

External evaluation, internal evaluation?

Con formato: Francés (Bélgica)

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RTA is a ~~longstanding~~ ~~historie~~ partner of street work in the French Community of Belgium. In fact, twenty years ago, the association set up a street work training policy (~~incarnated in~~ a series of yearly programmes) for and with the pioneers of this practice. One of these was Edwin de Boevé, the current director of Dynamo International, which ~~lead~~ ~~coordinates~~ the International Network of Social Street Workers, and Bernard de Vos, the current Délégué Général aux droits de l'enfant (General Representative for the Rights of the Child) – RTA is also partnered with this institution.

~~Our aim here is not~~ ~~It is not for these lines~~ to retrace the numerous stages of ~~these~~ collaborations and solidarity ~~ies~~: we mention them because they ~~form the backdrop~~ ~~make up the context of~~ ~~to~~ a question relating to the evaluation of institutional practices.¹

Today, Dynamo International is actually financed by the European Union within the framework of the “Progress” programme. ~~Amongst~~ ~~the~~ requirements of this programme ~~include~~ ~~s~~ the obligation to organise an “external evaluation”, defined as a “monitoring system”. We were approached to take charge of this part of the programme.

The question that could be posed is therefore the following: is a partner association ~~working~~ in solidarity sufficiently “external”?

A revealing question

Let us say straight-away what this question may ~~potentially~~ illustrate, ~~in its potential effects~~ (we do not give an opinion on ~~theirs~~ intentions):

- ~~Ignorance of the failure to recognise its the specifically specific nature of the~~ associative ~~set-up~~ ~~process~~;
- ~~Associations may be victims of~~ the excessive imposition of bureaucratic norms ~~of which associations can be victims~~, that ~~fail to do not~~ respect their organisational and political freedom,²
- ~~The vague attempts inclinations~~ to force these creative and ~~unselfish~~ ~~disinterested~~ processes to ~~conform~~ ~~align to with~~ ~~market~~ ~~commercial~~ logic, to which the political elite were converted in the 1980s.³

In fact, we would like to show that the “internal/external” schema is ~~barely~~ ~~only~~ ~~barely~~ relevant as

- 1 With this term, we are referring to one of our contributions to institutional analysis “Evaluation and control of institutional practices” in J.Blairon, J.Fastrès, E.Servais and E.Vanhée, *The recomposed institution, volume 2, The complete virtual institution*, Brussels, Luc Pire, 2001, pp. 111 to 152.
- 2 We are referring here to some principles of the association charter, as defined upon the initiative of the governments and public authorities in the Walloon and Brussels Region, and in the French Community; we hope that this initiative will be followed by both local and supranational authorities.
- 3 Pierre Bourdieu mentions this conversion, which accompanied the state of neglect at the heart of public services, in this way: “It is therefore impossible to understand the state of affairs (...) without taking into account the collective conversion to the neo-liberal vision that, having started in the 1970s, finished in the middle of the 1980s with the rallying of socialist leaders.” He continues: “by associating efficiency and modernity with the private business, and archaism and inefficiency with public services, one wishes to substitute the relationship with the client, supposedly more egalitarian and more efficient, for the relationship with the user. Also, one identifies “modernisation” as being the transfer of the most profitable public services to the private sector, and liquidating or bringing junior staff from public services into line, as they are held responsible for all inefficiencies and “inflexibilities”. (*The woes of the world*, Paris, Seuil, 1992, p. 221). Henceforth it is necessary to add to these structural facts, with the necessary usage of commercial models in the conduct of public business and associative projects, as notably instigated by the European Union.

regards the evaluation of association practices and institutional processes.

Once again, ~~let us offer one definition of we posit here what one may understand by~~ “evaluation”, within the great tradition of institutional analysis; ~~namely,~~ as a collective reflection on the meaning and values of action, ~~undertaken begun~~ by all protagonists of this action themselves, starting with the effects of these actions, the uninterpreted traces and signs that they leave. The aim is really to ask ~~oneself~~ **new** questions, in order to support **collective commitments**.

We are thus obviously ~~placing ourselves in a universe talking about something~~ other than ~~that of~~ monitoring; ~~endeavouring that aims to legitimately~~ verify; ~~legitimately of course,~~ how activities ~~on~~ conforms to pre-established norms (~~norms of results-based~~ or ~~proceduresal norms~~).

~~It is clear that One clearly sees how~~ this distinction ~~situates classifies~~ evaluation as an internal process and monitoring as an external act. There ~~is constant~~ confusion between these two ~~action- areas of action areas is permanent~~ and; ~~this,~~ in our opinion, well and truly constitutes an act of power ~~that generates that continues by setting up a generalised widespread~~ confusion, which is remarkably useful in ~~the~~ attacking ~~the specific nature of -on-~~ associations ~~ve specificities~~.

For example, “monitoring” ~~entails assumes a logic of~~ verifying conformity ~~with to~~ stipulated “plans” (~~involving on the horizon of a~~ totally technocratic ~~demand for control demand for control~~) which abuses both the beneficiary audience and the ability of the actors to make challenges, by remarkably also ignoring the forceful strength of the structure that one intends to fight...

A question to shift

If the ~~initial starting~~ question “is a partner association in solidarity sufficiently “external” to proceed with an evaluation worthy of this name?” seems rather out of place in this respect, it is also fitting to shift it in order to size up the challenges of a real evaluation.

An association (or in other words, an associative process that institutional analysis has always designated as an “institutional process”) always tries to live as a “group subject” and not as a subjected group, as Félix Guattari asserted.

The aforementioned subjection may correspond ~~to with~~:

- submission to one or more external constraints ~~coming of bureaucracy from the, for example, bureaucratic environment for instance~~: a classic example is politicians imposing division on activity through excessive sector ~~ali~~isation;
- the excessive exertion of an internal power, be it vertical (hierarchical) or horizontal (for example, ~~one thinks of the~~ dominating relationships between beneficiaries or of the ~~side-effects of~~ ~~detour from certain some~~ self-management experiments).

The first question relating to an evaluation in this context is therefore: **is it being subjected or not?**

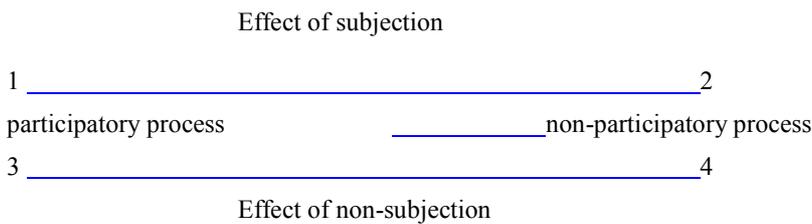
After that, an associative process is always more or less characterised by that which we have suggested calling a “communalism” (in reference to the values of the Paris Commune) or a mode of “loving communism” (evoking a ~~problem of concern for~~ equality within a rationale of free exchange and solidarity)⁴.

The second key question with regards to the evaluation of an associative process therefore deals with **the more or less participatory nature of reflexive hindsight that was implemented**.

4 Cf J. Blairon and E. Servais, “The institution, protagonist of cultural battles”, in “*Scum*” and virtual suburbs, Charleroi, Couleur livres, 2006.

By using the words “reflexive hindsight”, we are evoking the long traditions of ~~lifelong~~~~permanent~~ education, of training for adults as ~~advocated~~~~praised~~ by workers' movements: one can evidently understand that these ~~traditions~~ are hardly known by the converts to neo-liberalism and neo-managerial rationale that make up the sacro~~sanctamental~~ financial year.

From these two questions, we obtain a structure where the effects of power axis can cross with the axis of the processes for producing meaning.



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A non-participatory process coupled with an effect of subjection corresponds particularly well with the imposition of an (“external”) evaluation practice that acts as a “Trojan horse” to attack the specific ~~nature~~ty of ~~the work of associations~~~~associative activity~~.

On the opposite side, position 3 designates the evaluation practice ~~advocated~~~~praised~~ by institutional analysis.

Position 4 is the impossible position that, as a rule, comprises a well-constructed crossed structure. Position 1 could correspond to, for example, the use of an “evaluation” within the framework of an unobserved or already overly embedded horizontal power.

The principles of institutional analysis and their impact ~~as regardson~~ evaluation

RTA has clarified and publicised ~~their~~its institutional choices and benchmarks.⁵

One of these actually ~~involve~~~~consists in~~ coming round to the values of a recon~~structed~~~~imposed~~ institutional analysis. Amongst other things, this text, which is the result of a participatory process involving ~~various~~ workers, ~~bodies~~authorities and management, states:

“Recon~~structed~~~~imposed~~” institutional analysis is the central reference point (of the association).

This is firstly a **practice**. It guides attitudes and behaviour not only as regards supervision, but also in terms of training for adults.

~~It encompasses the~~The ~~premise~~postulates ~~for~~of a pragmatic social science, as defined by P. Goodman, ~~are~~activated within it (our recognition in the ~~sector of~~youth ~~work sector~~aid is explicitly based on this ~~premise~~postulates):

1. *The very fact that the problem ~~should be~~ being studied forms a factor of the situation. The investigator is one of the participants in the experiment, and this already shifts the problem, by objectifying it in a useful way.*
2. *The investigator cannot know exactly what he is looking for, as there is no predetermined hypothesis to prove, for he hopes that an unexpected solution will arise from the dialectical relationship with the problem. (...)*

⁵ See text “Institutional choices and benchmarks” on <http://www.rta.be>

3. The investigator, like the other participants, is “committed”: he feels a moral duty to arrive at a solution, and therefore he is inclined to modify his own ideas and even his own character. (...)

4. Since he does not know the outcome, the investigator must risk confusion and conflict, putting untried methods to the test. The only safeguard is to stay in close contact with the ~~specific~~ concrete situation, to be objective and ~~precise~~ exact when making observations and reporting facts, and to ~~be meticulous~~ appear strict during the analysis.

Therefore we tackle our work as regards evaluation (and, for example, our mission to evaluate the activities of Dynamo International and the Network of Social Street Workers) in the following pragmatic way.

Keeping the right ~~Finding~~ distance

This means viewing oneself as a de facto stakeholder in **the facts of the situation**, by taking part:

- in the goals and challenges of the associative process concerned;
- in the commitments of the network;
- in problems that are encountered through activities, including those that arise in terms of power (external constraints, potential internal conflicts);
- without being directly involved in “interests” that may potentially be present (in concrete terms, in this scenario ~~that concerns us~~, without taking part in the decisions made by the leaders of the network’s pilot group).

Being answerable for institutional questioning

The institutional process is particularly demanding. Indeed, the constraints are it gives itself much greater constraints than in public and commercial processes:

- in comparison with public rationale, it asserts itself to be “listening to silence”, to innovate and, if necessary, to leave the existing framework;
- in comparison with market logic ~~commercial rationale~~, it is impartial ~~forces disinterest~~ and makes huge ethical demands upon itself, compared with the opportunism of markets and traders.

By imposing these very great demands upon itself, the institutional process clearly can’t ~~is quite aware that it can~~ not lean on either the stability that characterises of public rationale or on the exponential benefits that market ~~commercial~~ logic promises and allows to the victors.

The evaluation of an institutional process must therefore serve these demands, by facilitating the reflexive hindsight and criticism of the protagonists (“shareholders”), particularly on four levels in particular.

- How, based on their meeting ~~outreach~~ (in the fullest sense) and on the “community” that they are endeavouring to build ~~intend to establish~~, how do the protagonists translate their own commitments into societal commitments?
- How do they promote ~~encourage~~ and build the affiliation of members and new members to a “shared ~~common~~ adventure”?
- How do they verify their creative loyalty to their foundings ~~fundamental~~ commitments? How do they overcome the tensions that this loyalty involves?
- How do they live out the “commensurate nature ~~relative homology~~” of that must exist between their ~~societal~~ commitments to society (their struggles ~~battles~~) and their internal operations?

~~It is clear that these questions are all linked.~~ Encouraging this questioning —~~it goes without saying that they are linked~~— seems to us to constitute both a commitment on the part of the association as it reflects on itself and a strong contribution to its operations and practices.

We are clearly “far” from an “external evaluation”, but in this way we hope to encourage its willingness to participate and its anxiety to escape from subjection.

Strategic ~~issues~~ ~~facing~~ ~~questions that are raised for~~ the Network today

~~At~~On the occasion of the second international forum ~~that was~~ held in Brussels in October 2010, with ~~high turn-out~~great participation from member countries (720 participants), the Network ~~came to an agreement based~~agreed on around a ~~certain~~ number of recommendations that were defined in a participatory way.

To us, these recommendations seem to respond to two types of strong ambitions.

Firstly, the recommendations ~~aimed~~wished to ~~highlight~~compare specific proposals (for street children, for street workers) and general recommendations concerning the ~~way our societies are developing~~method for development in our societies. This operation can only contrast with the “~~schizophrenia of the State~~ ~~schizophrenia~~” denounced by Pierre Bourdieu in 1993: ~~by this,~~ the sociologist showed ~~the fact~~ that the “right hand” of the State, which deals with its economic development, no longer wants to know what the “left hand” (which is concerned with equality, the distribution of wealth and the security of existence) is doing. This diagnostic can be extended to the supranational ~~level~~rationale, ~~which tends to exacerbate~~that has a tendency to worsen it.

One of the strategic ~~questions~~issues for the Network in the future will be to see how it can cease being confined to the ~~problematic~~ities of the “left hand” and ~~make a contribution to influence the~~ challenging of the dominant development model (which produces, reproduces, even justifies, situations of social ~~disaffiliation~~breakdown). In other words, according to the suggestion made by the Belgian and European ~~anti-poverty network in the fight against poverty~~, how can it avoid becoming a “social road sweeper”, a cynical appellation to camouflage the inequalities produced by the dominant development model in the name of “marketing” strategies for “reducing inequalities”. These strategies ~~come up with~~give themselves figures such as 20% less poverty by 2020, which will doubtlessly be ~~subject to very close~~ the object of the ~~sharpest~~ monitoring, but will not tackle the ~~key~~central question: who will the 20% be? What will happen to the others?

Secondly, we observed that the Network intended to connect the promotion of cultural rights (the right to be the creator of one's own existence, to choose a “lifestyle” etc.) ~~with~~and the defence of social rights (equal opportunities, security of existence).

Many people are ~~seeking~~doing research into this connection, but it must ~~really~~rhf be recognised that it is difficult to construct. The absence of trade unions at the ~~Forum of Social Street Workers Forum~~ constitutes a tangible sign of this.

A second strategic ~~question~~issue for the Network is therefore how to ~~expand~~tend itself, no longer to ~~similar~~“homogeneous” actors (from other countries that carry out street work) but to ~~different~~heterogeneous actors (actors defending different yet complementary rights). The presence of European ~~anti-poverty networks in the fight against poverty~~ at the Forum is encouraging in this regard, but this type of mobilisation should ~~be extended~~go into further depth, ~~even extend,~~ by finding the most suitable “format”. In any case, ~~the network will~~it will be necessary to try to ~~be~~ need to try and ~~one capable of~~ go beyond ~~letting past~~ “exchanges of practices” between social street workers (exchanges that are still necessary but that are not sufficient in this instance).

Finally, it seems to us that the experience of the Brussels Forum highlights a key point of the relevance of the Network's operation: that of the commensurate nature of relative homology between its battles (notably the fight for the freedom of each person to be the creator of their own existence) and the way the Network operates ~~very operation of the Network~~.

This commensurate nature ~~relative homology probably is apparent~~ manifests itself in ~~around~~ three specific key points ~~areas~~:

- the attention paid by the Network to its weakest members;
- the way in which the Network combines affiliation and freedom (in its relationships with members);
- the way in which the Network combines, in terms of direction and decision-making, the necessary ~~ed to come together as a groupe~~ collectivisation with ~~and the~~ respect for individual situations ~~realities~~; the way in which the Network's recommendations were able to be ~~negotiated~~, through a strong participatory process, is probably encouraging on this topic ~~and~~ should be ~~pursued~~ constitutes a path to follow.

It seems to us that these three strategic issue ~~question~~s: **how not to become a social “roadsweeper”**; **how to reach out to other actors**; **how to maintain the commensurate nature ~~homologous quality bet ofween~~ external struggles ~~combats~~ and the internal operations.** These make up the strategic priority points which emerged from ~~as revealed by~~ the Forum in October 2010.

Con formato: Fuente: Sin Negrita