

**Governance, Democracy and Evaluation  
– From not evaluating at all to learning from  
ex post evaluations – the strenuous  
Swedish way towards accountability**

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**Prepared for delivery at the European Evaluation Society Sixth Conference,  
Berlin September 29– October 2, 2004**

## **Abstract**

Before joining the European Union, scientifically based evaluations were scarce in Sweden. This lack was not considered a problem. The tradition was to prepare reforms by appointing Government commissions to investigate specific subject matters. The commissions would put forward proposals for social reform, often given the form of an experiment. Even ex ante evaluations were strange birds.

During the last decade there has been a complete change. An earlier approximation we have undertaken shows that some 190 million Euros are spent annually on evaluations in the public sector alone. Universities and Government agencies evaluate. In addition some 20 new specialized institutes have been established with the sole task to undertake evaluations.

An interesting question is to what extent this flood of evaluations is utilized in the decision-making process, more specifically so in Government Bills. The evidence in a preliminary study proves that they are not very much used. Our intention is to evaluate if and how evaluations have recently been used in two cases: educational policy and regional development policy. Based on documentary studies and interviews the reasons why evaluations are used or not used will be analyzed.

One hypothesis to be investigated is that political considerations undermine the use of evaluations. Such considerations must, of course, be respected. However, accountability requires that the reasons for disregarding the results of evaluations be reported so that learning from evaluations can continue and promote the understanding by evaluators and citizens of the complex nature of political decision-making. In our case studies we will focus on the relations between evaluations, accountability, learning and democracy including a comparison between evaluation made by government commissions and independent evaluators.

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# 1 Introduction

In this paper we will explore the production and utilisation of evaluations for policy decision-making in Sweden in view of learning more about practice among evaluators and politicians. Furthermore, how could practice be improved and in a wider perspective the democratic process including the whole chain from the electorate to Parliament and further to Government and back to the electorate? To bring in new substance into the discussion we make two in depth studies of the role of evaluations in adult education policy and in regional development policy during the period 1993 - 2004.

These two areas are interesting to study because of their political importance, the size of their budgets and the complexity of issues on the agenda. They have been found to be in the middle ranks as to the numbers of evaluations produced. Still, education was identified as one of the policy fields most in need of more evaluations (Fredriksson, 2002; Medelberg, 2002).

Earlier policy evaluations were used and produced in rather unsystematic ways. Nowadays evaluations are very common (Furubo, & Sandahl, 2002; Furubo, 2004a & b) but we still do not know much about their use. In section 2 we present a few starting-points for our analyses and some hypotheses we want to test. They are drawn:

- From the organisational development of Swedish evaluations activities
- From Swedish empirical discussions about evaluations
- From theoretical discussions about evaluations in Sweden.

In the next sections 3 – 6 we concentrate on our two case studies, documentary studies and some interviews. In section 7 a summary and the conclusions are to be found.

Methodologically, we are focusing Government policy making as judged by Government proposals and reporting to Parliament. And by evaluation we understand a study that produces some kind of judgement (assessment of the merit, the worth or value) of a government intervention. However, as a starting point in our case studies a wide definition of evaluation will be used. Everything that is called an evaluation in the documents studied is regarded as an evaluation. Initially, we also use a rather coarse definition of the “utilisation” of evaluations. But we will come back to these questions in the introduction to the case studies. It should perhaps also be added that we work in the Swedish tradition and we see evaluations as part of a rational decision-making process.

## **2 Starting-points and hypotheses**

### **2.1 From the organisational development of Swedish evaluation activities**

Before joining the European Union, scientifically based evaluations as systematic policy tools were scarce in Sweden. This lack was not considered a problem. The tradition was to prepare reforms by appointing Government commissions to investigate specific subject matters. The commissions would put forward proposals for social reform.

Often the important committees included members of Parliament and experts. They worked towards a common understanding of the problem at hand and reached at least partial consensus as to the analyses of the problems and the remedies. Knowledge from research was incorporated in the analyses and the identification of the consequences of the proposals investigated. Hearings (by written or oral procedures) were arranged after the commissions had presented their proposals. After that the Government would put forward a Bill to Parliament. (Furubo, 1994)

In reality, the work of the commissions has departed more and more from this ideal. There are fewer Parliamentarian commissions than there used to be; there is less time for analysis and fewer evaluations are made by them. (Riksdagens Revisorer, 1997; ESO, 1998; Fredriksson, 2002)

In spite of this reduction in research, analyses and evaluations made by commissions, there has been an enormous increase in evaluations produced in Sweden during the last decades as Government agencies have started to evaluate on a large scale. In addition a number of new specialized institutes have been established with evaluations as their main task.

The permanent resources the Government has to its disposal consist of two agencies the main task of which is to make evaluations - the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) and the Swedish National Financial Management Authority (Ekonomistyrningsverket). Since 2003 the Swedish Parliament also has its own, Riksrevisionen, the General Audit Office.

To government agencies that are responsible for ordinary policy implementation but also have important evaluation tasks belong:

- The Swedish National Tax Board (RSV)
- The Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA)
- The Swedish Integration Board (Integrationsverket)
- The National Social Insurance Board (RFV)
- The National Agency for Higher Education (HSV)
- The Swedish Agency for Education (Skolverket)<sup>i</sup>

- The Swedish Environmental Protection Board (Naturvårdsverket)
- The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen).

Among the agencies with important evaluation tasks but without policy implementation the following can be mentioned:

- The Swedish Energy Agency, which nowadays hosts the AES-programme that was created in 1975
- The Swedish Council on Technology Assessment in Health Care (SBU), since 1987
- The Institute for Housing and Urban Studies (IBF), since 1994
- The Swedish Institute for Transport and Communications Analysis (SIKA), since 1995
- The National Council for Crime Protection (BRÅ), since 1996
- The Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation (IFAU), since 1997
- The Swedish Institute for Food and Agricultural Economics (SLI), since 1999
- The Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies (ITPS), since 2001
- The Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), since 2001.

New evaluation institutes have been proposed or are under investigation: one for foreign aid initiatives and one for city development projects. In addition, the Government uses resources for evaluations made by special government commissions, working groups, researchers, and consultants. Some of these groups have had more long-term missions. For the time being there are two working (one expert-group for economic studies and one for studies concerning municipalities) and one being planned for (to work with environmental evaluations).

In Sweden researchers at universities and university colleges also do evaluations but the researchers that are primarily working with evaluations are rather few (Fredriksson, 2002). Two non-public research institute with an evaluation profile can also be mentioned: SNS (the Centre for Business and Policy Studies) since 1948 and SISTER (the Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research) since 2000.

In sum, evaluation is an important activity in the public sector nowadays. An earlier approximation we have undertaken shows that some € 190 million are spent annually on evaluations in the public sector alone.

Politicians in Sweden are apparently interested in evaluations as they have introduced and are financing a lot of evaluation activities. So it must be of interest to study the efficiency in the process of information exchange between evaluators and politicians. To the questions we want to investigate belong the following:

- How has the transition to the new evaluation situation including many new specialised evaluation agencies, evolved?
- What role is still played by the Commissions?
- How does the division of tasks between the ordinary government agencies and the agencies specialised in evaluations (either generally or in sector specific evaluations) look? Do they have different roles in the policymaking process?

## **2.2 From Swedish empirical discussions about evaluations**

There are few earlier Swedish studies about the use of evaluations. One study (Furubo, 1994) suggests that the overwhelming share (some 90 per cent) of the evaluations made by the national agencies is made for central government. The evidence that exists also indicates that the evaluations are not very much used by the Swedish Government. More for technical questions than for fundamental reassessments, perhaps. But they are communicated to the Government. (Finansdepartementet, 2002; Fredriksson, 2002; Furubo, 1994; 2004a; Medelberg, 2002; Vedung et al., 2000)

Two recent studies (Fredriksson, 2002; Medelberg, 2002) analyse evaluations and their utilisation by the Swedish Government. All instances where the word “evaluation” (and derivatives of that and effect analysis) is mentioned in the Government Budget Bills for the years 2000 and 2002 were picked out. Then all the evaluation studies found were characterised in different ways including the way in which they had been used in the Budget Bills. The number of evaluations found was 119 and 132 in the Budget Bills for 2000 and 2002 respectively.

The evaluations were unevenly distributed over the 27 budget areas in the Bills. Most evaluations were found for “Education and Research” with 30 and 24 evaluations for 2000 and 2002 respectively. The changes in numbers for the different policy areas between the years were rather frequent and there is generally an important volatility in the data. For the political fields we are interested in – education and regional development policy – it can be noted that for regional development policy there are 9 evaluations in the 2000 and 4 in 2002. For education the corresponding figure for 2002 is 12. Still, the policy area education was – together with social security, health and care, defence, and international co-operation – found to be most in need of more evaluations given the size of its budget, its complexity and its current importance.

The evaluations are then studied, classified and cross tabulated in different ways (but unfortunately not by policy fields):

- Utilisation, whether the evaluations were: just mentioned, commented upon, used for justification of the intervention studied, to be returned to later on by the Government or used to motivate a change of the programme.
- Quality: if they had a clearly defined measuring rod (in 2002  $\frac{3}{4}$  lack a measuring rod); if they had a good measure of effects (only 1/5 had such a measure); if they measured cost, discussed alternatives and cost-efficiency (few discussed costs, 1/10 discussed alternatives, still fewer cost-efficiency).
- By whom they were commissioned/initiated: the government or someone else.
- By whom they were produced: the government itself; a government commission; an agency specialised in general evaluation; an agency specialised in sector specific evaluations; an agency with evaluation among other duties; other public agencies; private consultants; other evaluators e.g. the European Union.
- To what extent the evaluations were critical: make mainly critical judgements, mixed positive and negative judgements, legitimising judgements, neutral judgements.
- What type of proposals are made: to change, modify or keep a given programme unchanged or no proposals.

The results for the producers of evaluations show that:

- Most evaluations were commissioned by the government. However, the share of governments commissioned evaluations fell somewhat during the period. In 2000 and 2002, between 59 and 48 per cent respectively were commissioned by the government.
- Most evaluations come from general sector agencies and that share increased (from 53 to 59 per cent). The agencies specialised in evaluation accounted for a small and decreasing share of the evaluations (from 15 to 10 per cent). Commissions and the government itself stood for a modest share of evaluations, around 10 per cent.
- The highest quality (judged by the use of a measuring rod) is found in the evaluations produced by the specialised agencies. The evaluations produced by the government also hold a high quality. The ordinary agencies have a share of 20-25 per cent of evaluations using a good measuring rod and the commissions a share of only 10 per cent (average figures for 2000 and 2002).
- The quality (judged by the use of a measuring rod) was somewhat higher for the evaluations that were commissioned by the government. The government mainly used the ordinary agencies. Next were the specialised agencies, the government itself and finally the commissions.
- The most critical producers are the specialised agencies, the least the government itself. The commissions and the private consultants make more balanced judgements.
- As to proposals the most striking result is that the agencies specialised in sector specific evaluations very often do not make any proposals at all.

For utilisation we can note that the most common thing is to use the evaluations to justify a given intervention or just to mention or comment upon the evaluations. In 15–20 per cent of the cases they are used to motivate a change in the programme.

Does it make any difference for the utilisation

- if the government or someone else is the commissioner? It seems that the government uses the evaluations it has commissioned a little more for change and the other evaluations a little more for comments or justification.
- who is the producer? The government uses its own evaluation more for change and the sector specific evaluations for justification.
- the message – if it is critical or not? Critique seems to be mainly commented upon and justifications used for justification. Change may be motivated by all sorts of evaluations.
- proposals? Evaluations proposing change are used to motivate change.
- the quality (as judged by the use of a clear measuring rod)? This factor seems to be unrelated to the utilisation of evaluations.

In sum, the government commissions most evaluations (but not more than 50-60 per cent). The ordinary agencies dominate these commissions and the evaluations in general. During this period no break through is observed for the specialised agencies and accordingly for quality and critique (as the specialised agencies hold higher quality and are more critical) which might be related to the fact that they seem to be reluctant to put forward distinct proposals.

The commissions make few evaluations and the evaluations they make are of low quality. Facts, that seem to contradict the traditional reputation of commissions.

The evaluations are normally not used to motivate change but rather just noted or used for justification. The government seems a little bit more interested in using the evaluations it has itself commissioned or produced for change as well as evaluations containing clear proposals. Whether evaluations are critical or not doesn't influence their use for change. Quality doesn't seem to influence the use of evaluations.

To the questions we want to investigate belong the following:

- What about the awareness of evaluations in political decision-making?
- Is it still true that evaluations are more used for small, technical questions/programme changes than for the underpinning of more important reforms or new initiatives?
- Has there been any change in the position of evaluations made by ordinary agencies versus specialised agencies over the longer time span?
- Do the evaluations continue to be mainly used for justifications? Are they still just mentioned or commented upon?

- To what extent do results differ when you look at more types of Bills and over a longer time period in stead of just Budget Bills for the years 2000 and 2002?

### **2.3 From theoretical discussions about evaluations in Sweden**

In Sweden (as well as in other countries) there are different strands in the theoretical discussions about evaluations: some more oriented towards the Parliamentary process; others to political practice; and still others towards the different roles of politicians and evaluators.

In the *Parliamentarian process* the relations between politicians and researchers/evaluators can be seen as one step in a circle of relations between the electorate, Parliament and Government. If more and better knowledge, of relevance for political decision-making, is produced it is interesting to investigate what happens to its utilisation all along the chain – including the step between politicians and researchers/evaluators. (Peterson et. al., 2002)

The role of evaluations in the overall parliamentary process should, of course, not be exaggerated (Tarschys, 2004). The results of evaluations can reach the electorate directly via media or indirectly via the government and Parliament. A more controversial role would be to give evaluators an independent role in the Parliamentary process. But not going that far, evaluations can still be part of a rational decision making process where arguments are exchanged and valued. Of course, when fundamental policy decisions are at issue value judgements and political considerations can make results from evaluations irrelevant. As we see it, this is quite normal and does not necessarily jeopardise a rational decision making process. However, parliamentary democracy and accountability requires that the reasons for eventually discarding or disregarding the results of evaluations be reported. Then learning for and from evaluations can continue. And the understanding by evaluators and citizens of the complex nature of political decision-making will be promoted. In that sense, we think that evaluations have a role to play in rational decision making within the framework of political processes and as such evaluations can be a policy driver.

Politicians are *practitioners*. Politicians have wide information networks. They receive formal and informal information from the political party to which they belong, as members of Government, of Parliament, of boards etc. From international contacts with other governments or international organisations, e.g. the EU and the OECD. In the process they also get informed about results from evaluations. Politicians have to muddle through an information jungle – acting more like artists, using intuition and judging all sorts of available information. (Schwandt, 2004a & b; Tarschys, 1986).

For their grand decisions evaluations have to be seen in relation to the fact that

- The politicians often act in response to a crisis, an opinion storm, media pressure, intervention from important pressure groups (e.g. LO, the trade union of blue collar workers, in Sweden). Are there any evaluations at hand at the right moment? Are those right types of evaluation and at the right time? Expansionary proposals at good economic times and cost saving proposals at bad economic times? (Tarschys, 1986).
- Government interventions have to be negotiated - within government and/or with other political parties. There is always a lack of resources. Political priorities have to influence decisions. Do existing evaluations say anything about the relative merit of different actions, or combinations of actions?
- There exists a lot of other information besides evaluations. Are the existing evaluations more relevant than other types of information? Are they future oriented enough? (Tarschys, 1986).

If there is a need for and time for additional evidence, an interesting question is whom do the politicians then ask for advice – existing commissions, commissions to be appointed, agencies with evaluation as their main task, other agencies, independent evaluators, researchers, knowledgeable people. Do they develop an evaluation strategy? Do they change it as the political situation and goals may change? Maybe politicians are more interested in having new ideas and overviews from evaluations than scientific quality? (Furubo, 2004a; Sohlman, 2004; Tarshcys, 1986)

For more routine decision making concerning the maintenance of and minor changes in government interventions, evaluations could be expected to play a major role. Changes in implementation would be less political (Furubo, 2004b). Civil servants may be expected to be more involved in these decisions and at the same time handle both the commissioning and the reception of evaluations. And they may be more interested in other aspects of evaluations than politicians – their relevance, reliability and quality e.g. the classification aspects in the study mentioned above: their measuring rods, their estimates of costs and effects, their proposals, critique etc. Other aspects they may be interested in how the evaluations handle uncertainties, whether they relate to research and the scientific reputation of the evaluator. Their problems may be more technical – to have the right answer at the right time – and their difficulties to keep abreast of all that is produced, to have systematic knowledge. They may need overviews of results from evaluations and consolidated evaluation knowledge. There may be less political sensitivities in these cases – if the evaluators combine criticism and political remedies; if they leave open for different types of conclusions; if the evaluations have become discredited being promoted by media or pressure groups. (Furubo, 2004a; Sohlman, 2004; Premfors, 1987; Tarschys, 1986; Fredriksson, 2002; Medelberg, 2002).

The question about *roles of politicians and researchers/evaluators* relates to the two discussions hinted at above. For one thing politicians are expected

to produce visions, send political signals and introduce fundamental social reforms, which may not be the normal role of evaluators. On the other they (together with the civil servants at the ministries) take a lot of minor decisions concerning e.g. changes in existing programmes where they may be in more close contact with evaluators (Furubo, 1994; 2004a).

Political visions should perhaps be the exclusive task of politicians and not a task of researchers/evaluators. But maybe the latter should be prepared to answer question whenever a window of opportunity opens up. Or perhaps the evaluators should keep even further away from political practice not even drawing too many conclusions from their evaluations or turning them into proposals for actions. Also in this respect there are different views among Swedish researchers/evaluators. Some think a very clear distinction should always be made between the tasks of politicians and researchers or evaluators. Others are more inclined to welcome a participation of researchers/evaluators in the political process. At least their evaluations should lead up to some clear policy conclusions. Some ask for more outspoken evaluators others for more research-oriented evaluators. (Tarchys, 2004; Gustavsson, 2004)

To sum up it would seem interesting for us

- To follow up on big issues versus small issues. Is the role of evaluations different when it comes to important reforms versus more routine questions and related to this in relation to politicians and to civil servants?
- Are the roles of politicians and civil servants in the ministries fundamentally different from the roles of evaluators?
- Given the evaluation activities, does the government pass on a fair reporting of them to Parliament?
- How are the evaluations used?
- What role do evaluations have in relation to other types of knowledge and information in the political process as they are described in the Bills?

### **3 Two case studies – adult education and regional policy – methods used**

We are focusing on *Government policy making* as judged by Government proposals and reporting to Parliament 1993/94 – 2003/04. We have chosen to make two case studies – one for adult educational policy and one for regional development policy – to be able to go more in depth into the analysis. And these two areas were judged relevant both as to their political importance and the reform activities that have been going on during the period studied.

We base our analysis of the reasons why evaluations are used or not used on documentary studies of the Bills to Parliament. They are supplemented by a few interviews that we will use in the summary analysis of our results in section 7.

By *evaluation* we understand a study that produces some kind of judgement (assessment of the merit, the worth or value) of a government intervention. Normally these studies will be made *ex post* (i.e. after an intervention has taken place so that the effects of it can be observed), but also *ex ante* evaluations are possible to make as well as evaluations during the implementation of a government programme. (Fredriksson, 2002; Furobo, 2004a; Vedung, 1997). Different aspects of a government intervention can be evaluated – the implementation process or e.g. the socio-economic effects of the intervention.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes a very wide definition of evaluation is used. Everything that is called an evaluation in the documents studied is regarded as an evaluation (Fredriksson, 2002; Medelberg, 2002). We also use this method as a starting point in our case studies.

We have investigated three types of Bills to Parliament:

- Budget Bills
- Sector Specific Bills
- Government Reports to Parliament.

The budget bills are the normal channel for presenting proposals to Parliament. When more important or complex reforms are initiated a Sector Specific Bill may be called for. The Government Reports are used when the government wants to communicate to Parliament its views on certain subject matters that are not up for decision yet. There are no proposals in them that Parliament has to decide upon.

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<sup>1</sup> Other definitions are also used. some researchers exclude *ex ante* evaluations from their definitions of “evaluations”. There are also divergent opinions about implementation and effects – whether an evaluation should include both aspects or could concentrate on one or the other. (Vedung et al., 2002)

In each case study we had to identify which bills to include in our study. A first approach was to include all bills where “regional development policy” and “adult education” were mentioned. The next step included a discretionary selection of policy documents in order to be able to concentrate on the most relevant ones. Thus we excluded the reports on Nordic co-operation, EU co-operation, the financial situation of the public sector, and the situation in the municipalities. For the case study of regional development we have also excluded the Budget Bills. Regional Development Policy is given a very narrow definition in the Budget Bills that does not correspond to the wide definition used in the Sector Specific Bills. The “normal” relation between Budget Bills and Sector Specific Bills is thus only illustrated by the case study of adult education.

Regional policy aspects have also been present in quite a number in specific bills dealing with subject matters such as equality policy and environment policy. These have been excluded from our study.

Perhaps it should be mentioned, that the first Bills we look at were produced by a non-socialist government in power between 1991 and 1994. From 1994 and onwards the Swedish government has been a social-democratic one. We have, however, not tried to use this change in Government as an explanatory factor in our analysis.

Initially, we will use a rather coarse definition of the “*utilisation*” of evaluations. Whenever we found an “evaluation” mentioned in the bills it was included in the study and classified as follows:

- An up-coming evaluation either a new one or an earlier announced one
- An existing evaluation that was just mentioned
- Whether the government expressed an opinion about the evaluation
- Whether the proposals in the bill were based on the evaluation mentioned.

This material was then further analysed as described below. On the one hand we look at evaluations and their use in the decision-making process. On the other hand we look at the decision making processes to find out how evaluations come in. (Furubo, 1994). In that way we can identify both the direct use of evaluations and the indirect use. In the latter case evaluations forms part of knowledge building for later and more diffuse use (cf. Weiss, 1975).

As Government Commissions used to be so important in Swedish policy-making we have tried to look especially at the role they play today. Two types of Commissions can be distinguished – Parliamentarian and Expert Commissions. In the former case a number of Parliamentarian representatives sit on the Commission and forms a kind of board while the work is done by a secretariat. In the latter case often only one expert, i.e. a special investigator, is appointed by Government to do the work together with a secretary. The instructions from the Government for the Commissions are found in the official series of Directives to commissions. And their reports

are published in the Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU-series). The publications of Government working-groups are found in the official Ministry publications series (Ds-series).

## **4 Adult education**

### **4.1 Introduction and an overview of results**

First, let us briefly mention what adult education consists of in Sweden.

There is:

- Municipal adult education (at primary, secondary and to some extent at post-secondary level)
- Popular education – the folk high schools and the study circles
- Swedish for immigrants
- Adult education for disabled people.

All in all for adult education we analysed

- 13 Sector Specific Bills
- 4 Government Reports to Parliament
- The Budget Bills for the years 1994 to 2004 (including the Supplementary Budget Bills to the extent that they had something to say about adult education).

All reports refer to existing evaluations and upcoming evaluations. As shown by Table 1 the great majority of Sector Specific Bills and Budget Bills also refer to evaluations. Up-coming evaluations are more frequently mentioned in the Specific Bills than in the Budget Bills compared to existing evaluations.

The relation between evaluations and proposals to Parliament in these Bills is more complex. For one thing most bills contain many proposals and some of them might be based on the results from evaluations and others not. In no Bill are all the proposals motivated by evaluations. Proposals partly based on evaluations are found in 12 out of 23 Sector Specific Bills and Budget Bills containing proposals for adult education policy – 4 out of 13 for Sector Specific Bills and 8 out of 12 for Budget Bills. Such proposals are thus relatively more frequent for Budget Bills than for Sector Specific Bills.

**Table 1. The utilisation of evaluations of adult education in Bills**

	Sector Specific Bills	Budget Bills	Supplementary Budget Bill
Mentioning of evaluations			
Up-coming	11	8	0
Existing	6	9	0
No mentioning	2	1	10
Number of Bills	13	11	10
Proposals			
Based partly on evaluations	4	8	0
Not based on evaluations	9	2	6
Number of Bills with proposals	13	10	6

Table 1 also shows that the Supplementary Budget Bills are different. Evaluations are not part their repertoire. Proposals are made in them but they have a character of corrections to an earlier Budget Bill. To get a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and the relationship in general between evaluations and proposals to Parliament in the Bills you have, however, to relate to what has been going on in the sector during the period studied:

- The AEI (Adult Education Initiative) was introduced, launched, completed and a transition to “business as usual” initiated.
- Advanced Vocational Training was launched, put to trial and regularised.
- The decision making about education and training including municipal adult education was decentralised to municipalities and management by goals and results introduced already in 1991 but much energy has since been devoted to the development of an adequate system for reporting, evaluation and quality assessment.
- Popular education was also re-organised in 1991. The decision making was decentralised to the Council for Popular Education (FBR) and a predetermined process for accounting and evaluation put in place.
- For ILA (Individual Learning Accounts) Government set aside funding in the Budget Bill for 2002. A Guideline bill was produced in 2002 (Bill “002/2002:175) but the implementation is still awaiting.
- Minor reform processes were also going on in different parts of the adult education system e.g. for SFI (Swedish for immigrants) and adult education for the disabled.

Below we will take a closer look at these developments. For the minor changes we will only include one example and that is SFI.

## **4.2 Examples of reform processes**

### **4.2.1 The AEI (Adult Education Initiative)**

When the AEI was launched in Spring 1996 (Bill 1995/96:25; 1995/96:150; 1995/96:202; 1995/96:207; 1995/96:222) we think it is fair to say that that it was not much based on evaluations.

The overarching goal of the incoming social-democratic government was to reduce unemployment by half. Unemployment was at unprecedented high levels at the time. And the AEI was a cornerstone of the Government's programme to reduce unemployment.

The process started in October 1995 with the 1995/96:25 so called Growth Bill where an education initiative was announced. At the same time the Commissions working at the time were asked, by February 1996, to come in with suggestions for the contents of such an initiative that was to be more fully presented in spring 1996.

In the meantime in the Bills 1995/96:150 and 1995/96:202, the training and the number of training slots that were to be financed began to be more clearly specified. To start with 100 000 training slots were to be provided. Then came the 1995/96:222 Employment Bill and the 1996/97:1 Budget Bill for 1997 with still more specifications. In the latter the accompanying study grant system, UBS, was introduced. The 1996/97:150 Economic Spring Bill opened up for even more study seats to be provided (up to 140 000).

There were no clear evaluations underpinning these decisions as no evaluations directed towards this problem area had been produced. There did not even exist an evaluation of the effects of municipal adult education. There were, however, some indications that municipal adult education was inefficient and had to be renewed. Labour market training at the high levels now operated was thought not possible to expand further. To the general arguments in favour of an education initiative belonged: that Sweden should compete with high skill levels not low wages; that education would increase the productivity and wages of low skilled individuals; forecasts showing an increasing demand for more highly skilled labour etc.

However, very soon, i.e. even before the programme started to be implemented, 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1997, the idea came up that the AEI was to be accompanied by evaluations. Still, the first traces of these evaluations do not appear in the Bills before 1998/99. This may not be surprising given that it was decided to ask the sitting Commission for the Promotion of Adult Education to initiate independent evaluations. In May 1997 the Commission got the instructions and the budget for the independent evaluations. A tender process started and was concluded in 1997. Therefore in March 1998, the Commission could only report to the Government about the planning of

evaluation. A second report was produced in March 1999 and the Commission's final report in March 2000. They contained evaluations results but, of course, the labour market effects for the participants were still rudimentary. This was i.a. due to the fact that many individuals continued to higher education after the AIE. When the Commission had finished its tasks there was no organisation responsible for the co-ordination of evaluations results.

The evaluation programme was therefore not of much use even when the political conclusions were to be draw from the AEI. The programme was a five-year programme and ended in 2002. Well in advance the stakeholders had to be informed as to what would happen after the programme. That was communicated in February 2001 (Bill 2000/01:72).

For the successive adjustment of the programme, that i. a. appeared in the Supplementary Budget Bills the recommendations the Delegation within the Government that was initially responsible for the practical handling of the programme and the reporting from the Swedish Agency for Education were more important than evaluations. At first the number of study seats was set at 100 000. Then they were increased to 140 000. And then again reduced to 100 000 and further reduced towards the end of the programme. As the labour market situation improved the demand for adult education decreased.

However, the up-coming evaluations are mentioned innumerable times in the Bills during the period. There might have been a genuine interest to learn from the evaluations and some disappointments that results were so slow to show up. There might also have been some frustration as to the many aspects to the evaluation of this huge programme – its implementation and macro- and microeconomic effects for the individuals, the schools, the teachers, the local employment offices and labour markets, the municipalities etc. The interest in evaluations could also have been motivated by an expectation that they would provide justifications for the programme and by this time evaluations had more or less become a political must.

One new feature of the time period after the AEI programme was the introduction of a recruiting study grant (Bill 2001/02:161). Again this reform was not based on evaluations but it was to be evaluated in the future. The idea of an accompanying evaluation was, by the way, a new feature in the policy area of study grants and study loans. Changes in that system have generally not been based on evaluations (e.g. Bill 1999/00:10).

#### **4.2.2 AVT (Advanced Vocational Training)**

With the Advanced Vocational Training the situation was somewhat different. In this case the Bill had been preceded by an investigation made by an Expert Commission. Its proposals (SOU 1995:38) had been sent out for hearing by written procedure. Its proposals were to a large extent carried forward by the Government – that there was a need for AVT, which should be introduced and that 1/3 of the training should take place at a workplace. So in the 1995/96:145 Bill, the Government proposed that an experiment with such Advanced Vocational Training should be carried out and that it should be implemented by a Parliamentary Commission. The Commission should also see to it that an independent evaluation of the experiment was carried out and itself produce a final report with the Commission's conclusion.

An experiment was motivated by the fact that there were uncertainties both as to the demand for AVT and the supply of training slots by companies. The experiment should also serve the purpose of finding an answer to the controversial question if a new administrative organisation was needed and in that case where to locate it – in the university sector or in the adult education sector. However, the whole idea of advanced vocational training came from other quarters than evaluations and, of course, an experiment can be seen as an alternative to evaluations in case of new ideas that may be difficult to evaluate in advance.

The government, however, soon started to hint at its intention to make Advanced Vocational Training a regular feature of the education system. Anyhow, an evaluation was produced (SOU 1999:119) and a report from the Commission (SOU 1999:122). The conclusions in the evaluation were rather vague. It was thought worthwhile to pursue the AVT but this could be done in different ways. The Commission made more precise recommendations. They were to a large extent picked up in the Government Bill 2000/01:63. Still, the Government's decisions had been preceded by a report (Ds 2000:33) from a Government working group. The report finally recommended, that the AVT should be handled by an independent government agency. It is interesting to note that this agency is not supposed to evaluate the AVT. There are to be independent evaluations of the AVT but it is not clear who is going to do them.

#### **4.2.3 Popular education**

The evaluation process set up when popular education was reformed in 1991 consisted of self-evaluations to be made by the folk high schools, the study associations and the Council for Popular Education. Independent evaluations were to be made by an Expert Commission. Such an evaluation was produced in 1997 (SOU 1996:159) and to a large extent the proposals in Bill 1997/98:115 are based on the evaluations. That holds for the general judgement that popular education was worth government support to the

same extent as earlier. The Government also picked up the idea that a new target group should be introduced: the unemployed. There were divergent views on the organisation of evaluations. The investigator recommended a permanent unit within the ministry. The Government, however, decided that the process should continue as before:

- the Council of Popular Education and the folk high schools and associations of study circles should make their own evaluations and report to the Government
- every 5<sup>th</sup> year an independent evaluation should be made by a Commission but for the future with more Parliamentary participation. With few strings attached to the funding of popular education, which is to continue to be “free and voluntary”, there has to be a strong evaluation process.

#### **4.2.4 Governance**

After the reform in 1991 the municipalities and the schools (including the schools for Municipal Adult Education) are to evaluate themselves. The Swedish Agency for Education is to follow, monitor, evaluate and inspect all forms of education that the municipalities are responsible for: pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools and adult education.

Already in 1993 the Parliamentary Audit Office and the National Audit Office started to produce evaluations concerning different aspects of the system for reporting, evaluation and quality assessment (RR 1993/94; RRV 1994, 1996). A series of changes were also introduced during the period. In 1997 it was decided that municipalities should deliver Annual Quality Reports. In 1999 the Swedish Agency for Education got a formal organisation for inspections. Sanctions were introduced for the Agency to be used against municipalities that did not comply with regulations. Finally, the tasks of the Swedish Agency for Education were divided between the agency itself and a new National Agency for School Improvement. The Swedish Agency for Education was to concentrate on the formal regulatory side including evaluations while the Swedish Agency for School Improvement should support quality development in the schools.

So far, no specialised agency for evaluations has been judged necessary in this field. For the university-sector it is the National Agency for Higher Education that produces evaluations. By whom the AVT should be evaluated has not been decided yet. Changes in the system for study grants and loans have normally been proceeded by work done by Commissions. The sector agency, the Swedish National Board of Student Aid, has not been doing many evaluations.

#### **4.2.5 ILA (Individual Learning Accounts)**

The Guideline Bill 2001/02:175 for the ILA was preceded by an Expert Commission, producing two reports (SOU 2000:51; SOU 2000:191). But in this case it was ever clearer (than with the AEI and the AVT) that the government had to a large extent made up its mind before the investigator was appointed. The investigator was to come up with proposals as to how the money, in an agreement with the Green and Left party, set aside in the budget for 2000 and the coming years should be used for individual competence development. General arguments were underpinning the instruction to the investigator: a higher level of competence could counteract unemployment and pre-pensioning, facilitate restructuring of the labour market and increase the competitiveness of Swedish firms as studies had shown e.g. that enterprises with a higher level of education were more productive than other enterprises.

The reason that the Government produced a “Guideline Bill” and not an ordinary Bill was that the Government wanted to report back to Parliament even though all questions concerning the ILA had not been solved. What remained to find out was i. a. how the system should be administrated, what courses should be eligible for subsidies and how the system should be made to comply with EU financial rules. It also turned out that the proposals had no great backing – at least not from the LO, the blue collar worker trade union, or the socialdemocrats.

The intention of the Government was that it should return to Parliament when these questions had been solved. Already in the Guideline Bill it was indicated that the reform should be evaluated. The statistical follow-up should be taken care of by Statistics Sweden and the evaluations by the relevant agencies in addition to a coordinated national evaluation project and independent research projects.

#### **4.2.6 SFI (Swedish For Immigrants)**

The Bill 1993/941:26 is a good example of political changes that are continuously going on in minor reform processes. Since the latest reform of SFI in 1991, SFI had been evaluated by the Parliamentarian Audit Office and the National Audit Office. They had shown that the education was still inefficient and the dropout rate high, that the students had to wait a long time before they could start their studies, that the teaching was not adapted to the varying competence level of the students etc. The description of the situation given by the Swedish Agency for Education gave the same impression.

So the Government proposed i.a. that the municipalities should be obliged to offer SFI within six months when demanded, that national test should be administered to the students and that the Swedish Agency for Education should follow and evaluate the reform.

## **4.3 Some conclusions**

### ***Big and small questions***

Big, new reforms are not based on evaluations (cf. AEI, AVT, ILA, the recruiting study grants ). But nowadays they are accompanied by evaluations for different reasons: for justification (even if there sometimes has been a disappointment with slow delivery of evaluations results), for evaluations having become political “must”.

The system for study grants and loans has traditionally not been evaluated.

Small questions – continuing reform processes – there evaluation plays an important role (e.g. SFI).

### ***Adjustment mechanisms***

At least one of these reforms (AVT) was introduced as an experiment. The AEI was also a kind of experiment where successive adjustments were implemented on recommendation of the Delegation within the Government that was initially responsible for the practical handling of the programme.

### ***Organisation of evaluations***

The Ministry of Education relies for evaluations on

- The Swedish Agency for Education - in a similar way as it does rely on the National Agency for Higher Education for higher education. It remains to be seen where AVT is to be evaluated.
- Systems of evaluation at local, regional and national levels are being introduced.
- Commissions
  - They may be asked to commission evaluations on behalf of the Government (AEI, AVT) – e.g. for more truth worthiness
  - Commissions may be set up to produce evaluations (Popular Education) – as a complement and counteracting factor to self-evaluations in the sector.

There is no specialised agency for evaluations in the field of adult education.

Evaluations have been referred to all along since the first bill studied for the fiscal year 1993/94.

### **Commissions**

Commissions are important for the production of proposals. They may be called upon when there is a lack of time. A window of opportunity may then open up for them to feed results into the political decision-making process (AEI).

In all the big reform processes described above commissions have played (or were supposed to play) an important role for evaluation (AEI, AVT, popular education and ILA). The only exception is Governance. Minor reform processes can go on and integrate evaluations without the help of Commissions.

## 5 Regional development policy

### 5.1 Introduction and an overview of results

Swedish regional policy – or the more recent concept used, regional development policy – exists in a broader as well as in a more narrow meaning. Firstly the subject area can be defined as being identical to a specific item of expenditure on the debit side of the government budget. In a broader sense – as used many a time when Government presents its specific Bills to Parliament aspects and subject areas such as cultural, educational and employment policies are included.

During the period 1993–2004 the word ‘regional policy’ or ‘regional development policy’ appears in 117 Government Bills or reports to Parliament, including different annexes to the Budget bills. There has on average each year been one bill without any reference to evaluation at all.

All in all, for the sector in question only 7 Sector specific bills have been presented to Parliament, and in addition 1 government report.

The eight bills and reports falls into three different categories. Firstly, four bills concerns strategic *proposals on regional development policy in general*. Those are (1) Rural areas and districts during a process of change (prop.1993/94:140), the only bill in this study presented by a non-socialist government, (2) Regional policy (prop. 1994/95:161), (3) Regional development and growth for employment and welfare (prop. 1997/98:62) and (4) A policy for growth in all of Sweden (prop.2001/02:4). Two of the bills deal mainly with *the organisation of the public sector on the regional level*, they are: (5) The regional organisation of the public sector (prop. 1996/98:36) and (6) Regional co-operation and governmental regional administration (prop. 2002/02:7). One Bill and one report to Parliament, finally, concerns *the development and problem of the metropolis areas*. They are (7) Development and Equity – a policy for the metropolis areas for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (prop. 1997/98:165) and (8) Local development work in metropolis areas (skr. 2003/04:49).

**Table 2. The utilisation of evaluations of regional development policy in Bills/Reports**

	Sector Specific Bills/Reports
<b>Mentioning of evaluations</b>	
Up-coming	8
Existing	6
No mentioning	2
Number of Bills/Reports	8
<b>Proposals</b>	
Based partly on evaluations	3
Not based on evaluations	4
Number of Bills with proposals	7

As shown in Table 2. up-coming evaluations are mentioned most frequently. But in two of the bills existing evaluations are not referred to. Only in three out of seven bills are proposals to a certain extent founded on the result of evaluations.

## **5.2 Bills on regional development policy in general**

### ***Rural areas and regions during a process of change (prop. 1993/94:140)***

This Bill is the only one put forward by a non-socialist government during the period studied concerning regional development policy. Compared to Bills from a later date, this one is dealing with the subject in a more narrow sense.

Although dating back to the period before Sweden became a member of the European Union a specific section deals with the results from evaluations that had been undertaken.

The Swedish Civil Aviation Administration – the agency responsible for the subject in question – is assigned to undertake an evaluation concerning the de-regulation of the Swedish national aviation market.

An evaluation of the tasks and responsibility of the Council for Popular Education concerning local development and rural development for which large resources are given, is announced. No specifics, however, is given about by whom.

As concerns different forms of subsidies to business an evaluation and the expert opinions on this evaluation from different government agencies undertaken by the National Rural Development Agency is thoroughly

accounted for. This as well as the fact the most of them are unanimous in their critique.

The National Audit office has evaluated the support/subsidies to so-called local cooperative development centers. The evaluation indicates advantages as well as a well functioning form of subsidy and as a result more resources are to this area is proposed.

An evaluation undertaken by the Swedish Consumer Agency concerning the to support to commercial services in the sparsely populated areas is quoted. As a result from the agency's positive conclusions more resources as well as some improvement of the construction of the subsidy are proposed.

The Swedish Business Development Agency (NUTEK) has evaluated different subsidies to business enterprises during the last two decades and concluded that the subsidies throughout were well functioning.

### ***Regional policy (prop. 1994/95:161)***

In this bill some new goals for the Swedish regional policy are formulated as well as some recommendations concerning adjustments and elaborations of different regional political actions. By way of introduction several reports and expert opinions are enumerated, none of those an evaluation however.

When describing different subsidies or support to business enterprises several evaluations are mentioned, especially from the Swedish Business Development Agency (NUTEK), which underlined the positive effects. Also concerning the effects of employment subsidies more than one report from NUTEK is referred to. This is also the case with the system for reduced payroll taxes where evaluations and reports from different government agencies are mentioned but not in any details.

Several improvements and changes are announced in different subsidies in general terms referred to as consequences of evaluations but primarily as a result of the prevailing budget deficit.

Finally several future evaluations are announced, but not by whom they are to be carried out.

***Regional development and growth for employment and welfare  
(prop. 1997/98:62)***

New goals and guiding principles for the Swedish regional development policy are presented in this bill as well as proposals and assessments concerning future directions and design of different measures for promoting regional development and growth.

In this bill it is proposed that a reduction of pay roll taxes is to be effectuated. The effects and consequences is to be evaluated, by whom is not specified.

Concerning the EU Structural funds there is a specific section describing reports and evaluations. The midterm evaluations are in general terms criticized as they are undertaken before any effects are to be found. Specific evaluations of different aspects undertaken by the Swedish Agency for Public Management, the National Audit Office and the Swedish Business Development Agency are quoted.

A proposal concerns the regional developments strategies in the future, which are to be monitored and evaluated. And evaluations should in the future be of better quality and also the monitoring should be more efficient. No specifics are mentioned, however, concerning by whom these are to be handled.

An evaluation of a relatively new government agency – Invest in Sweden – is referred to as an illustration of how well this agency functions. There is no information about by whom it has been undertaken.

***A policy for Growth in all of Sweden (prop. 2001/02:4)***

A new concept for regional development policy is there introduced. This bill is also different from the earlier ones in the respect that it is more comprehensive including subject areas of a more indirect connection to regional development policy, such as education, labour market policy, transportation, culture and environmental policy.

Concerning evaluation efforts they are concentrated to mainly the business enterprise subsidies. Notably the bill refers to studies not only undertaken by government agencies but also by private consultants. On-going evaluations especially those concerning grants from the EU Structural Funds are referred to in great detail, not however by whom they are undertaken.

Several non-specified evaluations pointing at problems concerning the division of labour between different agencies are referred to. By whom they are produced is however not specified.

When mentioned by whom different evaluations are undertaken, however, most concerns government agencies such as the Swedish Business Development Agency and but also the Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation.

Evaluations are specifically important is stated concerning the local development agreements/contracts. Further it is generally stated that “an efficient governmental control implies monitoring, statements of results and evaluation.”

A critical evaluation from the Institute for Labour Market Policy Institute on the local labour market boards is quoted. When describing policies and ambitions in areas such as culture and education evaluations are not mentioned at all. Maybe the explanation is simply that there are other specific government bills dealing directly and solely with those areas.

There is a special section on the importance of monitoring and evaluation as an important policy aspect of the policy of the metropolis areas.

An important new aspect in this bill is that the new regional growth programmes replace the earlier growth agreements. The Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies is commissioned to evaluate these in cooperation with several other government agencies. Furthermore, an unspecified evaluation is to be undertaken towards the end of the period in question. It is not announced however, by whom.

En evaluation by the Swedish Business Development Agency concerning business advisors to women is accounted for. This agency reports that the endeavour has been successful, but in spite of this it is proposed in the bill that a decision whether the venture should be continued or not is to be made not at present but further ahead.

An evaluation and reconsideration – unknown by whom – is announced concerning special government subsidies to the venture capital market.

Finally an evaluation is to be undertaken by the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies and the Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation jointly of the employment subsidy.

### **5.3 Regional organisation**

#### ***The regional organization of the public sector (prop. 1996/97:36)***

The bill proposes a new organization – an experiment in four administrative provinces in Sweden. From the very beginning an evaluation is to be undertaken and the basis for this is defined in a special section. One of the main reasons for the experimental organisation is the imminent need for better coordination and joint actions from the government but also and not least concerning monitoring and evaluation.

The proposed continuous evaluation is to be undertaken by a specially appointed parliamentary commission.

#### ***Regional co-operation and government regional administration (prop. 2001/02:7)***

An experimental organisation including two large regions as well as yet another experimental endeavour in four administrative provinces have been evaluated by a parliamentary commission. The problem, however, is due to the fact that the experiments have existed only a short time. The evaluation is described in large detail as well as written opinions from those concerned. While awaiting the final evaluation, the experiment is prolonged. The evaluations are to be continued and reinforced. Finally it is repeatedly emphasized the importance of evaluation as one of the tasks of the administrative provinces.

### **5.4 The development of metropolis areas**

#### ***Development and Equity – a policy for the metropolis areas in the 21st century (prop. 1997/98:165)***

We have chosen to include the two bills specifically dealing with the special problems in the metropolis areas during the studied period. The reason is that in both of them it is proclaimed that regional development policy as well as policies for the metropolis areas derives from the very same principles and that they reinforce each other.

By way of introduction the bill proclaims regarding the responsibility of government that “The government should also be accountable for evaluations and exchange of knowledge regarding the experience of different policies in this subject area”.

The appointment of a special delegation for the policy of the metropolis areas is announced. One of its main tasks is to “monitor local development contracts and be responsible for independent evaluations of them.”

### ***Local development work in metropolis areas (skr. 2003/04:49)***

The most recent of the bills studied here is not a proper bill but a report from Government to Parliament, mainly concerning the special problems of the metropolis areas and the development since the bill two years earlier. As a report there are no proposals upon which Parliament has to decide.

More than 150 reports and evaluations have been undertaken on this subject as a result of the earlier bill. Beside all these evaluations undertaken on local, regional and central level a special investigator – as part of the regular ad hoc commissions – is to make an inventory of, collect and analyse evaluations and reports as a result from the local development agreements.

It is also proclaimed that “evaluation is an important part in the development process and the goal has been to provide a basis for further decision-making.

Several government agencies, such as the Swedish Business Development Agency, the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies, the Swedish Agency for Public Management, the National Council for Crime Prevention and the Swedish Integration Board have undertaken evaluations or delivered reports. None of these evaluations are quoted or related to in any detail, however. Mostly referred is a report from a special university research group.

## **5.5 Some conclusions**

A few general conclusions are possible from the Special Bills analysed above. Firstly, evaluations are mentioned as early as the fiscal year 1993/94. In that bill, written by a non-socialist government, several evaluations were thoroughly accounted for. Most of them were undertaken by the traditional government agencies, the agencies specialised in evaluations did not exist as yet. Based partly on the evaluation results a continuation of some support or grant systems were decided. Another significant feature is that most of the evaluations in question had been referred for consideration to government agencies, county councils and municipalities as well as others. Their statements have been commented on in the Bill. The Bill from 1997/98 is furthermore in a lesser degree than the earlier one dealing with evaluations – those undertaken and reported as well as those announced.

Secondly, quite a few evaluations are mentioned, ongoing or finished, in a very anonymous way. Neither the name of the evaluator or the report is mentioned. This makes it rather difficult to trace them.

Thirdly, an announcement of evaluations, that are to be started up or ongoing evaluations are referred to in a higher degree than are the case of those delivered.

Fourthly, in bills dealing with more or less organisational and/or technical issues the importance of evaluation is underlined. Even so the main evaluation concerning organisational objects was commissioned to a Parliamentary commission. Thus giving an example of how the traditional Swedish way of preparing policy decisions by commissions has been supplemented and integrated with the somewhat newer tradition of evaluating.

Fifthly and finally, concerning a rather new policy area dealing with metropolis areas and their problems and challenges systems of evaluations on local, regional and national levels play a rather important role.

## **6 Some comments on evaluations – based on interviews**

Analysing government bills and other official documentation only partially gives the picture of how evaluations and the findings reported are used in the shaping or re-shaping of policies and the decision-making by Parliament. This official picture built on written and open sources have been the main focus in our study. As a supplement to this in order to be able to get some hints of the more complicated true picture, we interviewed eight persons – university researchers, civil servants and state secretaries (see References). Although observing how evaluations are taken into account during the policy-shaping and decision-making processes from different angles the interviewed were in a surprisingly high degree unanimous.

### ***Why evaluations?***

The motives why evaluations are commissioned or undertaken vary. One reason might be that an evaluation can be a way to handle the sceptics. On the other hand at times it is just the sceptics that commission an evaluation.

When interviewing, the different traditions in the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Education concerning how to provide a basis for policy-making became evident. In education there is a tradition dating at least half a century back to rely mainly of either independent research results or on reports from the regular agencies. Sometimes this basis may take the form of proper evaluations, sometimes not. The non-existence of any special evaluation institute in this subject areas was not, however seen as a problem. The diminished role and less financial resources given to applied research in a specific sector might, however, change this in the very long run.

As concerns regional development policy the establishment of the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies in 2001 was welcomed and it was felt to fill a long felt for need.

### ***Special agencies for evaluation or not***

Some of those interviewed stated that there exist some true problems unsolved in these aspects. This is due to the fact for instance that the specialised institutes vary to a large degree. Some more or less functions as research institutes. Evaluations from these many a time have a tendency to be more vague and less precise in conclusions as well as in their recommendations. It is more difficult though, to use the result directly when re-defining and correcting policies.

An evaluation with vague conclusions is easily put aside. Those more explicit are more likely to be taken into account in the decisions-making process. This was stated by several of those interviewed. Especially this applies to evaluations that are more “research-oriented.”

Another problem, mentioned by one of the persons interviewed, is the fact that it is sometimes somewhat obscure who is responsible for an evaluation. An institute sometimes in its turn commissions an evaluation to a researcher or consultant.

### ***The usefulness of evaluations***

One aspect which one of the interviewed mentioned was an inherent controversy in governing by targets and results. The political goals are often a compromise between conflicting targets within a political party or within a coalition government. As a result they might be somewhat vaguely formulated. When translated into evaluation indicators part of these goals for a certain policy is lost. The evaluation in question might therefore be of less interest for the politicians who originally commissioned the evaluation.

Another conclusion from the interviews is, that it is of great importance that evaluations in the future become more policy-relevant and maybe less restricted to build on only a few of the relevant indicators. Also there is not a real tradition engaging evaluators from other countries, which was considered a drawback. Maybe this could be a way to re-innovate evaluation, because it was also remarked upon the fact that there exists a certain tiredness as concerns the great number of evaluations.

In spite of this the general opinion among those interviewed, was that evaluations and reports, those commissioned as well as independently undertaken ones, were thoroughly studied and discussed in the ministries concerned.

An evaluation and its results must, however, in order to be considered, also arrive at the right time seen from a timetable point of view from those making decisions.

Another lack in many evaluations that was underlined in the interviews was that few broaden the horizon by looking forward towards the future. Often they could be combined with national or international comparisons, i.e. benchmarking of different sorts.

Finally, one of the persons interviewed was very pessimistic as concerns our study. According to him evaluations and reports were indeed used in the internal discussions in the ministries, but to a much lesser degree referred to in the final and official version of a bill.

### ***On the democratic function of evaluations***

One of the interviewed pointed to the fact that evaluations are of great importance to the democratic process. For members of parliament the accounting of results from evaluations are essential for getting information about how reforms and policies actually function.

One person interviewed even referred to a hearsay that there are MPs who are of the opinion that civil servants are censoring the results from evaluations undertaken. On the other hand, some of the interviewed claimed that Parliament is more interested in getting reports on the results concerning a narrowly defined budget item than broader and more policy-relevant matters.

## 7 Summary and conclusions

Our main conclusions are the following:

- The evaluation situation in Sweden is changing – but rather slowly and in an incremental way. Independent evaluations, made by agencies and researchers specialized in evaluations, are integrated into the traditional decision-making processes with commissions, reports from other government agencies, referrals for consideration to the stakeholders concerned, and bills to Parliament.
- Sweden has not become an “Audit Society” or a society where management by goals, monitoring, reporting and evaluations are worked out in a systematic way. Or shall we say not yet? There are some tendencies in that direction in some areas. Evaluations still mainly come about in an ad hoc fashion.
- In the Swedish system evaluations alone cannot suffice as input to the ministries. Given our small ministries someone has to prepare detailed proposals for them to work on. And politicians also need inspiration from other quarters than from evaluators.
- The reports to Parliament might be more systematically used by the Government to communicate to Parliament the Government’s view on sector development including results from evaluations.

Below we systematically try to answer the questions drawn up in section 2.

### ***How has the transition to the new evaluation situation including many new specialised evaluation agencies, evolved?***

The Ministry of Education relies for evaluations on the Swedish Agency for Education and in a similar way it does rely on the National Agency for Higher Education for higher education. It remains to be seen where AVT is to be evaluated. There is no specialised agency for evaluations in the field of adult education. As concerns commissions these may be given the task either to commission evaluations on behalf of the Government (AEI, AVT) – e.g. for more truth worthiness, or been given instructions to undertake evaluations themselves. An example of this is that commissions may be set up to produce evaluations (Popular Education).

This pattern is somewhat different when compared to bills from the Ministry of Industry. They rely rather heavily on evaluations and reports from their regular agencies, such as NUTEK. In more recent years this is still the case but at the same time some references are made to evaluations or reports commissioned to or published by institutes specialised in evaluating such as

IFAU and ITPS. A significant fact, however, is that when new experiments in regional organisation is to be evaluated, this task is given to a special ad hoc parliamentary commission.

***What role is still played by the Commissions?***

Commissions, their analyses as well as their proposals, are traditionally very important factors in the process of reaching new standpoints and formulating new policies. They may be called upon when there is a lack of time to feed results into the decision-making process (AEI), or they may be asked to commission evaluations on behalf of the Government (AEI, AVT). Another example is that commissions may be set up to produce evaluations (Popular Education). There are few examples, if any, of decision-making or proposals to Parliament based solely on evaluations with no connection to the Swedish system of Government commissions.

***How does the division of tasks between the ordinary government agencies and the agencies specialised in evaluations (either generally or in sector specific evaluations) look? Do they have different roles in the policy-making process?***

There is no specialised agency for evaluations in the field of adult education. The government relies on ordinary government agencies. As with regional development policy, there are two specific institutes in particular that could be of interest the Institute for Labour Market Evaluations and the Swedish Institute for Growth Policy Studies. They have both been referred to for instance in the latest bill on regional development policy.

So far we have seen no difference. The institutes or agencies specialised in evaluating are referred to as well as the regular agencies. The former are however, a rather new phenomenon. It remains to be seen if there will be any significant change in the long run.

***What about the awareness of evaluations in political decision-making?***

The evaluations are communicated and kept record of. There is a tendency though that they are more frequently and also somewhat more in detail accounted for in bills on regional development policy, especially those bills on the development of metropolis areas. The question arises if this has any connection to the fact that this subject area is relatively new and that openness to evaluation results due to this might be somewhat larger.

As our interviews also show the general opinion in the ministries is that the evaluations are well known and that the civil servants concerned have a thorough knowledge of them and their findings.

***Has there been any change in the position of evaluations made by ordinary agencies versus specialised agencies over the longer time span?***

Not in the field of adult education, as there exist no agency specialised in evaluation. Nor are there any proofs of this in regional development. The general picture emerging from our empirical findings is, that evaluations from agencies with evaluations as their main task are yet another piece of information added to the facts generated in the traditional process.

***How are the evaluations used? Are the evaluations still mainly used for justifications? Are they still just mentioned or commented upon?***

The situation is somewhat different for Reports, Sector Specific Bills, Budget Bills and Supplementary Budget Bills. For adult education the results show that all reports refer to existing evaluations and up-coming evaluations. The great majority of Sector Specific Bills and Budget Bills also refer to evaluations. Up-coming evaluations are more frequently mentioned in the Specific Bills than in the Budget Bills compared to existing evaluations. In no Sector Specific or Budget Bill are all the proposals motivated by evaluations. Proposals partly based on evaluations are found in 12 out of 23 Sector Specific Bills and Budget Bills containing proposals for adult education policy. The share of such proposals is higher for the Budget Bills than for the Sector Specific Bills where it is only 4/13.

The Supplementary Budget Bills are different. Evaluations are not part of their repertoire. Proposals are made in them but they have a character of corrections to the earlier Budget Bill.

***To what extent do results differ when you look at more types of Bills and over a longer time period in stead of just Budget Bills for the years 2000 and 2002?***

When analysed over time, there are no clear development trends in adult education in the use of evaluations. Evaluations have been referred to all along from the fiscal year 1993/94. Budget Bills have not become less important for proposals and do not use evaluations less over time. Indirectly, diffuse utilisation of evaluations of the knowledge building type can be recorded (e.g. SFI and governance).

***Is the role played by evaluations different when it comes to important reforms versus more routine questions and related to this in relation to politicians and to civil servants? Is it still true that evaluations are more used for small, technical questions or changes than for underpinning of more important reforms or new initiatives?***

We have not found any examples where new initiatives have been based on evaluations – quite the opposite. The Government had already made up its mind: AEI, (during the process) Advanced Vocational Training, ILA. The introduction of growth contracts or the new initiative concerning proposals for solving problems in the metropolis areas do not emerge as a solution to problems that has been reported in evaluations. In the case of continuing processes or different adjustments of a well-established policy there seem to be a tendency that more reliance is based on evaluations.

***Are the roles of politicians and civil servants in the ministries fundamentally different from the roles of evaluators?***

Yes, politicians make proposals based on all kinds of considerations, e.i. political ideologies. The question whether a policy or proposal is efficient and give value for money is just one of many they have to consider. Civil servants at the Government Offices have to make many more, and also more detailed proposals, where disadvantages pointed out in an evaluation may be considered. Evaluators on the other hand do not necessarily make any proposals at all. As some of those interviewed pointed out, evaluations with no proposals or, even worse, with vague and inconclusive conclusions – not too unfamiliar a phenomenon – are rather useless for those responsible for shifts or changes in policy.

***Given the evaluation activities, does Government pass on a fair reporting of them to Parliament?***

We have found somewhat different traditions when comparing adult education and regional development policy. In the bills on adult education the reporting is scarce and might not be sufficient. The evaluations are rather shortly described and not discussed. However, in the Reports there is more of a discussion and a detailed description. This last conclusion applies as well to bills on regional policy. These tend to include a more detailed description of evaluations as well as of opinions on them put forward if and when they have been referred for consideration to agencies and others concerned.

### ***Finally some research ideas for the future***

We think that it would be interesting to supplement our study with other case studies e.g. in the field of labour market policy and industrial policy.

It might also be worthwhile to turn the investigation around, starting with existing evaluations and compare with what evaluations and to what extent they were picked up by government and how they were used. The treatment of very critical evaluations could be compared to that of evaluations with more positive conclusions.

One might also want to find more about the importance of the context for the reception of evaluations: whether they fit in actual strategies for use, the policy setting and co-ordination (Stern, 2004)

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