Charles Berg

The Metaphor of Mapping and the Principles Underlying Participatory Evaluation of Youth Projects

Institut Supérieur d'Études et de Recherches,

B.P. 2, L-7201 Walferdange, Tel. +352/33 34 201

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As projects have become a very popular means of coping with all kinds of problems, the urge to evaluate is felt by those concerned with running and financing youth projects. But there does not exist any single and reliable set of methodological standards for youth project evaluation. In practice, evaluators mostly proceed in an eclectic way by importing methods from the fields of group dynamics, the social sciences and financial analysis. Very often, in a specific project, there may occur different approaches not linked or interrelated so as to work as an efficient instrument of control. Therefore, it seems important to clarify a few of the general principles which any participatory evaluational method of youth projects must necessarily embody. To do so, I shall analyze evaluation as a social process using as a starting point the metaphor of mapping which is commonly found in cognitive and social psychology (e.g. Neisser 1976, Moscovici 1984).[*]

Three Dichotomies concerning Mapping and the Nature of Participatory Youth Project Evaluation

When people are confronted with an unknown place, as happened to the participants on entering this meeting room this morning, they fix in their minds some landmarks to find their ways. In our example, these might have been the traffic roundabout, the hotel, the post office, the main entrance of the Institute. Perhaps some of the participants have had some *a priori* conception of the site's structure through their knowledges of campuses or even barracks before actually crossing what formerly was the soldiers' drill square. Their interior map allows them to anticipate the location of paths they have never seen before. If they are not very trustful in their own means of orientation, they may have drawn a quick sketch on a piece of paper, or even have had this done by a colleague. Moreover, there certainly are geographical maps and plans of the site and the buildings

drawn by specialists, though they are too large and too complicated to be useful in solving the rather simple problem of finding one's way around campus.

In the light of this example, I am going to introduce three conceptual distinctions which will serve to describe what the task of participatory evaluation of youth projects implies. First, we have to distinguish between the interior representation as a cognitive scheme of reality and the exterior map, which is a medialized representation of reality and of the interior scheme. Then, there are *ego* representations made by the actor himself and *alter* representations where he has to rely on somebody else. Finally, we have, in analogy with the distinction introduced by Alfred Schütz (1977), we have representations used in an individual's or a group's everyday life and geographical maps which meet a set of cartographic standards and conventions.

The basis of project evaluation lies in the changing interior representations of the participants and the social group process of shaping a common representation. But the product of evaluation is a medialized representation itself, so that the participants in youth projects are able to fulfill a task of orientation and to make decisions on how the project will go on. Thus an evaluation guide should give instructions or hints for the elaboration of a medialized representation of the project. Correspondingly to the weakening of the positivist paradigm, the experts' role is not to describe young people, their behavior, their attitudes or their cognitive structures. What they *are* supposed to do, however, is to help young people who are running, or taking part in, youth projects to become not specialists of evaluation, but a kind of "ethnogeographers" of everyday project life. The participants should be fundamentally involved in the evaluation work and they should not only own their project, but also its evaluation. Nevertheless the form of the evaluation should be such that its results can be shared by others. The principle of non-alienation of youth project evaluation is less revolutionary that it may appear on first sight. For in an organization evaluation generally turns the hierarchy of

credibility upside down. During curriculum evaluation, for instance, students' opinions may count more than those held by school administrators or political decision makers. Now, we are just going one step further by explicitly emphasising the participatory nature of project evaluation.

The Indexicality of Mapping

Reading a map may be linked in a more or less explicit way to its environment. In a town council the members had a sharp discussion about how the town plan which was to be printed as a guide to tourists was to be set up. One party suggested that it should be oriented in the conventional way, with the north pointing towards the upper edge. Other councillors argued that it should correspond to the perception of reality from the observer's standpoint. Thus, it would be less standardized, but more adequate to the actual situation of the map reader. Indeed, such a map may be compared to a sign post, for it is pointing towards the objects in the real world. It has a strong indexical character. It is linked to a standpoint or even to a path, to a direction and to the real or the expected goals of the journey.

Accordingly, youth project evaluation should be very wary to use hardcore social research methods. But, in return, the indexical character of the evaluation has to be strengthened. Therefore, a very important step of any evaluation will be the contextualisation of the project. The evaluation should not hide or betray its roots in the social tissue of a local community; on the contrary, it should be related to participants' standpoints, to their values, exspectations, opportunities and goals, and thus gain a certain amount of ecological validity.

The Temporality of Mapping

Evaluation also stands in a temporal context. For a representation will almost never be the very first one. It is nearly always the result of a history of changing images. Even at the beginning of the project, the participants will have some expectations in mind which function as their first project map. An evaluation manual should encourage young people to consider evaluation not as a "snapshot" at the end, but as a sequence, a series, a film, an evolutionary picture of the mapping process. We should develop methods to collect data and documents, which enable actors to retrospectively reconstruct the evolution of expectations, goals, references, opinions in the course of the project so that they may become aware of the emergence of new elements, new references and new interpretative schemes.

Reflectiveness

Cognitive processes generally include metacognition, and evaluation is no exception to this rule. During evaluation, a kind of monitoring of the process itself takes place. Reflectiveness is not a mere cognitive competence aiming to gain an explicit consciousness of concepts and methods of evaluation, but it also includes an affective and a social dimension, in which elements such as attitudes and relationships or group and institutional structures are relevant. It is an important function of participatory evaluation to track down information on this control process and any method of evaluation has to promote self reflective attitudes. It should urge social actors to become aware of the established patterns as well as of their own reframing. A written account, for example, should state how and by whom data were collected. A video tape evaluating a project should include a sequence on the making of the tape. If slides are shown and commented as part of the evaluation procedure it should also be indicated how and by whom the pictures were selected.

The Role of the Experts

Normally, this kind of reflectiveness and accounting is required from professionals (Schön 1983). Therefore, I want to consider again the role of the experts in youth project evaluation. Though I can hardly imagine that we could conceive a magic book which would work as a method of evaluation for all kinds of projects and without the slightest professional support, it seems nevertheless clear that the social researcher involved in youth project evaluation does not consider young people to be objects on which he inquires. Indeed, he has to play a new role. He is no longer the main evaluator who asks himself whether the project runs well or not. But he is a cog in the machinery of evaluation, who basically is activated by the participants themselves and their questions. He intervenes as a consultant and a trainer, and he is linked to the project by a partnership founded either on an individual level or on an organizational level. In the second case, one could think of an evaluation partnership contract between a research group and a youth movement, a youth association, a social work organization or a local youth administration. As a consultant, for instance, he could check with the project runners which are the ressources (in terms of time, manpower, medias) needed for the autoevaluation of the project. As a trainer he would contribute to develop competences and attitudes that would improve the quality of the self-conducted evaluation. He would, for example, try (a) to increase the participants' abilities to description, before they proceeded to evaluate the project, (b) to strenghten self-consciousness about their own values and perspectives and (c) to encourage them to see more clearly the perspectives of differently situated people.

In the light of these remarks, it appears that participatory evaluation is not a mere management procedure. It should indeed be grounded in individuals' and groups' ongoing creation of representations in the course of communication and co-operation. Thus, it does not belong to a technocratic culture, but to a participatory culture, which represents an essential element of a consensual society aiming at civil democracy and social integration.

More generally speaking, in the process of interrelating European organisers and participants of youth activities, introducing participatory evaluation as a broadly grounded social study opposed to a narrow kind of market research, will be a touchstone to prove that we do not just promote access to consumerism, but also the far more endangered access to citizenship and social autonomy.

In this context, I actual think of a European, regional or national, institution which, on the theoretical level, would produce frameworks and training units for this new kind of evaluation, while on the practical level and by secondary analysis of collected evaluation documents, working as a sensor of youth life quality. That would be a very important means of a global and integrated approach to youth problems.

Cognition and Emotion

We have to acknowledge the fact that evaluation has a lot of individual forms and ways beneath, inside and beyond social sciences which contribute both to decision making and to a participatory culture as has been evoked. It is probably a contradiction in terms to conceive a method of evaluation which would be strongly coercive concerning methods and criteria. We should be aware of the fact that, through the questions and instruments in the evaluation manual we inevitably do some shaping and modeling of young people's reality. We should not exaggerate this, in order not to deprive the project participants of the opportunity to develop their own approach, their own language, their own modes of expression and communication. The project report should make sense to them whatever role they held. Therefore it is important to overcome the antagonism between a rational and an emotional approach. The evaluation tool should instigate young people to combine both ways of knowledge. That is why ,we should offer them qualitative and creative methods, such as in-depth interviews. group discussions. the commenting and reinterpreting of informal data recordings, video tape production. role playing. project diaries or narratives. all of which can provide a common understanding

of project values and purposes without presupposing an external value system in too strong a way.

The Information Processing Cycle

Evaluation processes are not linear, they are information processing *cycles* and have the shape of open-ended spirals. It does not matter where the evaluators start. They can begin with transforming information about reality into a representation, with developing an exploration grid on the basis of their representation or with exploring reality itself. But at the same time, it is very important that they will run through more than one cycle, and that several open-ended spirals, coming from different projects, should be connected or related.

The Background of Youth Life

Of course, participatory culture is not a matter of evaluation alone. For evaluation presupposes a democratic kind of background. Young people will not involve themselves in project evaluation if they view their own situation as non negotiable. Indeed, a basic assumption of participatory evaluation is the belief that people are able to change themselves and their immediate environment.

If we want to understand what is actually at stake, we have to view the topic of project evaluation against the general background of social youth life. The traditional transition patterns between childhood and adult life have vanished and modes of transition have been largely differentiated and individualized (cf. Heitmeyer/Olk 1990, Olk 1990, Tillmann 1993). This evolution entails that adolescents are confronted with an over-complexity of social life which they sometimes try to reduce by choosing highly rigid

role patterns. Youth project evaluation, situated at the border between individual identity construction and temporary, casual social structures, if conducted in the formative and participatory way we have suggested, will help young people to become aware of their own goals and their opportunities to reach them. Consciousness of their freedom of movement will allow them easier acces to democracy and autonomy. Evaluation contributes to minimize transitional risks. Evaluative competence as experienced and tried out in a youth project may even be seen as an essential component in the "survival kit" of an adolescent nomade going through a transitional period of life and living in the openely structured urban cities (Roulleau-Berger 1993).

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