EUROPEAN EVALUATION HELPDESK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

European Commission

REPORT

METHODS FOR ASSESSING IMPACTS OF RDPS 2007-2013: PRACTICES AND SOLUTIONS FOR THE EX POST EVALUATION

GOOD PRACTICE WORKSHOP, PALERMO 4 - 5 JULY 2016

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The Evaluation Helpdesk is responsible for the evaluation function within the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) by providing guidance on the evaluation of RDPs and policies falling under the remit and guidance of DG AGRI's Unit E.4 'Evaluation and studies' of the European Commission (EC). In order to improve the evaluation of EU rural development policy the Evaluation Helpdesk supports all evaluation stakeholders, in particular DG AGRI, national authorities, RDP managing authorities and evaluators, through the development and dissemination of appropriate methodologies and tools; the collection and exchange of good practices; capacity building, and communicating with network members on evaluation related topics.

Additional information about the activities of European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development is available on the Internet through the Europa server (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu).

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SUMMARY

The Good Practice Workshop "Methods for assessing impacts of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013: Practices and solutions for the ex post evaluation" which took place on 4 - 5 July 2016 in Palermo (Italy), aimed at providing a forum for the discussion and exchange of evaluation practices used in the context of ex post evaluations of RDPs 2007-2013. The workshop was hosted by Regione Sicilia and co-organized with the Italian National Rural Network. It was well attended by more than 60 participants

The workshop provided an opportunity for evaluators, Managing Authorities, EC representatives and the authors of the guidelines for the ex post evaluation to:

- discuss the methodological approaches chosen to assess results & impacts of RDPs 2007-13;
- exchange on the usefulness of the data used and the solutions found to overcome data-gaps;
- explore the robustness of the answers to the evaluation questions, and the conclusions and recommendations developed;
- identify quality criteria for sound evaluation reports.

For this purpose, case studies from Latvia, Sweden, Portugal, Slovenia, Estonia, Austria, Cyprus and Italy were presented.

The participants highlighted that good data availability and efficient data management are crucial for a robust and cost effective evaluation, whose usefulness would increase if based on a common understanding of its purposes and scope among stakeholders. The involvement of the latter appears relevant also for a successful dissemination of evaluation findings.

Finally, it was concluded that a single method which is applicable in all contexts does not exist. Tailor made methods (paying attention to their strengths and weaknesses) should be chosen according to the RDP needs and available data. The convenience of mixed (qualitative/quantitative) approach should nt be underestimated. To this purpose, the methodological support provided by the Guidelines for the Ex Post Evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs was recognised by participants.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Good Practice Workshop "Methods for assessing impacts of Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013: Practices and solutions for the ex post evaluation" was opened by Hannes Wimmer (Team Leader of the Evaluation Helpdesk) and Francesca Varia (researcher at CREA) welcoming the participants.

In the **welcoming note**, it was highlighted that:

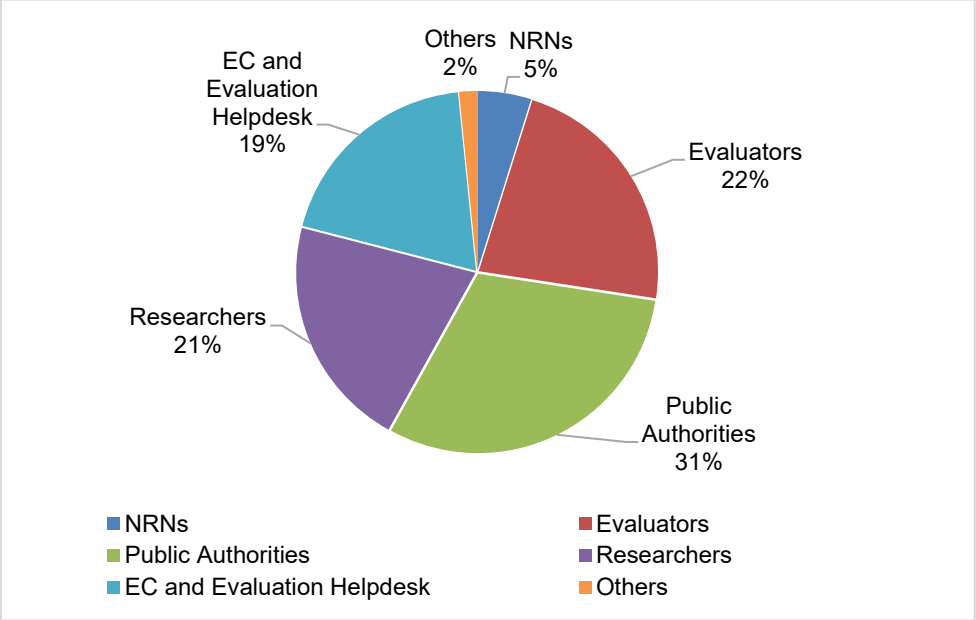
- the Methodological Assessment of Mid-Term Evaluation Reports of 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes has shown that evaluators were facing difficulties in assessing results and impacts of RDPs;
- the Guidelines for the Ex Post Evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs published by the Evaluation Helpdesk (June, 2014) suggested various approaches on how to conduct the impact assessment;
- the workshop was designed to learn from practical experiences from ex post evaluators.

Workshop organisation and hosting was under the lead of the Evaluation Helpdesk in collaboration with the local organisers and hosts, the Sicilian Region, and the Italian National Rural Network 2014/2020.

On behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, and Mediterranean Fisheries of the Sicilian Region, Mr. Antonello Cracolici shared his gratitude with the organisers and the participants, and introduced the main aspects and goals of the Sicilian RDP 2014-2020. The head of the Managing Authority of the Sicilian RDP 2014-2020, Mr. Gaetano Cimò concluded the introductory part of the workshop by thanking the participants, the organisers, and all of the people who contributed to facilitating the event.

Workshop participants and their expectations were briefly presented by Vincenzo Angrisani (Good Practices Manager of the Helpdesk). He informed that 62 participants from 21 different EU Member States were present in the workshop, covering different roles as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of participants by role



Hannes Wimmer presented the Objectives, agenda, and introduction to the Evaluation Helpdesk team and governance structure, and introduced the moderators of the workshop: Herta Tödtling-Schönhofer (Project Director of the Evaluation Helpdesk) and Sari Rannanpää (Capacity Building Manager of the Helpdesk).

2. SETTING THE FRAME

2.1 Ex post evaluation of RDPs 2007-2013: Expectations and use

Fernando Fonseca (European Commission, DG AGRI Unit E4) presented the "*Ex-post evaluation of RDPs 2007-2013: Expectations and use"*. Mr. Fonseca informed that the European Commission is currently monitoring the state of play of the ex post evaluation of RDPs 2007-2013 among Member States. He also explained and compared the main criteria and purpose of the ex post evaluation from two legislative points of view: the previous Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 and the current Common Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES) 2014-2020.

During his presentation, Mr Fonseca introduced numerous lessons learned from the mid term evaluation of RDPs 2007-2013 concerning the **importance of data, budget allocated to evaluation, skills of the evaluator, and relevance of robust evaluation findings for the policymaking process**, showing how the European Commission has taken into account the challenges and limits of the mid term evaluation, and explaining the future expectations with regard to the ex post evaluation. He emphasised that the European Commission pays high attention to the quality of the ex post evaluation reports with a view to improve the usefulness of the evaluation findings for all stakeholders (e.g. European Commission, Managing Authorities, and the wider public).

Finally, the **"Evaluate First"** principle and the "**Better Regulation Agenda**" adopted by the European Commission to improve its own policy making methods, and increase the transparency and accountability of EU policy towards the citizens and enterprises were introduced. As part of this regulatory framework to achieve better policy results and transparency, Mr. Fonseca explained that the "Evaluate First" principle represents a stronger commitment of the European Commission to elaborate policies and regulations after an extensive planning and analysis, like the conduction of regulatory mapping and impact assessment.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications/questions.

Relevance of Better Regulation Agenda for RDP evaluation

As regard the introduction of the Better Regulation Agenda in the Rural Development Policy, Mr. Fonseca shared his reflections about support and challenges deriving from its implementation. This new agenda is a learning process for all the European Commission. A Regulatory Scrutiny Board (an independent group of Commission officials and experts from outside the Commission) has been established to ensure higher quality of EU policy making process and results. Finally, although this agenda has been recently introduced in the EU policy framework, its requirements and criteria (i.e. efficiency, effectiveness, independency, proportionality, evidence-based judgment, added value) take advantage from previous experiences, yet they are more oriented to increase the quality and usefulness of the evaluation findings of 2014-2020 RDPs.

>>>Link to the PPT

2.2 Methodological challenges in ex post evaluation

Jela Tvrdonova (Evaluation Manager of the Helpdesk) led an interactive presentation jointly with Simona Cristiano (Researcher at CREA) about the "Methodological challenges in the ex post evaluation".

The presentation aimed at examining the main challenges encountered during the process of the 2007-2013 RDP ex post evaluation[1]. For each challenge, the solutions and the reflections from the participants were discussed, and summarized here below.

Distinction between programme results and programme impacts

The terminological difference between results and impacts is subtle, yet with several operational implications on the common evaluation process and findings use among the EU Member States. To reduce the risk of confusions in the terminology used in the terms of reference, or in the common understanding of the RDP intervention logic, Simona Cristiano suggested to rely merely on the DG AGRI's terminology, as it is reported in the Guidelines for the *ex post* evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs. Moreover, she suggested to the Managing Authorities and evaluators to build a strong and common understanding among stakeholders about the RDP intervention logic, starting by the on-going evaluation process.

Identification of programme effects

Assessing the programme effects is deemed to be a challenging task. The challenge emerges from identifying and calculating both the intended and unintended changes generated solely by the policy intervention, and excluding other external or contextual factors. In order to cope with this challenge, Simona Cristiano proposed to undertake a context analysis in parallel to the programme evaluation, in order to understand the dynamics of intervening factors during the RDP implementation. Moreover, she proposed to conduct a deep analysis of the theory of change and the delivery system underlying the programme, to search also the internal factors affecting the programme effects. In general, this practically implies to mix both quantitative analyses with qualitative studies along the RDP ex post evaluation.

Indirect vs. direct programme effects

Distinguishing the programme effects between direct or indirect is another common challenge encountered during the RDP evaluation. The main challenge consists in identifying and calculating the indirect effects that go beyond the direct beneficiaries of the public intervention, which can lead to a possible contamination of control groups and, eventually, to a biased estimation of programme effects. Besides the suggestion of a context analysis, Simona Cristiano recommended to the evaluators to involve more the Managing Authority during all the evaluation process in order to clearly identify the expected direct and indirect programme effects. Moreover, she suggested to the evaluators to explain and acknowledge the limits/bias of the methods/techniques used for the evaluation before developing recommendations and final conclusions. In addition, participants proposed to face this challenge through computational solutions: for example, with respect to *programme impacts* as the sum of *indirect* and *direct* **programme effects**, it was considered possible to identify and measure programme net effects by netting out *indirect effects* by *programme impacts*. Moreover, it was remembered to identify and measure direct programme effects in relation to the specific beneficiary, while programme impacts in relation to the territory or area of intervention. However, with this conceptualization of impacts (macro-level) and effects (micro-level), evaluators should carefully consider the consequence of the proportion on the final evaluation findings. Practice has shown that, when the territory is vast and the number of beneficiaries is low, assessment of impact can lead to negative or poor results just because of the low proportion between the number of beneficiaries and the territory. Vice versa, when the territory is narrow but the number of beneficiaries is really high, assessment of impact can show very high values. Therefore, evaluators should carefully consider what they define as impact or effect, and ponder the consequences of these definitions.

[1] For an exhaustive reference on the challenges in the ex post evaluation please refer to ***Capturing the the success of your RDP: Guidelines for ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs***

Programme externalities

The programme externalities (programme effects that may occur on the beneficiaries or non-beneficiaries in different RDP domains (social, environmental, economic), can be either positive or negative. Identifying and measuring them is a challenge that could be tackled in different ways. Firstly, Simona Cristiano suggested to identify the programme causes of externalities (e.g. selection criteria, synergies with other policies) during the planning and implementation of the RDP. For the identification of externalities, some participants proposed to use qualitative research methods to discover inductively their cause and nature. Subsequently, qualitative inquiries can be complemented by quantitative methods and analysis in order to capture and assess their existence and extent. Secondarily, planning the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as well as its on-going updating throughout the RDP implementation, was proposed as tool for incorporating social and environmental externalities in the RDP ex post evaluation.

Identification of factors distorting the estimation of programme effects

Confounding factors are (non-programme related) elements that can distort the expected relationship between the intervention and its outcomes. For the ex post evaluation, confounding factors challenge the evaluators when choosing the methodologies able to properly isolate the effects of the intervention, as well as when searching data sources to compare the programme intervention with no intervention. The importance of reliable primary data sources (good data management), and the use of mix methods for collecting and analysing data, were proposed to reduce the risk of distortion of the ex post evaluation findings. Later, the discussion turned to how to distinguish internal (e.g. beneficiaries' characteristics) from external (e.g. market price) confounding factors, and which of them really affect the programme results. By building a sound and accurate control group, and exposing the control and target group to the same external confounding factors, a participant argued that it is less biased and more precise to assume that the only differences between the two groups are due to the programme effects, while the distortion of confounding factors is minimized.

>>>Link to the PPT

After this round the moderator introduced the case study presentations session for the first day.

3. SHARING EXPERIENCES: FIRST DAY

3.1 Counterfactual evaluation of the farm modernization measure of the Latvian RDP with PSM-DID method

Juris Hazners, evaluator from the AREI Institute for Agrarian, Rural and Economics (Latvia), presented the approach used in the ex post evaluation of the Latvian RDP. The approach aims at assessing quantitatively the impact of the farm modernization measures by using a counterfactual evaluation of the programme's economic variables with help of the PSM-DiD method. Among several software available for this kind of analysis, the method relied on STATA MP-13. The evaluation procedure, findings, and lessons obtained from the ex post evaluation were then described, and finally discussed interactively with the participants.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Usefulness of counterfactual method

Counterfactual method allows for statistically sound estimations of the economic variables in Axes 1 and 3, but allows also to analyse environmental variables of Axis 2 of RDP. Moreover, counterfactual method is considered to be a proper tool for the evaluation of programme indirect effects, both at the measure and programme level. In any case, this method requires good availability, quality, and quantity of relevant data.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Limits of qualitative methods in estimating the Gross Value Added. Qualitative methods applied for measuring the Gross Value Added are time consuming and demanding (evaluators need to provide more explanation to the participants). Moreover, the nature of the indicator is strictly quantitative.

Limits of qualitative methods in validating evaluation findings. Generalized linear models are deemed more appropriate for validating the results of economic assessments than qualitative methods.

>>>Link to the PPT

3.2 Productivity effects of CAP investment support measure 121: Evidence from Sweden using Coarsened Exact Matching

Pia Nilsson, evaluator from Jonköping University (Sweden), gave a presentation about the Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) method to assess the productivity effects of CAP Investment Support Measure 121 in the context of Ex-post evaluation of the Swedish RDP 2007-2013. The Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) method was chosen to overcome the limits of the Propensity Score Matching (ad-hoc and inefficient), and consists of matching the control and treatment groups before the analysis to reduce the degree of model dependency. Ms Nilsson presented the data and the independent variables used to run the econometric model, as well as the hypothesis formulated for the ex post evaluation. Making a good literature review was considered to be a critical step for the formulation of the hypothesis. For example, the literature argues that farm competitiveness is the result of both positive and negative effects, but these two elements cannot be distinguished in advance. Therefore, in this balance between positive and negative effects, the evaluation hypothesis assumed that the Investment Support Measure 121 can give a net positive effect on the farm competitiveness.

Key lessons learned from the case study:

Methodological weaknesses of CEM

It is difficult to disentangle the effects of one specific investment measure since firms can receive many other governmental supports or can apply to more investment measures for several times during the same program period. Moreover, assuming a binary treatment of the measure effects is considered to be incomplete or limited for revealing the information about the cause-effect linkages.

Use of the method for better targeting

Evaluation results indicate a significant fall in firm productivity correlated to a higher degree of subsidies as main source of income for farmer. Investment measures can improve efficiency in productivity if targeted at small firms.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Balancing the number of variables and the quality of results

Increasing the number of economic variables in the CEM was considered to improve the robustness and overall quality of the ex post evaluation findings. However, Pia Nilsson argued that the number of variables used for analysing the control group was considered sufficient. In general, she argued that there should be always some strong assumptions behind the addition of new variables when designing and running the model, otherwise more variables can be counterproductive for the quality of the final results.

Evaluation conclusions and recommendation should take into account the time frame

The findings of this ex post evaluation showed that farmers receiving large subsidies can achieve smaller effects in terms of productivity. However, this conclusion can be also explained by the fact that productivity might increase in the long time period. Therefore, evaluators should consider carefully the time frame before translating the findings into conclusions and recommendations.

Using FADN for assessing RDP effects

The data used for running the CEM method require high economic and organizational resources for managing the data. In this case-study, the firm-level data were obtained from the Swedish National statistics. The question raised during the discussion was about the use of FADN for running this kind of methods to assess the RDP effects. Pia Nilsson explained that it can be possible to run the model with the FADN, but it is difficult to assert that FADN provides enough data to construct and cover a precise and robust control group. For example, in the Swedish context, Ms Nilsson argued that the FADN data might not well represent the statistics of the Swedish farmers.

>>>Link to the PPT

3.3 Case study from the evaluation of RDP Azores (PT): Multi-method approach

Magda Porta, evaluator (Portugal) and a core team member of the Helpdesk, presented a case study of multi-method approach in the ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDP in Azores (Portugal). The approach employs different participatory tools: focus-groups, interviews, questionnaires issued to beneficiaries, case-studies, analysis of information, and desk research with several stakeholders. The mix of methods in this approach is advantageous because it identifies several elements of the programme, such as the trends and tendencies evolving along the period; the dimensions that are worthy of being explored (e.g. unexpected results), the factors explaining the results (detailed and in depth analysis), and the enhancement of stakeholder involvement along the evaluation process.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Qualitative methods increase the understanding among stakeholders about RDP effects and impacts

The strengths of the qualitative methods lay in the ability to engage stakeholders in describing how they have experienced and perceived the RDP implementation, and how they have interpreted the respective results. Moreover, qualitative methods are effective for identifying the intangible factors underlying the RDP effects and impacts, which cannot be grasped through quantitative analysis. Finally, qualitative methods are recommendable for interpreting and understanding the results obtained by quantitative analysis, as well as to describe and explain relationships among different interplaying factors affecting the impacts of the RDP.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications

Qualitative methods can hardly capture RDP impacts at macro-level

Magda Porta explained that this multi-method qualitative approach was applied at programme level. However, experience showed that qualitative methods can hardly capture the impacts at macro-level, but are more recommendable for assessing and exploring the effects and dynamics of the RDP occurring at beneficiary level.

Qualitative data/methods can complement quantitative analysis

Quantitative data sources are not always updated or sufficiently representative for undertaking the programme ex post evaluation at macro-level. However, further quantitative data can be collected via

qualitative surveys. In the case of Azores (Portugal), Mrs Porta explained that qualitative methods were used to collect data and analyse the programme effects measured through quantitative analysis. Matching and comparing the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (counterfactual analysis) rests the main challenge to complement qualitative with quantitative analysis.

>>>Link to PPT

3.4 Use of a GIS-based method for the assessment of contributions of the RDP to biodiversity, with a focus on measure 214

Mojca Hrabar, evaluator from Oikos (Slovenia), presented the ex post evaluation of the RDP - Axis 2, Measure 214, based on the use of the GIS. She explained that the purpose of this ex post evaluation was to answer four evaluation questions (2 programme specific and 2 common EU evaluation questions): two of which were addressed in the presentation. The evaluation approach used a combination of theory-based, qualitative and quantitative techniques and data (e.g. GIS and LPIS), and has been based on the assumption that (some of) the 214 sub-measures support directly biodiversity, while others do it indirectly. The evaluation process foresaw several steps, starting from the literature review to search for available data on nature conservation and agriculture in Slovenia and on the implementation of Measures 214. Then, GIS data was used to assess whether biodiversity was more stable or higher in areas targeted by the selected sub-measures compared to similar areas without receiving the treatment. Moreover, two case-studies were conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the programme. Finally, a focus group and a stakeholder survey was used to understand the factors leading to certain actions and results occurred during the programme.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Data management plays a key role in GIS-based evaluation methods

GIS-based methods present several potentials and strengths, such as suitability with counterfactual analysis, applicability in both Pillar I and Pillar II evaluation, ability to monitor and evaluate changes in nature conservation areas, etc. However, these potentialities can be exploited only if good and easily compatible databases are established, and the accuracy of monitoring methods and data collection increases. GIS-based methods can be used any time and in any context, provided that good data bases are built, and GIS software is available and transferable.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Access to data is the main challenge for assessing contributions of RDP to biodiversity

Personal data on the biodiversity of High Nature Value at level of farms and forestry are not always available for evaluators. In this case study from the Slovenian RDP, Mojca Hrabar explained that data from the Land-Parcel Identification System (LPIS) was made accessible by the Paying Agency to the RDP evaluator. The access only to data at beneficiary level did not allow the evaluators to assess the contributions of RDP to the biodiversity of the whole country.

>>>Link to the PPT

3.5 Estonian Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation

Veeli Oeselg, evaluator from Civitta (Estonia), presented a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach for the Estonian RDP 2007-2013 ex post evaluation. The ex post evaluation contract is still ongoing and focuses primarily on the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of each specific axes implemented, and the merits of the RDP as a whole. The strengths of this approach derive from the combination of different

data sources, availability of detailed secondary data from the ongoing evaluations, and the usage of quasi-quantitative methods which reduce the subjectivity of the evaluators. Examples of quantitative methods used are the before-after estimators, Difference in Difference (DiD), Input-output analysis, and web-based surveys. Examples of the qualitative methods used are literature reviews, focus groups, and case-studies.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Good ex post evaluation need to be planned at the outset of the programming period

Detailed planning at the beginning of the programming period allows evaluators to understand better which data can be collected, especially when primary data collection is not foreseen for all RDP measures. Planning implies also defining which analytical activities need to be carried out, as well as to determine the focuses of the ex post evaluation. Moreover, experience suggests that the involvement of the ongoing evaluator is crucial during the planning and conduction of the ex post evaluation.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Methodological recommendations

Participants recommended the use of Before and After estimations in ex post evaluation of RDP, and triangulation with other qualitative data was suggested to minimise the weaknesses of the method. The use of Difference in Difference (DiD) method has also been recommended for the ex post evaluation only under the strong assumption that the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are the same, which implies for evaluators to build a robust control group.

>>>Link to the PPT

3.6 Reflection round on the case studies

In the reflection round of the workshop, the moderators invited the participants to take part in a group exercise to exchange lessons and actions about the ex post evaluation practices discussed during the workshop. After the group exercise, Sari Rannanpää (moderator) synthesised the main results around four main topics for improving the RDP ex post evaluation[2].

[2] The extensive list of lessons and actions raised during the reflection round are displayed in Table 1 attached to Annexes.

1. ***Data management needs to be accurately planned,*** firstly by setting the theoretical framework of the evaluation, which will consequentially help the stakeholders to map the data (identifying data sources, availability, and quality), and when necessary, to overcome data gaps. Moreover, data management should ensure more access to open data (applying existing rules about open data, negotiating institutional agreement with stakeholders, harmonizing time), as well as comparability among EU Member States.
2. ***Combine and use different methodological tools,*** by exploring the potentials of new types of data and methods (e.g. LPIS, GIS), and mixing appropriately qualitative methods to dig into the rural development system and formulate evaluation hypothesis, and quantitative methods to test these hypotheses. New methodologies are required to assess environment-related measures (biodiversity, climate change, etc.), and standard methodologies (e.g. counterfactual analysis) need to be better tailored to the specific implementation context.
3. ***Increase usefulness of evaluation findings,*** by improving the governance and coordination among stakeholders, by increasing the transparency and communication between the European Commission and the RDP authorities for strengthening the quality of reports; by linking better the elements of mid-term with ex post evaluation; by synthetizing and comparing the findings among different RDPs; and by involving more purposefully the stakeholders in the evaluation process.
4. ***Raise the ambition of the ex post evaluation***, by focusing critically not only on the programme indicators and effects, but also on its delivery system and mechanisms, and on the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation system itself. Managing Authorities should be motivated and demanding for high quality and timely evaluation findings, which allow to improve the RDP and the organizations carrying out its implementation.

4. SHARING EXPERIENCES: SECOND DAY

Herta Tödtling-Schönhofer introduced the second day of the workshop by welcoming the participants and summarising the results and main lessons from the first day. She then passed the floor to the speakers of the second day who continued to present further experiences about the ex post evaluation of RDP 2007-2013.

4.1 Impacts of the Austrian Programme of Rural Development

Franz Sinabell, evaluator from the WIFO Austrian Institute of Economic Research (Austria), presented the ex post evaluation of the Austrian Rural Development Programme. The context of the Austrian RDP and the main evaluation topics and questions were firstly introduced. Later, he explained the multi-method approach used (input-output modelling and the econometric analysis) to measure the interventions related to Axis 3. To measure the quality of life in rural areas, the presenter explained that, ideally, farmers should be surveyed before and after the implementation of the programme, and then compared to measure the effects of the policy. In this ex post evaluation, a different approach was used, and theory-driven indicators were collected and used to assess the quality of life (source: OECD). The indicator values were analysed through an econometric-fixed effect model, and data was collected at the municipality level. Finally, the sensitivity of the econometric model was tested with the comparison of two scenarios, i.e. the addition of private leverage and the alternative use of public funds in Austria.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Computable models are advantageous, but also limited

Multi-method approach based on computable modes allow to evaluate a broad range of measures/indicators, and they are well suitable for ex ante, mid-term, and ex post evaluation. For example, econometric models allow the stakeholders to reach more in-depth findings (e.g. correlations between the measures and the RDP impacts), even if they present also several limitations: many non-market and important variables (social, environmental, cultural, etc.) are difficult to be measured quantitatively. Additional monitoring data, at micro-level of firms and social actors, should be used, and this ultimately higher the costs and organizational burden of the evaluation.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Technical aspects of computable models

Participants remarked that, when running computable models, evaluators can attribute different weights on the indicators for measuring the quality of life (e.g. gender gap, demographic changes, income inequalities, etc.) in order to prioritize or highlight some specific dimensions of the RDP impacts. Moreover, computable models require intense use of resources (data, financial, organizational, human, time). However, they are advantageous because applicable to different axes of the RDP.

>>>Link to the PPT

4.2 Ex post evaluation Cyprus RDP 2007-2013: Application of Input-Output analysis

Demetris Psaltopoulos, professor of economics from the University of Patras (Cyprus) and a core team member of the Helpdesk, presented an application of Input-Output Analysis in ex post evaluation of the RDP 2007-2013 in Cyprus. Demetris Psaltopoulos explained that the essence of this macro-economic approach is to estimate and aggregate together the economic effects of the RDP. He explained that this approach was concentrated primarily on the input-output method, and other more sophisticated models (e.g. general equilibrium model) were discarded because of the lack of time, resources, and robust monitoring systems. Regarding the methodological cycle, he recommended to choose first the methods appropriate to answer the evaluation questions, and subsequently, to collect the data necessary to run them.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Considerations for the choice of method

When choosing the methods to undertake the ex post evaluation, Prof. Psaltopoulos recommended to be both pragmatic and utilization-focused. Rather than opting for complex and sophisticated solutions, simple methods can be operational and, the same time, provide relevant results. Experience from this ex post evaluation says that the option to expand input-output models to a more sophisticated Computable General Equilibrium model should be considered in relation to the added value, feasibility, and costs. Moreover, when choosing the methods, decisions should also acknowledge the weaknesses and limitations, since no perfect method really exists. Finally, the presenter suggested to ground the overall evaluation process, including the decision about the methods, on a valid and strong theory.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Appropriateness of Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model for the RDP ex post evaluation

CGE model is a method considered more appropriate and suitable to evaluate policies that affect the economy of a whole territory, as for example in the case of the joint-assessment of European Investment

and Structural (ESI) Funds interventions. However, Demetris Psaltopoulos argued that CGE models can be applied for the RDP ex post evaluation, and merely within the economic boundaries of rural areas or in small regions/countries such as the case of Cyprus. Furthermore, he explained that the CGE model, when applied to estimate the Gross Value Added at NUT I, II and III level, it can be appropriate to answer the Common Evaluation Questions of the RDP ex post evaluation.

>>>Link to the PPT

4.3 Capturing impacts of measures to improve quality of life in rural areas

Cynthia De Sanctis and Paola Torcia, evaluators from Agriconsulting (Italy), presented the qualitative evaluation methods applied in 8 Italian Regions for capturing the RDP impacts on the quality of life in rural areas. The participatory approach used was focused on answering the Common Evaluation Question No 9, and was based on 25 Indicators reflecting the quality of life. The indicators were expressed and defined by the rural actors through a participatory consultation conducted in two moments: at the beginning (T0) and at the end of the programme (T1) in small target areas. Moreover, Cynthia De Sanctis explained that, for this kind of approach, the communities involved were based on well-recognizable cultural identity and not only on the administrative boundaries. Focus Groups were conducted to assess the stakeholder's satisfaction through a scale from 1 to 5. Paola Torcia, later, explained that the added value of the method was the discussion among the participants, the building of common understandings, as well as the exchange of views, opinions, and judgments among local stakeholders.

Key lesson learned from the case study:

Evaluation is a continuous process of sharing

The presenters argued that during the evaluation process, evaluators should be open to share the methods and the aims with all the relevant stakeholders in order to ensure their full engagement, as well as to improve their awareness about the RDP. Moreover, they recommended that sharing the data obtained from the monitoring before starting the interactive and participatory process helps to higher the quality of the evaluation practice and results.

After the presentation, participants raised the following comments/clarifications.

Integration of qualitative with quantitative data

In this example of qualitative approach, the importance of quantitative data emerged for improving the overall quality of the participation and discussion. Statistical information is not only necessary during the interactive process to ground the discussion on figures and facts, but also to back up and validate the findings obtained from the qualitative methods. In general, qualitative and quantitative data should inform each other. For example, the quantitative results obtained from the evaluation were discussed with local stakeholders in the focus groups in order to deepen the understanding and quality of the conclusions based on the evaluation findings.

Stakeholder involvement in the evaluation process

Some participants argued that involving stakeholder is not always easy and feasible. However, Cynthia De Sanctis explained that the purpose of evaluating RDP measures, and reporting the findings to the Managing Authorities, were stimulating people to take part of the evaluation process. Moreover, she argued that for the evaluation of LEADER-supported measures, the participatory evaluation approach was enlarged to other members of the community (students, entrepreneurs, etc.), and not only to the LAG staff and network.

>>>Link to PPT

5. DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

5.1 Reflection round on the case studies

After the presentation of the case studies, Herta Tödtling-Schönhofer invited the participants to split themselves in groups, and brainstorm about steps and actions to undertake and/or to avoid, when performing an ex post evaluation. Subsequently Sari Rannanpää collected in plenary those DOs & DON'Ts related to the ex post evaluation of RDP[3]*.* Here below are reported the main outcomes:

For the **European Commission (EC)**, participants suggested to formulate some criteria to quality check the methods chosen by the Managing Authorities. The criteria for the quality check should be followed during the evaluation process rather than at the end, or after having conducted the ex post evaluation.

For the **Managing Authorities (MA)**, participants proposed to understand better the strengths and weakness of the evaluation methods proposed by the evaluators, not to underestimate the usefulness of qualitative methods, to be flexible towards the evaluation needs, and to define the main evaluation purposes and to select the evaluators at the outset of the programming period. Finally, Managing Authorities were encouraged to ensure more resources for the evaluators and build stronger relationships with researchers.

For the **Evaluators (E)**, participants advised to formulate conclusions and recommendation carefully, and not based on "black box" models without having validated the results. Moreover, it was recommended to mix and use appropriately both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods.

6. ANSWERING EVALUATION QUESTIONS IN THE EX POST EVALUATION

Jela Tvrdonova led an interactive presentation about the role of the evaluation questions in the ex post evaluation of RDP 2007-2013, the lessons learned from the Mid Term Evaluation in 2010, and setting up of the evaluation system to answer the evaluation questions for the RDP 2014-2020. After the presentation, Jela Tvrdonova invited the participants to share their challenges and solutions to answer the ex post evaluation questions.

[3] The extensive list of DOs/DON'Ts raised during the reflection round are displayed in Table 2 attached to the Annexes.

Participants argued that **data management** (screening, mapping, structuring, gathering) is the key element for undertaking a successful ex post evaluation. Moreover, data management is not the solution to all challenges, but evaluators need to **build a common understanding** among stakeholders on the evaluation questions to be addressed. If the set of indicators is not consistent with new Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs), evaluators and Managing Authorities should **develop additional indicators**. Finally, participants proposed that when it is difficult to answer all the Common Evaluation Questions, evaluation stakeholders (MA, evaluators, policy makers) can **develop a priority list** to answer the CEQs.

>>>Link to the PPT

7. ASSESSING THE EX POST EVALUATION REPORTS OF RDPS 2007-2013

Sari Rannanpää introduced the quality assessment criteria prepared by the Evaluation Helpdesk for the DG AGRI desk officers to assess the 2007-2013 ex post evaluation reports. These quality criteria standardises the assessment of the evaluation reports, enforces evaluation quality standards, and builds desk officer's capacity in assessing the reports. These criteria focus on the consistency and the red thread between 1.) what the evaluator concluded and recommended, 2.) how the evaluator came to the conclusion, and 3.) what the evaluator based the conclusions on.

>>>Link to the PPT

8. LESSONS LEARNT

As overall lessons learnt from the two day workshop the following can be highlighted:

1. **Data**: good data availability and an efficient data management (screening, mapping, structuring and gathering) are key points for a successful ex post evaluation: they are not only necessary for establishing a robust counterfactual (enabling the construction of an effective control group), but also for minimising risk of distortion when accounting programme effects, enhancing the setting of a sufficient number of variables, the consideration of bias, etc. In the new programming period the Evaluation Plan should, on the one hand, be prepared duly on time and, on the other, properly foreseen an effective integration of quantitative and qualitative data and triangulation of findings. Use of monitoring data should also be thought at the right stage in order to increase the cost-effectiveness of the evaluation.
2. **Method**: no single method is valid in all contexts. Therefore, taking into account their weaknesses and limits, the most appropriate methods should be chosen considering how much they can be operational, versatile and cost effective for the purposes of the evaluation. A tailor-made approach, which could include a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, appears to be crucial in order to gauge the different effects of the RDP, both at micro and macro level, and measuring other effects such as externalities and counfounding factors, also in relation to environmental impacts.
3. **Usefulness**: in order to be useful, the ex post evaluation must be based on a common understanding about its steps, purposes and scope among stakeholders. It is useful to assess not only the effects of the Programme, but also the delivery mechanisms of the RDP. The selection of an appropriately skilled evaluator, by empowering the requirements prescribed in the ToR, would minimise the risk of unrelevant and weak findings.
4. **Communication**: evaluation findings must be communicated to the public who should have a clear understanding of what the policy (and the Programme) achieved. To this extent the involvement of most relevant stakeholders (e.g. LAGs) into the evaluation process since its very beginning would enable the successful dissemination and understanding of the effects of the RDP on the territory;
5. **Guidance**: in order to plan and conduct an effective ex post evaluation, finally a good methodological orientation is essential. To this regard making use of the Guidelines for ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs[4], is recommended.

[4] **Capturing the the success of your RDP: Guidelines for ex post evaluation of 2007-2013 RDPs**

9. ANNEXES

9.1 Table 1: Lessons and actions (outcomes of reflection round on day 1)

What are the 3 most important lessons that you have learned from the presented evaluation practices?	Which lessons do you need to apply in the ex post evaluation and/or in the during the programme evaluation in the current period in your context?
Data ○ Data mapping: it is important to identify what is important to collect, the data sources, availability and quality. ○ Lack of data is a cross-cutting problem among MS; ○ Ensure data comparability among countries; ○ Ensure more open data in RDP implementation and evaluation; Select first a rigorous theory, and then develop the data-set for testing the theory.	**Data** ○ Apply existing rules about open data; ○ Give better access to data; ○ Better data management with different stakeholders; ○ Stronger political commitment of Managing Authorities to make RD programmes more successful. Concentrate mainly on few indicator of success, and build an open data base to measure them; Improve GIS data, time, harmonization, institutional agreement;
Methodology ○ Using qualitative methods to formulate the assumptions, which will be tested through quantitative methods. Finally, conclude the evaluation with qualitative methods to confirm the findings; ○ Tailoring counterfactual analysis to the specific context; ○ Methodologies to evaluate measures supporting biodiversity; ○ Essential to use a mixture of methods; ○ The potentiality of the Geographical Information System; Many effects cannot be measured in a rigorous manner. It is necessary to develop new methods for them (e.g. biodiversity).	**Governance** ○ Managing Authorities need better coordination/relation with evaluator; ○ It is important to have better coordination of stakeholders of RDP into the evaluation process (IT, etc.) and hire evaluators at the beginning of the programmes; ○ Build an evaluation culture and communication; ○ Explain the why, not only what has been achieved; ○ MAs need better planning of the evaluation; ○ MAs need to contract the evaluators in the first stages of RDP; ○ Evaluators and MAs need to explore and use more methods to assess the RDPs effects.
Evaluation finding uses ○ How the evaluation findings and reports are used and looked by the EC; ○ How to link ex post evaluation to Mid Term evaluation questions; ○ Synthetizing and comparing findings between countries; ○ Importance of involving stakeholders for the use and communication of evaluation findings.	**Evaluation findings uses** ○ Managing Authorities should be more motivated to use the evaluation findings; ○ The feedbacks between the MAs and the evaluators should be strengthened.

What are the 3 most important lessons that you have learned from the presented evaluation practices?	Which lessons do you need to apply in the ex post evaluation and/or in the during the programme evaluation in the current period in your context?
Guidelines ○ Existing Guidelines are very well done and structured, but presents some gaps when confronted with the data and methods that can be applied in practice; ○ Make use of the guidelines.	**Guidelines** ○ Better involvement of the stakeholders during the process of evaluation; ○ Use the guidelines to structure better the evaluation; ○ Guidelines should be produced more timely.
Focus Don't focus only on indicators, but also on the delivery mechanisms;	**Focus** ○ Consider indirect and direct effect of the programme; ○ Evaluate more than the impacts and results; ○ Explore the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation methods beforehand, in order to choose them correctly;

9.2 Table 2: DOs / DON'Ts for RDP ex post evaluation (outcomes of reflection round on day 2)

DO	DON'T
Guidelines	
✓ Make use of the Evaluation Guidelines (MA) ✓ Formulate hypothesis and assumptions, and compare them among MAs and Evaluators (MA, E) ✓ Formulate some milestones to quality check the methods chosen by the MAs, rather than assessing them only at the end of the reporting (EC)	
Methodological issues	
✓ Understand the strengths and weakness of the evaluation methods (MA; E) ✓ Use mixed method to validate results (E)	✓ Don't underestimate the use of qualitative methods (MA; E) ✓ Don't use the findings of evaluation based on a black box model without validating the results (E)
Data management	
✓ Structure & combine data (E) ✓ Validation and quality check of data (E) ✓ Plan the data management in advance (MA, E) ✓ Combine and structure data sources according to the evaluation needs (PA, MA)	✓ Don't focus too much on indicators, and less on the content of the evaluation (MA)
Governance	
✓ Increase the competences and skills requirements of the evaluators in the Term of Reference (MA) ✓ Define the main goals and scope of evaluation at the beginning of the evaluation process (MA; E) ✓ Select evaluators in the very early stage of the RDP (MA) ✓ Make stronger relations between the researchers and evaluators (MA)	✓ Don't be late and dedicate the proper time to the planning of the evaluation (MA) ✓ Don't jump to conclusions (keep in mind the evaluation assumptions) (MA) ✓ Don't do the ex post evaluation workshop too late (HD) ✓ Don't underestimate the costs of the evaluation (MA) ✓ Ensure resources for the evaluation (MA)
Communication	
✓ Make the results of the evaluation more visible and understandable to the public (MAs; E) ✓ Make more use of the evaluation findings (LAG, MA, EC) ✓ Communicate the evaluation results to stakeholders (MA, E)	✓ Don't report quantitative results using qualitative methods (E)

9.3 Participant's Feedback – Summary

The **feedback form** was **filled by 59.7% of the participants** and included both **closed and open questions.**

Closed questions were focused on the overall assessment of the meeting and were appraised using a scale of one to four as a rating tool (very good-4; good-3; fair-2 and poor-1). The average score of the overall assessment of the meeting, for each of the closed questions, are summarized in the following table:

Closed questions Overall assessment of the workshop	Average score (4- Very good / 3-Good / 2-Fair / 1-Poor)
Relevance of the content of presentations	3.46
Usefulness of the exercises for understanding the content	3.16
Facilitation of the workshop	3.08
Overall organization of the workshop	3.03
Overall participation by the attendees in the discussion	3.22
Level of knowledge of the attendees before the workshop	2.54
Level of knowledge of the attendees after the workshop	3.27

Open questions explored the strengths and weaknesses of the workshop as well as the most relevant comments, suggestions and expectations.

Main strengths of the workshop identified by participants:

- Presentation of the expectations of EC and the Evaluation Helpdesk
- Presentation of a broad range of methods used in ex post evaluation
- Glimpse of different time-lines and methods
- Wide variety of stakeholders who are part of the evaluation process
- Good geographic representation of participants
- Good presentations and wide range of case studies
- Exchange of experiences, sharing knowledge and networking
- Meeting other evaluators
- Good facilitation
- Working groups
- Possibility to discuss and interaction among participants
- Visit and social dinner

Main weaknesses of the workshop identified by participants:

- Need for a more comparative approach of the methods used in evaluation
- Lack of comparability of presentations
- Methods used in many countries with difficulties of applicability
- Few information about environmental assessment
- Timing of workshop
- Focused mainly on evaluators and less on administration
- Limited time to discuss methodological issues
- Lack of material and presentations sent in advance in electronic format
- Facilities of the meeting room
- Accessibility and location of venue
- Indoor climate not appropriate

Comments, suggestions and expectations:

- Similar workshop on evaluation for 2014-2020 RDP would be welcome

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