



FRANCE STRATÉGIE
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Public policy impact assessment: what can France learn from the most advanced countries?

The aim of impact assessment is to evaluate, using statistical methods, the specific effects of a public policy compared with its stated objectives. Developed in the United States beginning in the 1960s, it emerged in Europe at the end of the 1990s, animated by a desire to streamline public action, and to make the political decision-making process more transparent.

While France is currently experiencing, with some delay, a boom in impact assessments, France Stratégie has identified good practices in five countries regarded as the most advanced in this field: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany¹. Using interviews, institutional reports, and academic articles, three key factors favouring the production and use of assessments in decision-making are analysed: the existence of formal mechanisms promoting impact assessments; the degree of dissemination and influence of these assessments on the public as well as on decision-makers; and finally, the openness of the administrative environment to economic researchers.

The comparison of France with five among the most advanced countries shows that no “turnkey” model exists to promote impact assessment. In recent years, each country has developed its own model of “evidence-based public policy” founded on its own levers for action, chiefly academic vitality, political impetus, and access to administrative data. With the opening up of the administrative environment to research actors in the United States, the training of public officials in the methodology of impact assessment in the United Kingdom, and the role of executive agencies for the evaluation of public policies in Sweden, it is clear that deferential determinants of success prevail in each country.

Far from arguing for the importation of a single institutional model, the good practices identified abroad highlight a set of approaches for consideration and experimentation to sustain the momentum of impact assessment in France. These focus on three major issues: the need for a better link between the demand for and production of impact assessments; the definition of common principles guaranteeing, in particular, the independence, credibility and transparency of assessments; and the sharing of issues, practices and results of impact assessment within an alliance bringing together the widest possible community of interested actors.

Several good practices could inspire the dissemination and the use of impact assessment in France:

- In the United States, the *Intergovernmental Personnel Act Mobility Program* promotes career mobility between the public administrations and the research community;
- The methodological guides on impact assessment published by the British Treasury, and widely used, guarantee a common framework;
- In Canada, the *Accredited Appraiser* designation recognizes evaluation competencies and ensures a common ethical standard;
- The What Works Centres and Clearinghouses in English-speaking countries centralise the results of evaluations to classify public systems according to their effectiveness and to make them accessible to the greatest number of people;
- In the United Kingdom, since 2015, the What Works Team has been encouraging government departments to publish *Areas of Research Interest (ARIs)* for researchers, which indicate areas where there is a need for scientific evidence.

1. This note provides a summary of the working paper entitled “Vingt ans d'évaluations d'impact en France et à l'étranger. Analyse comparée des pratiques dans six pays”, also available on the France Stratégie website. This document itself brings together the key lessons learned from monographs on public policy evaluation in six countries: Germany, Canada, United States, France, United Kingdom, Sweden.

SUMMARY NOTE

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INTRODUCTION

Practised in the United States since the 1960s, public policy impact assessments have only recently appeared in Europe, first in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s, and then in other countries from the 2000s onwards. They are based on the principle that it is possible to measure ex post, using rigorous statistical and econometric methods, the “specific effect” of a given public intervention. As such, they are often considered as the quantitative, even scientific branch of public policy evaluation².

Impact assessment is now a well-established practice in the US and UK administrations. Other countries such as Germany, Sweden or Canada have established institutional arrangements – structures, funding or regulations – to encourage the production of impact assessments, and their inclusion in public governance.

France has been comparatively late in developing this type of exercise, though significant efforts have accelerated a catch-up movement. Several evaluation committees have been established at the national level, and often entrusted to France Stratégie: the evaluation committees for the CICE (Tax Credit for Competitiveness and Employment), innovation policies (CNEPI), capital tax reform, labour ordinances, the Pacte law, the poverty reduction strategy or the Very High Speed Internet plan all use impact assessments to varying degrees. The ministerial statistical services are also piloting impact assessments such as the DEPP for the duplication of first-grade classes or the DARES for the Skills Investment Plan³. More recently, but to a lesser extent, the Court of Auditors has started to call on the academic community to carry out impact assessments as part of its public policy evaluations⁴. The movement is expected to grow in France in the coming years, especially since researchers have access to an ever-increasing volume of administrative data *via* the CASD (Centre d'accès sécurisé aux données).

Amid a growing practice, France Stratégie sought to draw up a complete overview of impact assessment in five economically close countries considered as the most advanced in this field: Germany, Canada, the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom to identify good practices that could inspire our own country.

This work follows a bibliometric analysis published in December 2018⁵, which quantified the production of impact

assessments in France compared with other countries on the limited scope of publications in peer-reviewed journals. As an extension, the overview proposed here is based on six monographs⁶; for each country, including France, they examine the place and influence of impact assessments in the decision-making process. By comparing good practices in matters of collaboration between administration and research, the implementation of formal mechanisms, and the dissemination and use of results, this overview underscores a dozen key lessons aimed at supporting the development of impact assessment in France and encouraging its appropriation by public decision-makers and citizens.

A RECENT DEVELOPMENT AT THE INITIATIVE OF NATIONAL EXECUTIVES

Impact evaluation first developed in the 1960s in the United States in the context of the major anti-poverty programmes initiated by the Johnson administration. In Europe, it was the United Kingdom that launched the first public policy impact assessments at the end of the 1990s. Most countries on the continent, including Sweden, Germany and France, waited until the 2000s to carry out the first national exercises. In nearly all countries, this work marked a breakthrough both in the methods used and in the way in which public policies are designed.

Yet other countries, like Canada, are experiencing slower institutionalization of impact assessment practices. These are gradually taking form in a long-standing formalized system that has existed since the 1970s to ensure the control and performance of federal programs.

In the two precursor countries, the United States and the United Kingdom, political impulses from the executive branch have played a decisive role in the recognition of impact assessments—notably from the Blair government in the United Kingdom with the creation of the NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence), the first What Works Centre set up in the field of health at the turn of the 2000s. In the United States, it was the Obama administration's passage of the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act* (FEBPA) that served to accelerate this development, strengthening access to data, and the federal government's capacity to produce and use evidence. These political impulses have, above all, made it possible, within these two countries, to impose impact assessment as an indispensable instrument for assisting

2. The evaluation of a public policy, in general terms, aims to assess the effectiveness of that policy by comparing the results obtained with the objectives set and the means implemented. It can take various forms, and sometimes simply uses indicator monitoring or qualitative methods. In addition, impact assessments should not be confused with impact studies, which have accompanied all draft legislation since 2009 and are an ex ante evaluation of the policy in question.

3. DEPP = Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance, Ministère de l'Éducation; DARES = Direction de l'animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques.

4. See Chapter V of the [Court of Auditors' 2019 Annual Report](#).

5. Bono P.-H., Debu S., Desplatz R., Hayet M., Lacouette-Fougère C. and Trannoy A. (2018), “Vingt ans d'évaluations d'impact en France et à l'étranger. Analyse quantitative de la production scientifique”, Working Paper, No. 2018-06, France Stratégie, December.

6. Each monograph is based on a review of the scientific and institutional literature and a series of interviews with national impact assessment stakeholders.



government decision-making and improving transparency with citizens in the principal areas of public policy (health, social, employment, education, etc.).

A study of the long history of this practice in the six countries shows that the major national reform sequences have often been moments of acceleration in the production of impact assessments. In addition to the above-mentioned examples drawn from the United States and the United Kingdom, this is also the case with the evaluation of the Hartz reforms in Germany.

Surprisingly, however, Parliament's role in impact assessment is modest in all countries. The recognition of the role of national parliaments in the evaluation of public policies, sometimes enshrined in the Constitution as in France or Sweden, has in practice scarcely ever led to the development of impact assessment practices in these fora⁷.

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH CENTERS, MAJOR PRODUCERS

Because of the complexity of the methods involved, impact assessment is mainly carried out by economic researchers. In the most mature countries, the main producers are the economics departments of major national universities. Thus, in France, specialized structures attached to the academic world, such as the Institut des politiques publiques (IPP), J-PAL Europe, the Laboratoire interdisciplinaire d'évaluation des politiques publiques (LIEPP) of Sciences Po, the Centre de recherche en économie et statistique (CREST) or the research federation Théorie et Évaluation des politiques publiques (TEPP), are at the forefront. These structures carry out impact assessments in response to governmental commissioning or by their own initiative.

Academic vitality in this area is also the result of independent players, operating alongside universities, particularly in English-speaking countries. In the United Kingdom, several small structures such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) produce evaluation work, while in the United States, federal departments and agencies regularly rely on studies by the MDRC or the Mathematica Policy Research Group, two independent research organisations specialising in impact assessment. Germany is distinguished by the predominance of these independent research institutes over universities. Two institutes are indeed the main source of impact assessments: the German Institute for Economic Research (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, DIW) and the Institute for Labour Economics, better known as IZA (Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit).

In this context, impact assessments produced "on their own" by administrations are more the exception than the rule at the international level. However, in France, INSEE and ministerial statistical services notably DARES (Ministry of Labor), DREES (Ministry of Health), or DEPP (Ministry of Education) are major producers of impact assessments, due to a long exclusive access to administrative data and a tradition of the official statistical service (OSS) of not confining itself to statistical production. In Sweden, executive public policy evaluation agencies, independent of ministries, also produce impact assessments and are for some of them genuine research bodies, in particular the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU) on employment and education policies. In Canada, too, many evaluations are produced by jurisdictions, but rarely use econometric methods to measure impact.

ADMINISTRATIONS, PRIMARY SPONSORS

The demand for impact assessments of public policies in the countries studied comes mainly from the ministries, particularly in the domains of labour market, education, and health. But the human and financial resources devoted to such assessments are often very unevenly distributed among ministries, even in the most advanced countries. The choice to assess may be a matter for the administration itself (self-referral), the government (ministers), Parliament, or the law (where it provides for the principle).

None of the countries studied in our benchmark to date has explicit and formalized criteria for deciding whether to launch an evaluation. Several criteria are taken into account, such as the experimental nature of the reform, the economic stakes (large-scale programmes such as the "Programme des investissements d'avenir" in France have thus been backed by an evaluation mechanism), the prior mobilisation of research players on the subject, and the general timetable for the development and implementation of the reform. However, the social demand for evaluations from civil society – Parliament, social partners, media, citizens – plays an important role in some countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. In France, the role of Parliament in driving evaluations is more recent.

In English-speaking countries, the demand for impact assessments is also supported by private foundations. Such is the case of the Nesta association in the United Kingdom, which promotes the use of scientific evidence in public decision-making, especially through the organisation of conferences. In the United States, the Mac Arthur Foundation and the Laura & John Arnold Foundation fund and promote work inspired almost exclusively by experimental methods involving RCTs (*randomized controlled trials*).

7. In France, since the 2014 reform, Article 145-7 of the National Assembly's Rules of Procedure provides, three years after the entry into force of a law, for the submission by two deputies, one of whom is from the opposition, of an evaluation report on the impact of the law. So far, however, there have been few evaluations seeking to identify the causal impact of the law.

Finally, in the six countries studied, there is a professional evaluation society-- that is, an organisation bringing together practitioners from the administrative, academic and private spheres. In France, the "Société française d'évaluation" (SFE) performs this role. However, these professional societies do not always develop specific initiatives in favour of impact assessments. Only the American Evaluation Association (American Evaluation Association) and the German Evaluation Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation) have made proposals to strengthen the place of impact assessment in practice and decision-making.

A STRUCTURED FRAMEWORK ONLY IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

A structured and coordinated framework can help to facilitate the use of impact assessment within the administration. Although it is not strictly impact evaluation, Canada is the country with the most strongly structured evaluation practice in the broadest sense, institutionally. A 2001 Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) directive, updated in 2009 and 2011, makes evaluation mandatory for all government departments and agencies. It has led to the creation, in most departments, of units responsible for formalizing a departmental evaluation plan (often five-year plans) to identify, program by program, the expected needs and methods to be considered. The Centre of Excellence for Evaluation (CEE), located within TBS, coordinates this work and reports annually on the activities of these units. Periodically, it also commissions "meta-evaluations" to verify the overall quality and usefulness of the work produced.

In the United States, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) within the White House administration also coordinates the assessment and its use through guidelines laid out for all federal agencies. In addition, some departments have study and evaluation units that are especially developed, with an advanced role in steering and coordinating evaluations. The Ministry of Labour, for one, has a Chief *Evaluation Officer* (CEO) responsible for designing and overseeing the Ministry's evaluation projects, enhancing the quality of these exercises, improving the use of results and facilitating access to data. Following this example, the FEBPA law of 2018 requires the appointment in each federal agency of a chief evaluator in charge of defining and implementing an evaluation policy. This law also provides for the establishment of *Learning Agendas* in all agencies, which identify the most important policy and research issues, prioritising them according to political and budgetary constraints. Their development usually involves broad consultation with stakeholders, including senior government officials, programme directorates, external researchers and Congress.

In other countries, the practice of impact assessment remains flexible and uncoordinated, though it is widespread in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. In the United Kingdom, the « What Works Team, » hosted by the Cabinet Office, promotes the practice of impact assessments within government departments and coordinates the network of *What Works Centres*. Yet it does not ensure real coordination of the evaluation beyond the mere coordination of training, actions and seminars.

MULTIPLE FORMS OF GOVERNANCE

For piloting evaluations, none of the countries here studied has established an explicit rule. Everywhere, the practice varies widely from one evaluation to another: the evaluation bodies are invariably set up on an *ad hoc basis*, depending on the scope of the targeted policy and the questions posed to the team in charge of the exercise. One principle is often reaffirmed, however -- that of pluralism within the evaluation bodies, particularly in the choice of members of the monitoring committees or directly in the choice of actors responsible for the evaluation. Because of the methods used, the presence of a high degree of scientific expertise is also a common feature found in the assessment bodies of all the countries studied.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, the evaluation of structuring measures is often entrusted to a consortium of players (research centres, consultancies and think tanks) to cover different types of work (implementation analysis, measurement of effects over different time horizons, cost-benefit analysis) and generally carried out over several years. Outsourcing is perceived as a guarantee of the appraisers' independence from their sponsors.

In France, France Stratégie, attached to the Prime Minister's office, is piloting several public policy impact assessments on behalf of pluralist evaluation committees, such as the evaluation committees for the Pacte Law and the anti-poverty strategy, both set up in the autumn of 2019. This work has the particularity of being long-term: the CICE evaluation committee, set up in 2013, has since produced six annual reports. France Stratégie also generates reflections on evaluation methods *through* the elaboration of methodological guides or the organization of dedicated events and seminars.

The opening up of evaluation bodies to stakeholders, whether operators of the policy being evaluated, or representatives of beneficiaries, is a new dynamic that seems to be at work in all countries and goes hand in hand with the challenges of communicating and disseminating impact evaluations.



ORIGINAL COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN ADMINISTRATIONS AND RESEARCH: NUDGE UNITS AND EXPERT PANELS

Innovative means also make possible a collaboration between administrations and researchers on issues of experimentation and impact assessment. This is the case of the *Nudge units*, which have spread to almost all the administrations studied. These units specializing in the application of behavioural science to public policies generally provide support to governments to test new solutions and rigorously evaluate the results using experimental methods (RCT). Examples include the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) in the United Kingdom, the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) in the United States or the team in charge of developing behavioural sciences applied to public policies within the “Direction interministérielle de la transformation publique” (DITP) in France. In 2018, for example, the DITP has entrusted several research teams, including CEPREMAP and the British Behavioural Insights Team, with the support and evaluation of seven projects proposed by administrations⁸ on the application of behavioural sciences to public policies.

Another method for offering points of contact between researchers and administrations is based on the establishment of panels of experts to support the design and implementation of public programmes. A good example of this is the creation in 2015 in the United Kingdom of the Cross-Government Trial Advice Panel (CG-TAP), made up of experts from the administration and the academic world. The CG-TAP encourages the various ministries to implement impact assessments of their programmes, and supports them in doing so by providing training and technical advice to the staff concerned. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), for example, benefited from the expertise of this panel in March 2018 for an RCT studying the impact of an English language teaching programme on social integration⁹.

THE PRESENCE OF ACADEMIC PROFILES IN THE ADMINISTRATION: A CONSTANT OF THE MOST ADVANCED COUNTRIES

The possibility for researchers to join the administrative sphere is a strong marker of countries with of the most mature evaluation practices. In the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden, it is common for academics or researchers to be recruited from headquarters for positions requiring scientific expertise.

The American administration is certainly the one that has pushed this possibility the farthest with the IPA (*Inter-governmental Personnel Act*) mobility programme, which allows exchanges of qualified personnel between federal agencies and universities and research centres. Staff members and researchers can thus change structures for a limited period (up to four years), with the guarantee of returning to their position, or an equivalent position, in their home organization. Thanks to the IPA program, the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) within the General Services Administration (GSA), which specializes in the application of behavioural science results to federal policies, is thus composed of an interdisciplinary team of researchers from major American universities (Harvard University, Reed College, Washington University, etc.).

SENIOR OFFICIALS TRAINED IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODS

Awareness-raising and training of senior officials in impact assessment is another lever for the development of practices. Most countries offer training sessions of this type, but they are mainly aimed at specialised public officials--those in a position to lead or conduct impact assessments. The United Kingdom is the only country to have included assessment in the skill standards used for the recruitment, individual assessment and career development of agents involved in the design of public policies (about 18,500 people). These competency standards, called *Policy Profession Standards*, define the competencies for the effective use of evidence in the design of public policy. In order to apply these standards, UK government departments regularly use external providers, such as the Alliance for Useful Evidence (A4UE) or the What Works Team, to train their officials in the use of scientific evidence.

METHODOLOGICAL CORPORA AND STANDARDS IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The publications issued by the British Treasury over the last 15 years offer the most comprehensive collection of valuation methodologies for government departments.

Together, the *Green Book*, the *Magenta Book* and the *Quality in policy impact* supplement cover all the dimensions of public policy evaluation, from the analysis of their implementation to the measurement of their impact and cost-benefit analyses. The scope of this methodological corpus extends to the entire British civil service: these publications are integrated into the assessment programs

8. The selected projects cover a variety of topics: promoting the rational use of antibiotics, encouraging the use of electronic payments, reducing the impact of stereotypes and combating discrimination in hiring, improving policies to prevent sleep deprivation among first-grade pupils, encouraging sports, encouraging the adoption of eco-responsible heating methods, and creating a consumer information system to promote the circular economy. [See the ministry's website.](#)

9. See the [What Works blog](#) on the British government website.

of departments as well as into the competency standards of civil servants. They are also used as a reference when implementing or commissioning impact assessments by ministries¹⁰.

More broadly, in English-speaking countries, investigations about the quality of evaluations involves the transmission of standards of evidence that make it possible to judge the robustness of evaluation results according to the used method. The "standards of evidence" published by the British association Nesta or the Maryland *Scientific Methods Scale* are the most common. Experimental methods are considered the most reliable for producing solid results, ahead of quasi-experimental methods. These standards are also used to conduct systematic reviews (syntheses of lessons learned from evaluations that meet a high quality standard), to build databases of evidence from evaluations, or simply to highlight gaps in rigorous evaluation in a particular policy area.

In Canada, a unique initiative was developed in 2009 by the Canadian Evaluation Society: the *Accredited Appraiser* designation. This professional certification program is built on three pillars: a code of ethics, professional standards and a set of thirty-six theoretical and practical competencies. The expected competencies do not focus on a specific discipline but on general professional dimensions. The title is deliberately not prescriptive in terms of methods and techniques (quantitative, qualitative) in order to encourage multidisciplinary evaluations. Using this benchmark, Canada in 2008 has 395 accredited evaluators, a list available upon request from the Canadian Evaluation Society; economic researchers are in a relative minority.

DEDICATED FUNDING FOR EVALUATION AND SUPPORT BY PRIVATE ACTORS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES.

In all those countries under study, impact evaluations are initially financed by the recurrent budget appropriations of the administrations, which themselves decide how they are to be distributed among their various study and expertise activities.

In some cases, however, specific funds may be earmarked for the impact evaluation of a programme or scheme, or to support the activity of a particular evaluation body. In the United States, for instance, up to 0.5 per cent of the funds allocated under the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*¹¹ can be used for its evaluation. Similarly, since 2012, the Chief Evaluation Office at the Ministry of Labour has been provided with funding of up to 0.75% of the total amount

of appropriations allocated to the operational agencies of the Ministry of Labour. In France, a few schemes or programmes have thus benefited from specific funding for their evaluation, such as the "Programme des investissements d'avenir" (PIA) launched in 2010 or, more recently, the "Plan d'investissement dans les compétences" (PIC).

In English-speaking countries, private foundations, together with public funds also contribute to financing impact assessments. This contribution takes the form of permanent endowments to specialised structures, on the model of the Big Lottery Fund in the United Kingdom, or direct funding of evaluation work, as in the case of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation in the United States.

TOOLKITS, CLEARINGHOUSES AND DIRECTORIES: TOOLS OF RESULTS CAPITALIZATION AND DISSEMINATION

To facilitate the publication of results and their appropriation by users, several countries are developing still more elaborate mechanisms than simple summaries of evaluation results. The most noteworthy initiatives are the toolkits set up by *What Works Centres in the United Kingdom* and *Clearinghouses* in the United States¹². What these two tools share in common is that they bring together available studies in a public policy area, synthesize them in a format that is readable by non-specialists, and classify them according to the methods they use and the results they produce. They facilitate in particular the comparison of public interventions for their effects, costs and the robustness of the associated scientific evidence. These innovative approaches have begun to spread to other countries. With funding from McMaster University (Ontario), Canada has since 2017 developed a search engine listing social policies and their evaluations (nearly 15,000 references). In France, Santé Publique France launched in 2018, with the support of the Directorate General for Health, a directory of effective or promising interventions and their evaluations in the field of prevention and health promotion.

INCENTIVE APPROACHES EMERGING IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

How can we ensure that the knowledge produced is most useful for public decision-making? This is the question that several countries are seeking to answer by focusing, in recent years, on the issue of the use of evaluation results by decision-makers and citizens. Since 2013, the UK government, for instance, has commissioned the « What

10. In France, the practice of methodological guides is restricted to ex ante socio-economic assessments of public infrastructure projects.

11. See on the [site of the American Department of Education](#).

12. See, for example, the *Crime Reduction Toolkit* of the What Works Centre for Crime Reduction in the United Kingdom, and the What Works Clearinghouse of the United States Department of Education.



Works Team » to conduct regular “evidence audits” to identify, department by department, areas of public policy in which the use of objective research evidence could be strengthened. This measure is accompanied by suggestions for improving the dissemination and uptake of impact assessments.

The development of “social impact” obligations in English-speaking countries, over the last ten years or so, is a much preferred way of encouraging decision-makers, as well as public policy operators to apply research results. Based on a financial incentive mechanism, the *Social Impact Bonds* (SIBs) that appeared in 2007 in the United Kingdom thus enable private investors to finance interventions delivered by non-governmental or non-profit organisations, and to recoup their investment, with interest, if and only if these interventions achieve their objectives. Interventions financed by SIB are sometimes subject to an *ex-post* impact assessment to establish whether the scheme has produced the expected effects, and thus

whether the private investor will be reimbursed by the public decision-maker. The American version of this type of scheme, known as *Pay for Success* (PFS), has made it possible to support projects in the fields of education, early childhood or the fight against recidivism. The first project was launched in September 2012 by the City of New York to reduce recidivism among young inmates at Rikers Island Prison (*Adolescent Behavioral Learning Experience-ABLE* program).¹³ The project aims to reduce the recidivism of young inmates at Rikers Island Prison. In the same spirit, under the Obama administration, “*tiered-evidence grants*”, also known as “*innovation fund grants*”, have been used starting in 2010: grants paid by the federal government to local authorities and non-profit organisations for the implementation of social programmes are all the more crucial, because these schemes are supported by solid evidence of their effectiveness. These financial mechanisms provide incentives for choosing effective schemes that might benefit from higher grants, while ensuring that projects are rigorously evaluated.

CONCLUSION

All the countries here studied have strengthened their evaluation practices without a common framework or “turnkey” model. Canada and the United States have a general framework for coordination, unlike European countries, though assessment practices are widespread in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. France stands out for the role of ministerial statistical services in the production of impact assessments. In other countries, it is rather academic institutions that provide this service. Everywhere, however, the administration is the main sponsor, though the role of civil society is growing, including private funding in some countries. Nowhere, however, are there precise rules serving as absolute guidelines for evaluations. The principle of stakeholder pluralism, however, is often advanced. Innovative means are emerging, such as units specializing in the application of behavioural sciences to public policy or panels of experts to support the design and implementation of public programmes.

The good practices identified abroad provide a set of possibilities for consideration as well as experimentation aiming to sustain the momentum of impact assessment in France. To this end, three major issues emerge: a better link between the demand for and production of impact assessments; a common framework guaranteeing the independence, credibility and transparency of assessments; and the usefulness of an alliance bringing together the widest possible community of interested actors to share issues, practices and results of impact assessment ¹⁴.

Keywords: impact assessment, public policies, ex ante, ex post, international comparison, administration

13. This program was funded by Goldman Sachs to the tune of \$9.6 million. New York City was not required to make any payments if the recidivism rate was reduced by less than 8.5% as a result of the program. Based on the evaluations available before the program was introduced, it was likely that a reduction in recidivism rates of about 11% could be expected as a result of the program. However, evaluation results obtained using a quasi-experimental method showed that the project had no effect on the recidivism rate at the end of the first year. On the basis of these results, Goldman Sachs decided to terminate the project, and the City of New York did not have to make any payments (see the discussion paper on the United States).

14. The authors would like to thank Vincent Aussilloux for his active involvement, their colleagues at France Stratégie and the administrations and experts interviewed for this project.

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