

Democratising Complex Evaluation

Thomas Dixon- Doctoral Researcher

Centre for Rural Economy, School for Natural and Environmental Sciences • t.dixon1@ncl.ac.uk

Context

- Recent decades have seen a drive towards open, evidenced-based policy making within Government
- This raises questions about the nature of 'evidence' and 'expertise' within policy making and its evaluation
- This research will explore the contribution of stakeholder's expertise within policy evaluation and its potential role in tackling complexity.

Objectives

- This research will examine how policy evaluations are designed and carried out in relation to the expertise of stakeholders.
- This will enable a greater discussion and recommendations about the use of stakeholder expertise within policy evaluations.

Expertise as Evidence?

- Evidence gathering is part of policy evaluation.
- Government guidance on evidence, within the Green book (2003) and Magenta book (2007), focus on scientifically informed methods.
- Scientific methods have been seen as the provider of objective and value free evidence from which the soundest decision can be made.
- This can minimise the impact of other types of evidence, such as stakeholder narratives, which may not often be gathered as part of an evaluation.

Democratising Evaluation

- The democratisation of expertise is the notion that expertise is socially distributed, challenging the perception that science is the sole source of objective knowledge, and the perception that objective knowledge is the only viable means to finding what works within policy
- Including stakeholders into the evaluation process has the potential to introduce complexity, but if harnessed correctly they can also help to understand complexity and the drive towards complexity appropriate evaluation.

Research so far...

Working within the Cecan project I have been able to attend sessions in which multi-agency teams from government, academia and evaluation practitioners have been brought together.

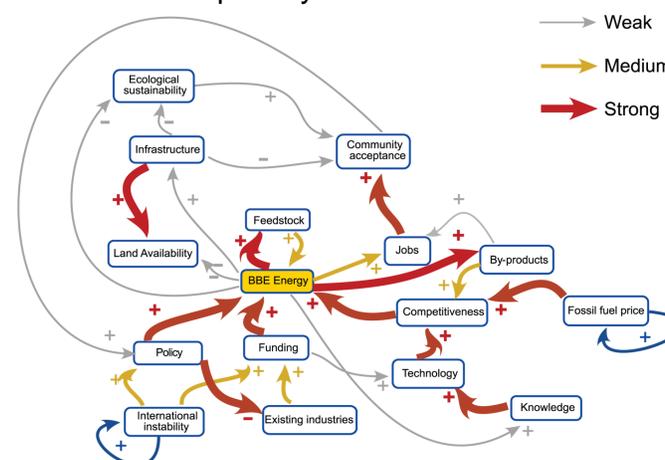
Insights which have come out of this period in the field have been:

- Power plays a role in the group dynamics, either empowering or limiting individual members, which can ultimately affect the outcome of an exercise
- Common language is created to determine both what the system looks like and also how the system is defined
- Expertise is present at all levels, however an unwritten hierarchy of experts/ explicit hierarchy of methods can affect who is asked to contribute and in what capacity.



An event with Cecan and Defra to explore new methodologies of evaluation

This shows a fuzzy cognitive map co-produced by government, industry and community stakeholders. This map of the bio-based economy of the Humber region shows the utilisation of stakeholder expertise explores the synergies and trade-offs of multiple nodes of the bio-based economy. It represents how stakeholder's expertise can be utilised to help understand complex systems.



A fuzzy cognitive map of the bio based economy of the Humber region. (Penn et al, 2013)

Future Research

To continue this research I will explore the following:

- The extent of stakeholder expertise in policy evaluation
- How novel methodologies in policy evaluation are designed and carried out and the effects these have on stakeholder expertise

The methodology will include:

- Interviews with key informants to explore the construction of stakeholder expertise
- Case studies on policy areas which are intrinsically complex, to explore how stakeholder expertise could contribute to the realisation of complex policy evaluation
- An exploration of methodological tools to unpack how these process stakeholder expertise

References

Penn, A.S., Knight, C.J., Lloyd, D.J., Avitabile, D., Kok, K., Schiller, F., Woodward, A., Druckman, A. and Basson, L., 2013. Participatory development and analysis of a fuzzy cognitive map of the establishment of a bio-based economy in the Humber region. *PLoS one*, 8(11), p.e78319.
Treasury, H.M.S., 2003. The green book: appraisal and evaluation in central government.
Treasury, H.M., 2007. The Magenta Book: guidance notes for policy evaluation and analysis. London: HM Treasury (Magenta Book Background Papers).