisation of consultation areas on a local level, such as neighbourhood committees for city policy, development committees, commuter committees for transport, offers the opportunity for debate upstream of the implementation of public projects. Local advances in participatory democracy owe much to this formalisation of consultation areas.

There is clear evidence of progress taking place within the professional background of evaluation. If we refer to the charters of evaluation guiding principles of European evaluation societies, the notion of democracy becomes visible (Beywl 2006, pp. 23–24). The charter of the French evaluation society defines in its principle of pluralism that 'Evaluation implies considering in a balanced manner all the legitimate points of view expressed about the evaluated activity'. It advocates, wherever possible, to involve the various stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Participatory democracy was also a central theme of the presidential election campaign in France in 2007. There is no doubt that such development will allow the evaluation of public choices to cast new light onto the conditions for the implementation of participatory evaluation.

6 One Step Further

Stakeholder participation in evaluation presents a certain number of interests, particularly when it involves evaluating the opportunity to undertake a project with strongly engages society. It lies within a certain conception of the governance of public action and requires institutional conditions, such as public decision processes and the existence of centres for debate which are accessible to citizens, which are favourable to participation.

Participatory evaluation is not, however, a panacea. Its implementation pre-supposes a certain number of stages such as informing, motivating, training stakeholders, allowing participants to construct a shared vision, guaranteeing conditions for balanced confrontation of points of view, which require financial means and which are not, in terms of timing, necessarily compatible with available resources nor the timeframe of the public decision. The application of participatory evaluation should be reserved for situations where it will be most productive. Rather, it should be considered as complementary. Recognising the virtues and limits of each form of evaluation is to adopt an open-minded attitude to a plurality of approaches. It also allows the adaptation of the evaluation process to the reality of the given problem, seeking to answer as efficiently as possible the questions posed by society and the decision maker.

In practice, the question of the advantages and disadvantages of participative rather than management-based evaluation cannot be asked in a univocal way, as treated previously. The evaluation process is lengthy and made up of different and distinct steps (drawing up the mandate, defining the terms of reference etc.). The question "Who should participate and how?" will depend on the particular phase of the process. Not

Table 2 Form of participation of the diverse stakeholders to the different stage of the evaluation process

	Mandate	Terms of reference	Management of the evaluators team, discussion and validation of interim and final reports	Formulation of recommendations	Elaboration of an action (implementation, not recommendations)
Decision maker/evaluation sponsor	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration
Program/project managers	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration
Funding authority	Consultation	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Dialogue
Other partners (institutions, …)	Consultation	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Consultation
Program/project operators	Consultation	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Information
Beneficiaries	Information	Dialogue	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Information
Associations/non profit organizations	Information	Dialogue	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Information
Citizens	Information	Dialogue	Co-elaboration	Co-elaboration	Information

Source: Groupe SFE (2009, p. 5)

all players will participate in the same way at each step of the evaluation process. It is therefore necessary to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of diverse stakeholders participating at different stages of the evaluation process.

These questions are debated within the working group that we chair in the French Evaluation Society ("SFE"). The group is made up of commissionners, practitioners and researchers in the evaluation field. The group drew up the following table to illustrate a so-called "ideal" participative evaluation (towards which we should lean) within the framework of a sustainable-development evaluation. At each stage of the evaluation, stakeholders are associated and a particular form of participation is favoured (information or public meetings, consultation and requesting opinions about a choice, dialogue and confrontation of players, or co- or collective working out of the decision to be taken) (Table 2).

Above and beyond the table itself, the interest of the exercise resides in the lessons learned from the deliberation process which produced it. Even though we are members of the same working group, acquainted with sustainable-development and open to participative forms of evaluation, it was difficult to reach agreement about which forms of participation to favour at which step of the evaluative process. Effectively, in the end, an individual's opinion is based upon his or her own idea of what should be the aim of the evaluation as well as the balance sought between transformative and practical evaluation. Discussion about evaluation, as well as the evaluation process, is not value-free but value-engaged.

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