



Inter-governmental Evaluation: Balancing Stakeholders' Expectations with Enlightenment Objectives?

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This article discusses, *from an evaluator's point of view*, the uses and utility of evaluation in inter-governmental contexts. Empirical data are drawn from the current evaluation of the European Social Fund's (ESF) Objective 3 programme in France.¹

It cannot be expected that the evaluator alone is in a position to assess whether the various stakeholders' expectations have been met in a satisfactory manner. However, the evaluator's mission undoubtedly includes accountability and consideration of the ways in which research is used, contributing to evaluation design and to the process and the scope of findings.² The expectations of the partners involved in the French ESF evaluation will first be analysed in order to highlight the evaluator's contribution. It is argued that, potentially, the benefits of evaluation extend beyond strictly satisfying the expressed needs of direct partners. An inter-governmental context tends to be favourable for such an extension.

Balancing Competing Demands Involves Ethics

Reflecting upon the uses of evaluation findings requires reference to standards and brings questions of ethics to the fore.

In France, evaluation has barely any professional profile and no code of practice is yet available to those engaged in evaluation practice (Perret, 1997: 286). Nevertheless, the Conseil Scientifique de l'Évaluation (CSE) has, in annual reports since 1990 as well as in its guidebook for evaluation (CSE, 1996), provided directions akin to 'standards'. Among the five standards for quality evaluation,³ under the criteria 'usefulness/relevance' (CSE, 1996: 46) this guidebook recommends that evaluation provides useful and clear information not only to decision-makers but also to all other actors having a stake in policies.⁴ It further states that 'the interest of a cognitive input for society as a whole' should also be taken into account. This amounts to evaluation contributing to the ability of

public opinion to formulate its own judgement, particularly through the dissemination of findings which feed political debate.

According to this standard, the usefulness of an evaluation study to potential users should not only be judged according to the satisfaction of the expectations of the partners directly involved. The evaluator also has to consider expectations of a more general nature which extend beyond the limits of the framework within which the evaluation study is situated (in time and space). Evaluation is then supposed to address some form of public 'general interest' and itself eventually tends to become a public good. The evaluator therefore appears to be accountable to society as a whole. This dimension of evaluation clearly concerns what Carol Weiss defined as the function of 'enlightenment', which she terms as 'the long term incorporation of evaluation results into professional knowledge, public opinion and taken for granted common sense' (1998: 323).⁵ In this respect, the evaluator is not merely a technician meeting clients' needs but is expected to use his or her own *room for manoeuvre* to influence the ways issues are addressed.⁶

Another source of standards in the context of European Social Funds evaluation, the MEANS programme, retains 'meeting needs' (MEANS, 1996: 18ff.) amongst eight 'quality' criteria. As for its implementation, the document assumes that the main stakeholders are members of a 'Monitoring Committee' and that 'the various needs of the stakeholders should ideally be expressed in the terms of reference'. How that prescription translates to the actual design of the evaluation process depends, *inter alia*, upon the Monitoring Committee's composition. But participation in the Committee does not automatically assume an equal capacity for all stakeholders to voice their requirements. Furthermore, the notion of 'main stakeholders' is itself subject to various interpretations and legitimization procedures.

The French ESF Objective 3 Programme under review is part of the European Structural Funds mechanism. It consists of the co-funding of a wide array of schemes concerned with professional training, employment policies and social integration. Defined in a *Single Programming Document* (SPD, in French, DOCUP, 1994), it is aimed at specific target groups (the long-term unemployed; young job seekers; people excluded from the labour market). An equal opportunities guideline for men and women is also supposed to be 'mainstreamed' in the programme. Twenty-one 'measures' cover more than 300 different actions, coming under the competence of central government and regional and local authorities (Barbier and Simonin, 1996, 1997a, 1997b). The Monitoring Committee (MC) acts as the national partnership body responsible for implementation. All authorities are represented in it, including the 'social partners'. It does not directly monitor evaluation studies and the evaluation process. An 'Evaluation Steering Committee' (ESC) is appointed for this task. The evaluator conducts and coordinates studies under the ESC's supervision and is accountable to the ESC as the decision-making body. The evaluator's contribution to evaluation design and decision-making takes place within this body.

The decision about whom to include in the ESC obviously determines which needs will be formulated and by which stakeholders. The evaluator has no say in the choice of members, a strategic matter agreed between the dominant partners

in the MC. However, initially, it is up to the evaluator to assess the consequences of this choice on the expected quality, relevance and legitimacy of future evaluation findings. Specifically, an evaluator is accountable, from an ethical point of view, for possible bias resulting from an unbalanced composition of the ESC.

Far from being a neutral provider of the methods and technical tools of their craft, evaluators act as fully accountable actors in the ESC. This responsibility may be seen as pertaining to an overall imposed standard: that of actively encouraging the partners in the ESC to take into account the 'general interest' of society.

This is an example of the role evaluators are inevitably led to take in the trade-offs between complex and often conflicting requirements from stakeholders. Moreover, further requirements are often expected in the course of the evaluation process: for instance, the MEANS document quoted above stresses that, should an intermediate evaluation take place, its role should be 'formative' and contribute to programme adjustments on an on-going basis.

The evaluator cannot simultaneously satisfy all these objectives: ensuring that work is being used in a 'formative' way; fulfilling the information needs of partners and stakeholders; providing cognitive inputs and enlightenment to society; and addressing the public's general interest. Conversely the evaluator cannot be expected to stay neutral in the inevitable selection between objectives that occurs as part of the evaluation process. Inasmuch as there is room for manoeuvre and influence in the evaluation design and monitoring, evaluators need strong professional ethics.⁷ This room for manoeuvre is all the more important in the ESF programme studied as evaluation covers a long period of time (1994–9) and its initial 'terms of reference' have allowed for a great deal of latitude in interpretations made by ESCs.

The Political Nature of Evaluation in the Structural Funds Context

The image of evaluators as purely technical or scientific providers of methods and data is not only challenged by the active part they play in the selection of the objectives of the evaluation project. It is also undermined by the fact that evaluation is *structurally* part of the political process.

Within the specific context of implementation and design of European programmes, several political authorities are involved whose *political legitimacies* are heterogeneous: those of the member states, the European Union and local authorities. This increases the complexity of the monitoring and implementation systems. However, being confronted with the political nature of evaluation is not specific to European programmes. The political and 'technical' aspects of evaluation always closely intermingle.⁸

Following Leca (1997: 13) a differentiation between 'political assessment' and 'evaluation of policies' is necessary. *Political assessment*, which is the prerogative of elected representatives (and, periodically, of the people electing them) has a discretionary⁹ nature and is totally free to take into consideration or to ignore the results of *the evaluation of policies*. The latter is *nevertheless an integral part of the implementation process and of the actual existence of the policy assessed* if it is clear that evaluators have an ethical duty not to *get involved in politics* while

performing their task, but nevertheless cannot prevent the outputs of their activity (however much it aims at scientific objectivity, transparency, etc. . . .) intervening in a process which, far from being purely technical or scientific, constantly crosses over into politics. Weiss (1993 [1973]) rightly highlighted this point, stressing not only that programmes are 'political creatures' but also that evaluation reports enter the 'political arena' and enter into competition with the other factors influencing the political game. She also goes further and states that evaluation itself must take a 'political stance'. It is true that, at least implicitly, participating in the evaluation of a programme or policy presumes a general acceptance of its core legitimacy.

In the case of the Objective 3 evaluation, this duality (useful in an analytical capacity)¹⁰ between technical and political issues needs to be carefully considered in order to sort out the specificities of each authority's (partner's) expectations. The evaluator, *nolens volens*, assumes a mediatory role between contradictory requirements, among which some are more or less directly and specifically political (and not merely standard strategic interests in the sense of the sociology of organizations). An evaluator, working as recommended by Leca (1997: 15), to create an '*area of autonomy*' for evaluation, separate from the rest of the political and managerial systems, will again have to draw on ethical frameworks as well as technical skills to determine his/her position.

This position forbids the evaluator from taking sides in a normative manner, in favour of or against the policy being evaluated. This does not mean becoming a mere ectoplasm between the powers and interests which are inevitably divergent. Even if not perfectly objective, the evaluator can nevertheless aim at supplying 'an honest report of his premises, his objectives, his research protocol, the techniques used to collect data, his inferences, his generalization and the way his practical conclusions are drawn' (Leca, 1997: 11). In this sense, s/he is not in a position to remain neutral in the evaluation process and, as far as we are concerned here, in the utilization of findings.¹¹ The evaluator's role is to promote an authentic cooperation between independent actors acting strategically. Evaluators must endeavour to avoid manoeuvring and data manipulation, despite any illusions about some mythical and equal 'freedom of speech' (Duran, 1997: 265). In this respect, the evaluator adopts a *political stance*, in Carol Weiss's terms, and falls back on evaluation standards that favour the public general interest.

To sum up, before turning more precisely to the analysis of the ESF programme: first, as a member of the ESC, the evaluator takes an active part in the collective and hopefully consensual selection of the evaluation's objectives and scope. Ethics and accountability are constantly called upon as part of this process. Second, as long as s/he also actively contributes to fostering cooperation between political authorities with differing, and more often than not conflicting, legitimacies, with an implicit or explicit reference to the public general interest, the evaluator's stance cannot remain purely technical/scientific, but is also political/normative. Let us now turn to the diversity of stakeholders' expectations which the evaluator has to differentiate between, in order to be able to justify his/her choices.

Diverse Expectations: Cognitive, Strategic and Political

Actors' expectations which are not determined once and for all at the beginning of the evaluation process may nonetheless broadly fall into three different categories:¹²

- *expectations of a cognitive nature*: these include the need for information and knowledge regarding the way the programme is being implemented, its outputs, outcomes and impacts, etc.;
- *strategic expectations* of the actors: these are linked to preserving their respective powers, in the sense of the strategic analysis of organizations (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977);
- *political expectations* which are related to political activity proper, the elected representatives and local authorities' legitimization efforts or, for the European Commission, the political decision-makers; they occur either because of the direct presence of political authorities within the evaluation process, or through their influence upon the expectations expressed by their administrative departments.

Many actors interact in the ESF Objective 3 programme and analysing their respective expectations comprehensively is beyond the scope of this article. The focus here will mainly concern the European Commission and the French central administration department in charge of the programme.

The Commission's Departments

- The European Commission's departments' cognitive expectations are influenced by their role as 'principals' as opposed to 'agents', occupying a position of information privilege. These departments require indicators, summaries including facts and figures relating to programme beneficiaries, outputs, etc., but also some information relating to implementation – an activity from which they are formally excluded. For instance, with regard to the EU's enlargement and the reform of the structural funds, the Commission takes part in debates with 'summaries', which can easily be circulated, and then makes global judgements on the effectiveness and efficiency of the funds.
- The Commission's departments' strategic expectations come under the typical power relationship that exists between itself and the member state's central administration. Evaluation operates as a lever for them, based on regulations that cannot be questioned. The Commission may also establish links with elected representatives and/or the departments of local authorities, possibly leading to alliances able to challenge the power of national administrations.
- Major Commission decisions and particular deadlines clearly have political import – for instance, regular political events like summits. Their influence on political expectations shows itself in the modification of deadlines or in special requirements the evaluator may receive during important stages of

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negotiation between the member state and the Commission. The deployment of the 'taxpayers' money' slogan is also a clear sign of the relevance of European level political expectations: evaluation, and specifically efficiency indicators, are necessary for the Commissioners to demonstrate their accountability.

The complex nature and interplay of these expectations is illustrated by the way the ESC fared with the framing of recommendations following the ESF programme's interim report. Following debates, and against the Commission representative's advice, the ESC had adopted the principle according to which it fell to them and not to the evaluator to write recommendations to the MC. Following two changes in government in the course of the programme and its evaluation, a substantial part of funds were 'frozen' as political decisions were pending.¹³ In the list of recommendations to the MC, the Commission's representative wished to include specific points regarding the nature of schemes to fund, drawing on evaluation findings. However, this recommendation, taken on a seemingly 'technical' basis, was directly at odds with the political expectations of the French Minister for Employment's representative: to her such a decision fell within the scope of the French government's *political discretion* and was not a matter for an MC agenda.

Overall,¹⁴ the Commission's departments favour an evaluation model able to yield aggregate indicators.¹⁵ The absence of an information system, as well as of homogeneous and reliable monitoring studies for the measures financed in the SPD, played a key role in ensuring that, despite European Community regulations, a massive investment to build a comprehensive set of indicators was out of reach.¹⁶ The ESC unambiguously admitted, in the initial stage of the evaluation design, that an *exhaustive evaluation of the programme was impossible*. In order to best satisfy the Commission's expectations for the mid-term report, a critical estimate of the number of participants and an analysis of the few target groups' characteristics that emerged reliably from the monitoring system¹⁷ was nevertheless provided.

The Commission's representatives have hence been brought, during the evaluation process, to modify their expectations in accordance with the joint ESC's decisions. This led to a series of 'second best' thematic (and qualitative) evaluations studies being approved and launched.

The evaluator contributed to this evolution by addressing the Commission's needs whilst at the same time supporting the other actors' insistence that building a comprehensive system of indicators was presently out of reach.

The French Administration

- The French administration's cognitive expectations obviously differ from the Commission's. Basically, the administration would not commission evaluations systematically of its own free will. French employment policies are currently monitored and evaluated on an *ad hoc* basis under the supervision of DARES,¹⁸ a department in the Ministry of Employment. However, as shown by the mid-term evaluation, the respective fields of intervention of the ESF and of the main national programmes only partially overlap. This

explains why it was technically difficult to set up a specific ESF monitoring system; furthermore, this monitoring depended upon various systems where more than one ministry besides the Ministry for Employment were involved – even more so when programmes were implemented by local authorities. The central government department is unable to systematically require and obtain indicators of effectiveness and efficiency¹⁹ from beneficiaries. The department's expectations have thus only amounted to formative support to management or on-going evaluation.

- With regard to strategic expectations, the department's position is again quite different from that of the Commission. The Commission's insistence on obtaining quantitative information (notwithstanding its separate source of information available from financial and contractual controls) has to be seen from the perspective of its balance of power with the French administration. The methods, management and choices of the latter are likely to be questioned. The administration is challenged when it fails to implement a monitoring system in accordance with the Commission's standards. In its own defence, the administration stresses that setting up such a system comes solely within its own responsibility. On the other hand, strategically, it finds itself in a different position when it comes to information concerning actions within the competence of local authorities, which, in turn, feel that monitoring and evaluation activities are *their* responsibility, in parallel with their political and management competencies.
- Finally, the French administration also has different political expectations. The administration is in the position of being an interface between management/monitoring decisions and the political decisions of its minister. It is extremely difficult for it to maintain the boundaries between, on one hand, technical and objective evaluation findings (especially when these are negative) and, on the other, *the political rationality* of decisions taken by the minister.

This contradiction is all the more vigorous because relationships between the Commission's departments and the central administration are not symmetrical with the political process in their respective areas of legitimacy. From the central administration's point of view, the Commission's 'technical' requirements may easily be termed as unjustified interference in the national political process.²⁰ For the Commission's representatives, what is perceived as an obstacle to the satisfaction of their expectations can easily be considered as strategic resistance.

Globally, the French administration's expectations seem to be dominated by a quest for formative, on-going inputs – a constant flow of information to the management process.²¹ The evaluator is consequently at risk of being dragged into a management assistance and monitoring function, the boundaries being sometimes difficult to identify as the information for the implementation is also relevant for the evaluation itself. The national authorities' political expectations are more directly influential in the running of operations than those of the Commission. In this respect, the evaluator is likely to encounter more difficulties in maintaining a balance between political claims and the preservation of the 'area of autonomy' of evaluation referred to above.²²

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The other stakeholders' expectations, analysed along the same lines, show yet other configurations. We will limit ourselves here to the example of the Regional Councils (RC), the other main level of government involved in the programme (they operate one of the major measures, the apprenticeship programmes).²³ Whether RC's representatives in the ESC were politicians or managers, political expectations always prevailed whenever apprenticeship evaluation was on the agenda. RC's national representative institutions were also logically associated with decisions concerning the design and objects of this thematic assessment; consequently, the evaluation process underwent a lengthy period during which RC's political expectations prevailed over the technical design. Again and again, the regions' representatives voiced their political objection to what they considered a defective partnership for the initial programming stages. Moreover, the technical feasibility of the apprenticeship evaluation remained dependent upon its compatibility with other evaluations commissioned by the RC. Finally, one of the recommendations made by the ESC to the MC was regarded as directly political by RC representatives: it expressed the wish to see local and regional authorities and their representative institutions 'better associated to ESF's programming, management and monitoring'.

Enlightenment and Societal Learning in the Implementation of Employment Policies?

The task of sorting out the stakeholders' expectations in such a complex and open-ended programme is very difficult. All stakeholders are well aware that, in the end, discretionary political decisions will prevail (both at national and European Community levels) over specific evaluation findings, whatever they may be. This structural factor favours the development of a certain 'relativism' among the programme's actors concerning the potential uses of evaluation findings. Relativism is also fostered by a traditional favouring of programme controls over evaluation activity (Barbier and Simonin, 1997b). But relativism may nonetheless be countered through cooperative achievements, despite the inevitable limits of the evaluation process.²⁴

One way of satisfying several expectations at the same time is to focus evaluation investigations on *consensual objects*. The evaluator can contribute to this effort by aiming at compromises between the various stakeholders' cognitive expectations, which consequently play down the differences in their respective political and strategic stances. This is not a strategy likely to defuse all conflicts nor to establish harmony between structurally conflicting points of view. But this does lead to enhancing consensus building as one of the ethical foundations of evaluation in an inter-governmental context. Of course any ethical relevance of consensus building is directly dependent upon a participation of stakeholders ensuring the inclusion in the consensus of all legitimate partners/actors.

A form of consensus building has been emerging around the thematic evaluations undertaken in the ESF case. This consensus encompasses: a clarification of the relationship between national and European Community policies; clarification of a number of sensitive issues regarding implementation and

partnership;²⁵ the specific observation of a sample of measures generally considered as important and significant by the ESC and the MC; and an evaluation of the objective of equal opportunities for men and women.

In this respect, experience gained during the present evaluation has shown that the multi-governmental context contributes to the undertaking of investigations which, had the terms of reference been formulated by only one level of government, would probably never have been possible. The use of evaluation findings is therefore not simply reduced to satisfying requirements supposedly well-defined in the initial terms of reference. It includes, among other things, an understanding of how, as the evaluation process develops, stakeholders behave towards evaluation reports and how they influence the elaboration of evaluations.

For instance, in the initial stages of the ESC's meetings, issues related to implementation were considered outside the scope of analysis. But, as the project developed and despite initial reluctance expressed by some, a consensus was achieved in favour of including these issues in the research into causes of effectiveness.

Similarly, when various partners' accountability is at stake, their participation in the evaluation design and steering process facilitates an explication of each other's share in the global outcome. This was highlighted by a specific analysis of delays observed in the financial approvals and expenditure. This demonstrated that the problem occurred at various stages in the implementation process, although the operators were inclined, spontaneously, to locate responsibilities for such delays solely within the French administration or the Commission's departments. A relative balance of power within the ESC also seems, at least by now, to be a positive factor for the dissemination of findings which would have probably been more difficult had only one commissioner been in charge. The multiplicity of partners thus constitutes a positive factor for the existence of the evaluation's 'area of autonomy'.

Within a perspective of collective learning, evaluation studies can also contribute to a reflection on labour market policies, professional integration and training programmes *in general*. This contribution obviously goes beyond the strict scope of the direct stakeholders' requirements. In today's European context, the 'scope of existing solutions' available to solve problems relating to unemployment and job shortage is neither unified nor based on firm and unquestionable knowledge. Uncertainty and controversy prevail, notwithstanding the use of a common, cross-national vocabulary²⁶ which invariably proves inconsistent when analysing the reality of national policies (Barbier and Gautié, 1998). This issue appears all the more relevant as, since the Amsterdam and Luxembourg summits in 1997, the Commission is in charge of the establishment of a 'coordinated strategy for employment' (Barbier and Gautié, 1998).

The European context in which ESF evaluations are performed (with simultaneous evaluation procedures in all countries) offers a particularly favourable opportunity to reflect on these questions. An example of such opportunities allowed by evaluation in an ESF international context is the notion of the 'path to integration'. The Commission has been active recently in promoting this

notion,²⁷ which is also directly linked to the conception of a comprehensive approach to problems encountered by individuals on the labour market.

The comparative context (comparison between the action theories of the national and European policies or between the various national policies) clearly enhances the existing diversity behind seemingly homogeneous general cross-national categories, such as the 'path to integration'. This expression is used more and more frequently and is at the core of the debate on the effectiveness of labour market integration schemes. However, the notion is often used without properly addressing the multiplicity of possible points of view that are involved in a 'path to integration' and this constitutes an obstacle to clarity, particularly from a European perspective.

In the ESF case in France, focusing on specific measures that refer to the notion of individual integration pathways has also been a matter for consensus, because all authorities are confronted with the same questions as to what sort of public intervention is likely to solve unemployment and training problems in the current state of the labour market.

Evaluator influence is directly associated with their ability to use academic research in labour market matters to contrast with normative categories used by operators and managers. Together with consensus building between stakeholders, this may result in the production of new knowledge and its dissemination to larger areas of society.

Between direct stakeholders' cognitive expectations and broader cognitive inputs

In the programme studied, potential uses of evaluation are influenced by a differentiated response to the various partners' expectations which the evaluator is in a position to influence within limits. The evaluator seeks to conform to various quality criteria on which his or her intervention will be assessed, of which ethical considerations are an essential basis.

Being unable to satisfy all expectations, the evaluator is fundamentally guided by the most consensual choices adopted by the ESC. In a long-term evaluation, the result of these choices varies according to the project's development and gradually becomes irreversible. Due to the complexity of the present ESF programme, this leads the evaluator to favour a compromise between partners' information and knowledge requirements, notwithstanding their political or strategic conflicts.

As the context of such an evaluation is immediately comparative, the opportunity arises to compare the various national policies, detailing their underlying theories and categories. However, due to the embeddedness of co-financed policies in their respective societal settings, this does not produce a universal framework where the success, or failure, of these policies could be examined. A more modest approach may be preferable, aimed at clarifying diverse policy actions within their respective contexts. Obviously, this task exceeds the present evaluation study, but we would contend that it conforms with expectations of a more general nature emerging in the wake of the recent debate on 'national employment systems' in the context of decisions on the coordination of national employment policies taken in Amsterdam and Luxembourg in 1997.

Notes

1. A preliminary version of this article was presented during the 'European Conference on Evaluation Practices in the Field of Structural Policies' (Seville, 16–17 March 1998). At the Centre d'études de l'emploi (CEE), the evaluation team has been headed by J.C. Barbier (with B. Simonin until June 1997).
2. Making efforts towards clarity and reflexivity as well as detailing the methods and their limits is part of the needs that will ensure the quality of an evaluation (CSE, 1996: 47).
3. Respectively 'usefulness-relevance; reliability; ability to generalize; transparency; objectivity' (CSE, 1996: 46–7).
4. As highlighted by J. Leca (1997), an answer has to be given to the question 'whose interest does it serve? the participants', the general interest's, an organization's, a department's, a managing authority's?'
5. This mode of evaluation should be linked to the model offered by 'societal learning' (Toulemonde and Rieper, 1997).
6. C. H. Weiss (1998: 322) notes that the evaluator 'may often choose to go beyond their concerns [i.e. the stakeholders'] to address issues of more general salience'.
7. Subject to this ethic, 'political talents to elicit participation of all parties, manage conflict and encourage resolution of differences' (Weiss, 1998: 104) are required.
8. The French CSE highlights the fact that the evaluation is at the same time cognitive, normative and instrumental. It may be assumed that the value judgement (normative) expressed by public opinion or underlying the politicians' decision process pertains to political activities. The cognitive and instrumental dimensions would belong to the 'technical' aspect. This classification, which has been simplified here, should be seriously put into perspective (Leca, 1997: 14).
9. Minogue (1983) highlights the absurd nature of a 'managerial' position and insists on the fact that 'above all stands the political limit, which might be described thus: (i) nothing gets done which is unacceptable to dominant and influential political groups . . . ; (ii) activities which "get done" externally may generate a hostile and uncooperative response'.
10. Political accountability is also involved in the quality of technical actions and management.
11. His/her professional ethic is based on 'positions which are never neutral', which call for 'identifying problems and processes, comparing approaches and concretely examining, if necessary case by case, the link between issues, hypotheses, data, conclusions, recommendations' (Leca, 1997: 12).
12. Differentiating the various types of expectations, from an analytical point of view, does not exclude the fact that they overlap in reality. Methodologically, the identification of expectations results from an analysis of the positions taken within the ESC and bilateral interviews.
13. This concerns funds the Juppé Government had allocated and which the following Jospin government used differently.
14. This is to be understood as a 'global' judgment and does not exclude the existence of different opinions amongst the various departments.
15. This is the model underlying the 'Orientations' document given to evaluators as a guideline (logical construction of objectives and indicators) (European Commission, 1995). It extends a 'programme evaluation' conception to the aggregate perspective of the Structural Funds.
16. Reserves had been written in the terms of reference, particularly regarding the Orientations reference framework, which was the expression of one of the partners'

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expectations. This is the reason why this framework was tested for the interim report (Barbier and Simonin, 1996).

17. In this case, only gender and age of the participants, without mention of their situation regarding the following categories: 'excluded from the labour market' or 'exposed to long-term unemployment'.
18. This department is also a member of the ESC.
19. Apart from the fact that procedures measuring efficiency are not fully part of the French evaluation culture, which places an emphasis on other elements (effectiveness, process evaluation, etc.).
20. In a wider perspective, this observation refers to the different nature of relationships between both partners' administrative departments and political authorities. The Commission's political authorities are not directly subject to voters' control. The Commission's political decisions come under a more 'consociational' process.
21. This situation is probably reinforced in this particular case by the fact that the Department's human resources dedicated to management are relatively scarce considering the Commission's implicit standards. It is no coincidence that, amongst the recommendations issued by the ESC, appears the following: 'pursuing the search for possibilities to increase the operationality of technical assistance, knowing that these are sufficiently endowed with provisional funds'.
22. To a certain extent this imbalance points to an under-estimation of implementation activities within the European programmes action theory (Barbier and Simonin, 1997b). There is hardly any 'implementation' equivalent to what is in place for national programmes, which somehow exacerbates ESF's 'strangeness'.
23. These local authorities hold, since the devolution laws, legal competence for apprenticeship programmes.
24. Some of which become rapidly irreversible. Instances of this are, among others, the impact of initial decisions as to ESC membership: what about the absence of final participants, or their representatives, during the evaluation process? How to objectively evaluate the influence of the Committee's members' personal implication and leanings and that of the institutions to which they belong?
25. Such a choice, at least in the present context, seems to contrast strongly with the limitations imposed on evaluation by a 'programme evaluation' model (Schmid, 1997: 410ff.) but we will not delve into this question. In the case of ESF Objective 3 in France, the interim evaluation precisely stated a strong hypothesis (Barbier and Simonin, 1997a): the ESF Objective 3 programme is not identified as a programme by its implementers, but rather as a collection of measures, each with its own logic, granted European co-financing without any consequent influence on the policies' *prior objectives*.
26. For instance, this is the case for translation of various expressions for the recent European summits on employment (e.g. the notion of flexibility or employability). We could indeed show numerous examples of such categories: labour market policies and employment policies, partnership, integration and exclusion, labour market active policies, etc.
27. See the seminar held on the subject (Bruges, October 1997) (Barbier and Geslot, 1997).

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