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Rationaliy and Utility of Evaluation Reseach in Policy Making

Anda Lake*

Abstract

In this article, the author explores the issues associated with the practical significance of evaluation research in the policy making environment of Latvia. Sporadic, selective and rare use of the results of evaluation research is viewed as the central issue of the paper. The objective of this article is to reveal the connection between the action strategy of the groups involved in the implementation of evaluation research and manifestations of practical significance of evaluation. Implementation, utilisation and practical importance of evaluation research are examined not only in relation to rational action strategies of the groups, but also in relation to the understanding of the concept of practical significance of evaluation research. The theoretical framework of the article is based on the conceptual understanding of J. Habermas' purposive rationality and communicative rationality, as well as C. H. Weiss' understanding of practical utilisation of evaluation (the instrumental and enlightened models). The practical importance of evaluation research as well as action strategies of implementing evaluation research are studied empirically in the form of qualitative interviews. The author concludes that the rational action strategy (typical of the Latvian policy making environment) of the groups involved in evaluation is not readily compatible with the evaluation approach that focuses on practical utilisation. The lack of communicative rationality in the action strategy of the interacting and involved groups substantially diminishes the role of evaluation research in the identification and implementation of the most effective models of solving social issues in policy making in Latvia.

Keywords: rationality, policy impact assessment, evaluation research, utilisation of evaluation research.

Introduction: Description of the issue

Political practice is experiencing an increase in demand for scholarly judgements and findings, including those provided by representatives of social sciences; however, their utilisation in political decisions and elaboration of corresponding action models for solving social issues are far from being consistent and self-evident. The functions of social research are certainly diverse, and not every piece of social research is aimed at utilisation of the acquired data in social practice and correction of social conduct, which is why application of research results in practice is not always considered a must. However, when dealing with different types of applied research, the requirement for applicability is topical. Thus, there is a developed and stable practice of commissioned research as well as elaborated data bases rich in information; however, their practical utilisation and expedience are interpreted differently by various groups involved, which often triggers negative publicity for sociology as a socially important scientific discipline.

One of the techniques of systematically correlating scientific argumentation with the shaping of policy and corresponding changes at the level of action is based on the development of a certain type of applied research, i.e., evaluation research. The term 'evaluation research' is not widespread in Latvia,

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although international academic literature on social sciences classifies this research as a particular type of research that is characterised by specific design, tending to applicability. Implementation of evaluation research is largely determined by its commissioner, i.e., the group involved in the sphere of public administration, whose interest in this type of research is largely determined by the requirements for quality improvement in the policy planning system. Practically, in all the modern democratic political systems, adherence to principles of policy impact assessment in policy making and conducting evaluation research are considered to be the most effective policy rationalisation and quality improvement instruments. Despite the various functions of evaluation (cognition, legitimisation, dialogue, the control function by R. Stockman) (Stockmann 2004), today, evaluation is mainly used as an instrument of decreasing expenses both in the public administration sector and the commercial environment. Implementation of research on the evaluation of Western democracy for political decision-making purposes started and became widespread already in the 1970s, when the world was affected by the burdensome oil price crisis, and many countries grounded their financial and budgetary planning particularly in evaluation research. This is when both ex-ante and ex-post evaluations were introduced.[1] However, in the context of international evaluation practice, it has also been observed that successful integration of the evaluation system into the system of political decision making has varied in different countries and at different levels of policy making, although the majority of experts in policy making acknowledge that policy evaluation and conducting evaluation research facilitate the rationalisation of political decisions and improve the quality of policy making. Within the framework of European Union policy making practice dominates a particular policy evaluation methodology that is widely known as regulatory impact assessment (RIA). In a modified way, this methodological totality of evaluation methods is applied in all EU member states. RIA is understood as "a systemic approach to critically assessing the positive and negative effects of proposed and existing regulations and non-regulatory alternatives. As employed in OECD countries it encompasses a range of methods. At its core it is an important element of an evidence-based approach to policy making. This leads to more fundamental theoretical questions about research design, the relationship between supply and demand of research and, ultimately, the aims of academic research in this are".[2] Evaluation subjects of RIA are legislative norms and normative framework on the whole. A creation of evaluation's methodological tools in various political systems has been developed in the context of improving the strategic planning. Researchers of the methodological development in RIA have also brought their attention to the aspect of evaluation. For instance, in the theoretical environment of the evaluation field a wide citation of Professor of Political Science Claudio M.Radaelli, (Exeter University, UK) occurs, who paid attention in his research to the practical meanings of research methodology of social sciences, as well as the academic knowledge (Radaelli 2009). However, the author of this article has concentrated her research interests on the groups involved in evaluation activities and on the connection of their action strategies to the practical meaning of evaluation. Hence, in order to maintain the main discourse of the research, this article does not emphasise the variety of evaluation forms.

Attitudes to the use of evaluation research in policy making may vary, but scholars are unanimous about the necessity to take into consideration the needs and views of different affected parties during evaluation, as well as the fact that a wide range of social research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, can be employed (Stockmann 2006). One can view evaluation research as an instrument that improves the foregrounding of issues of a certain political domain and facilitates the correspondence of political solutions, initiatives proposed and choices to the interests of the parties involved. Evaluation research has indeed become a widespread practice in the international research community, thus forming a special domain of professional activity, and has proved to be of

1 Ruhr-Universität Bochum. *Zusammenfassung verschiedener Texte zur Evaluationsforschung*. Available at: http:// www.luebbert.net//uni/ methoden/eval/index.php, accessed at 22.12.2010.

2 Regulatory Impact Analysis. Available at http://www.oecd.org/document/49/0,3746,en_2649_34141_35258801_1_1_1_1,00.html, accessed at 10.09.2011.

specific importance both in administrative and political decision making. In order to describe the widespread trend in evaluation, researchers often use illustrative metaforical terms. For instance, Strathern suggests that "the evaluation boom manifests itself as *checking gone wild*" (Schwarz 2006:14). Regarding evaluation, Power writes that it helps perform a 'general audit of society', and that in the policy-making environment, there is also a "particular management regime that presupposes the delegation of responsibility for decisions to the evaluation research data providers" (Power 1999). The latter quotation emphasises the tendency to use the results of evaluation research to legitimise the decision alternatives desired by politicians.

The quantitative aspect of evaluation expansion is explained by a general bureaucratisation of the social environment as well as the prevalence of the rationalisation principle. This envisages evaluation as part of a collective strategy elaborated within the framework of rationalisation of society. There exists an academically familiar assumption that the popularity of evaluation research can be characterised as one of the symptoms that creates M. Weber's established manifestations of purposive rationality in society. Such understanding of evaluation research is largely related to aspirations to sustain the cost-profit balance in society with the help of research data. The boom of evaluation can be viewed as part of the ongoing process of increasing bureaucratisation of the administrative system, where "evaluation is no longer for the people, but rather people seem to serve evaluation." (Schwarz 2006:15). This brings to the fore a different aspect of application and practical significance of evaluation research. Its application in the sphere of politics presupposes that traces of the bureaucratic environment of public administration are to be found in all the manifestations of this type of applied research, including possibilities of using its results in legal acts and solving social issues, as well as utilisation of models of social conduct. Thus, public administration implements and develops assessment of policy impact and evaluation research with the goal to improve and rationalise the policy making process in general. Moreover, academic definitions of evaluation research contain a clear reference to the indissoluble connection between the nature of this type of research and the utilisation of its results. In practice, however, there is a contradiction. On the one hand, *utilisation of evaluation research results* or *expedience of research* in general is one of the most important parameters characterising evaluation research as such, which is also included in the evaluation research definitions (*M. Q. Patton* devotes special attention to aspects of utilisation of evaluation research). He mentions a particular type of evaluation, i.e., *utilisation-focused evaluation*. (Patton 2008) On the other hand, a number of scholars acknowledge that the link to practical utilisation is not homogenous, and the theoretical requirement for utilisation or application of evaluation research results in practical situations remains unfulfilled. There are many limitations to the fulfilment of the requirement for utilisation. This contradiction can also be traced in the interaction of policy making and applied/commissioned research in Latvia, which justifies scholarly interest in manifestations of rationality in the actions of all the groups involved as well as in the formation of practical significance of evaluation research within a certain model of action. In accordance with the issue described, this article aims to establish which rational action strategies of actors involved in policy impact assessment research facilitate practical utilisation of evaluation research.

Theoretical basis: Rational action strategies and utilisation of evaluation research

In this article, I draw on the extensively quoted evaluation theorists' argument (Rossi, Freeman & Lipsey 2004) i.e., the axiomatic thesis that evaluation and evaluation research is considered a manifestation of rationality, which can lead to destruction in the context of an irrational environment.

The theoretical analysis of the concepts of rationality and rational social action admits the use of Habermas' understanding of rational social action as justification for empirical research. The author devotes special attention to Habermas' typology of social action, which presupposes distinction

between the strategic and communicative forms of social action. When defining strategic and communicative forms of action, Habermas follows the assumption that it is possible to classify certain actions from different points of view. He not only marks the two analytical aspects as 'strategic' and 'communicative', but also points out that, with the help of these two action forms, it is possible to describe one and the same action: first, as the interpersonal influence of participants implementing purposive rational action; second, as the process of mutual understanding of those who belong to the same lifeworld. One can rather distinguish between the forms of social action by defining whether it has a success-oriented or understanding-oriented character, namely, one has to identify these trends within certain circumstances and on the basis of the participants' intuitive knowledge (Habermas 1997). Moreover, according to Habermas it is possible to make a conceptual analysis of these tendencies or attitudes in both cases. Further on, within the framework of my empirical research and on the basis of the tendencies and knowledge of actors involved, I will distinguish between two different models of rational social action, each of them having its own mechanism of coordinating the actors' conduct:

- Purposive rational action, i.e., strategic action that is understood as a manifestation of purposive rational action characterised by the *success-oriented* tendency of actors. This form of action is aimed at attaining a goal; it is guided by a defined maximum. It aims to reach the desired state by way of analysis of the situation and deciding on the best alternative that leads to the desired state. In this case, the *mechanism of action coordination* is based on *egocentric calculation* of success.
- Communicative action is characterised by the *understanding-oriented* action tendency of actors (Habermas 1997). The general pre-requisite for communicative action is understanding or knowledge about what makes one's utterance acceptable. Communicative action is characterised by a particular link between speech and action. Any utterance is related to the critical requirement of validity. Actors are guided by intersubjective understanding. Agreement is ensured if the corresponding validities are accepted. *Action coordination* is based on 'the act of understanding'.

According to Habermas, each form of social action has its own model of rationality, i.e., purposive rationality and communicative rationality. It must be mentioned that Habermas attempts to apply communicative rationality as a critical scale and a normative justification in his social theory. This article also views communicative rationality as an ideal model of action orientation and an important pre-requisite for the practical utilisation-focused approach to evaluation research.

Alkin's typology of approaches to evaluation serves as the basis for the understanding of the practical value of evaluation research (Alkin 2004). It suggests three types of approaches to evaluation: 1) methodology-focused approaches; 2) evaluation-focused approaches; 3) practical utilisation-focused approaches. It is worth mentioning that the practical utilisation-focused approach is characteristic of the current phase in the development of evaluation, which confirms the importance of the expedience parameter as well as the topicality of issues related to it in the field of evaluation. Utilisation of evaluation results is of major interest to the representatives of the approach. The approach seeks answers to the question *What preconditions ensure that evaluation results are used and implemented in practice in future?* Moreover, utilisation of evaluation results is considered an extremely important fact. Within the framework of this empirical research, during the process of data collection and analysis, the practice of evaluation research will be categorised as practical utilisation-focused if: first of all, its profile reflects attempts to maintain such practice, and if the users of evaluation results are identified at its early stage and are involved in all phases of evaluation, thus becoming collaborators in the evaluation (Patton 2008); second, its profile reflects attempts to stress utilisation of evaluation research as a separate point in the logical structure of evaluation (Fetterman, Kaftarian &Wandersman 2005); third, its profile presupposes special techniques of analysis of evaluation results, which would adapt the data of the results to optimal use in decisions (Stufflebeam 2005).

This research draws special attention to evaluation theorists' attempts to revise and extend the concept 'practical significance of evaluation'. C. Weiss, graduate of the University of Columbia, Doctor of Sociology, and currently Professor at Harvard University, is one of the most prominent theorists in

the domain of evaluation, who has fundamentally influenced the development of the field, and whose ideas on the ideal type character of evaluation have evolved throughout her personal experience. Her major interests are the methodology of evaluation research, evaluation utility, as well as the political conditions for evaluation and its political context. Early works by Weiss emphasise evaluation as research. In this period, the author's view would classify as belonging to the category of methodology-focused approaches. In 1972, Weiss published her *Evaluation Research* (Weiss 1972), which is content-wise similar to textbooks on methods in social research. The book draws special attention to the use of experimental methods in evaluation with verification of attained programme goals. The revised edition of the same book in 1998 saw a change in the title *Evaluation – Methods for Studying Programs and Policies* (Weiss 1998). This symbolically illustrates the extension of the researcher's interests regarding the theme of evaluation and particular attention drawn to issues of utility of evaluation results. However, in Weiss' case, we cannot speak about a mere change in the scholar's research interests, as Weiss' academic work tends to be of general character in relation to the development of the evaluation domain. The scholar's rich experience in conducting evaluation made her draw attention to one of the most topical questions in modern evaluation, i.e., *What are the preconditions that make evaluation results un-/usable?* The researcher acknowledges that it is self-evident to judge the simple instrumental use of evaluation results, by which one understands conducting evaluation in accordance with the goals stated in the agreement, getting answers to precisely formulated questions and concrete conversion of knowledge to practice. This is why she extends the conditions of the evaluation project by substantially extending its focus. Weiss was first to stress that evaluation never takes place in a political vacuum, thus drawing attention to the fact that it is linked to the complex political context and interacts with it. In 1991, she pointed out herself that she tried to bring the theme to the fore in 1973 when it became topical: "The 1973 paper elaborated the theme. It pointed out that politics intrudes on program evaluation in three ways: (1) programs are created and maintained by political forces (2) higher echelons of government, which make decisions about programs, are embedded in politics; and (3) the very act of evaluation has political connotations. I still believe these statements are true" (Weiss 1991:212). This involvement with political conditions particularly refers to evaluation results as well as their utility or its absence. It deserves special attention. Weiss suggests two models of utilisation of evaluation results: instrumental and enlightening. The instrumental utilisation of evaluation results implies conducting evaluation in accordance with the goals stated in the agreement, getting answers to precisely formulated questions and concrete conversion of knowledge to practice by injecting it directly into the political acts that are made to solve a problem. The enlightening utilisation of evaluation results implies a situation, when the commissioner is informed in regard to the statement of a problem explained to him/her, and thus, encouraging changes.

This empirical research will use Weiss' division into instrumental and enlightening models of utilisation of evaluation results in the analysis of data and in the categorisation of informants' opinions.

To conclude the short description of the theoretical basis for this research and facilitate its understanding, the author of this paper demonstrates the links between the main theoretical concepts in Figure 1, which emphasises the conceptual link between Habermas' two different forms of rational action and the forms of evaluation utility established by Weiss. The strategy of purposive rational action presupposes a fixed action goal and is related to concrete and directly understood utilisation of evaluation results, i.e., to the direct and literal use of evaluation data in decisions. Action based on communicative rationality, however, is focused on understanding, which consecutively encompasses the enlightening understanding of practical significance of evaluation, i.e., the practical significance of evaluation is related to the explanation of the stated problem and the balance between all the parties involved.

The judgements provided in the Theoretical Basis for this research permit to formulate the following questions for research: What are the opinions of Latvian policy makers, politicians and scholars on the practical significance of evaluation research and its forms of use? What action models are typical of

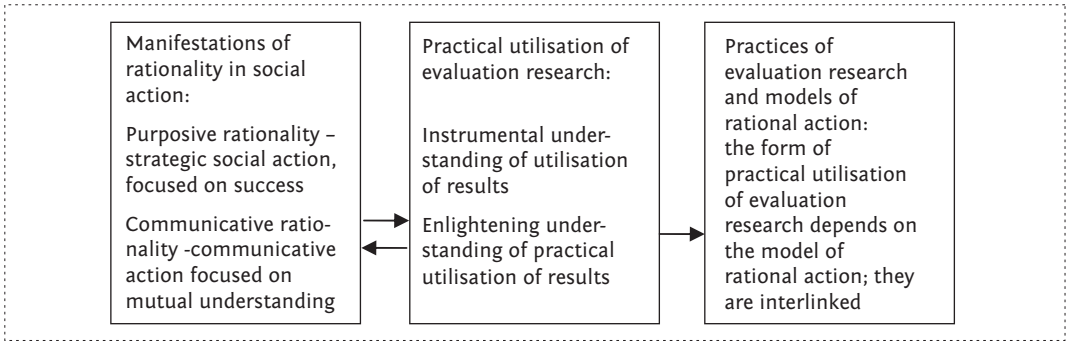

Figure 1: Schematic depiction of categories in empirical research
Source: author's compilation

the actor groups involved in evaluation in the context of utilisation of evaluation research conducted in the political environment of Latvia? Is it possible to identify signs of purposive rationality and communicative rationality in the actions of individuals?

Methodology of the empirical research, data collection method and selection

The choice of research ***methodology*** was substantially affected by the fairly unstructured understanding of the issue explored as well as lack of conceptual uniformity in it. The concept of evaluation research is not stipulated by Latvian normative documentation; however, the necessity to assess political impact is judicially regulated[3] both in reference to policy planning and legislative documentation. Policy evaluation techniques for use in accordance with the contemporary evaluation implementation methodological principles in Latvian policy-making environment do not have a very old tradition. Most European Union Member States have only acknowledged the important role of policy impact evaluation after year 2002. Latvia's first steps in the enforcement of policy's impact evaluation system began with the introduction of the so-called annotations of legislative acts in early 1997. All this time there has been a co-operation with foreign experts in both the improving of the policy planning process, and performance management system reinvigoration, thus, it is clear that this issue has not lost its importance in Latvia. However, it must be admitted that the policy evaluation system development ideas received wider publicity only in year 2003-2004. A major milestone of knowledge and skills in policy evaluation happened in 2003, when the State Chancellery of Latvia launched and implemented the UN project *Policy Impact Regulatory Impact Assessment Analyses System Establishment*. Its cooperation partner was the University of Latvia, and it was supported by the U.S. government Fulbright Program. In the framework of this collaboration, there were both government employees training in the issues that are relevant to evaluation, and also the development of recommendations for policy strategic planning system. The legal framework for policy evaluation is considered as an important factor that in a certain way promotes the development of evaluation methods. Both empirical data and document studies show that it is possible to discuss the improvement of evaluation's legal framework and the differentiated praxes on the level of developing policy documents and legal normative acts.

3 LR *Attīstības plānošanas sistēmas likums [Development Planning System Law]* came into effect on 01.01.2009, amended on 01.01.2011 ('LV', 205 (4397), 29.12.2010.); Policy planning document database of Latvia (2011). Electronic database. http://polsis.mk.gov.lv accessed at 10.09.2011

As recognised by the former Deputy Director of the State Chancellery in matters of government policy and development coordination Baiba Petersone, the Policy Planning Guidelines are considered as the beginning of the evaluation normative framework of policy impact in Latvian public administration (first approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on October 9, 2001)[4], as well as the results and performance management system guidelines (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, March 13, 2003)[5]. Currently, there are Performance and Performance Management System Guidelines for year 2008-2013 (approved June 18, 2008)[6] and the Policy Planning System Development (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, September 12, 2006); they are valid from year 2007-2013[7].

Policy Planning Guidelines, approved in 2001, for the first time defined the task "to strengthen the new policy initiatives' initial (ex-ante) evaluation and develop evaluation of policy implementationby determining annotation procedure for draft Cabinet regulations, preparing methodology for evaluating policy impact and implementation as well as making the necessary training". Also, a task was set "to improve policy planning coordination and hierarchy, by strengthening the government's policy priorities' aggregation to the public administrations in the planning". This is the first Latvian policy planning document which sets out two widely used policy impact evaluation types: ex-ante and ex-post. Performance and performance management system guidelines, *inter alia*, define the requirements to get accurate information and data for evaluation purposes: "The results and their performance indicators provide verifiable information-based policy development (ex-ante evaluation). The acquisition and analysis of results and performance indicators is a prerequisite for ensuring policy post-evaluation (ex-post evaluation)". Of course, a big role in the development of this regulation was played by Latvia's accession to the European Union treaties and today's policy-making principles contained in the EU-level started initiative 'Better Regulation'.

In accordance with the described policy planning documents, there are developed and adopted normative acts which govern the planning documents within the regulations. All policy-planning document binding, matching, validation, updating and cancellation shall be determined by the Development Planning System Law, which has been developed and approved based on PPSAP contained solutions. It came into force on January 1st, 2009 (amended on 10 November and 16 December, 2010 and 16 June, 2011).[8] Regarding the evaluation application to the policy planning documents' development, a significant correction in evaluation procedures within Latvia's policy-making procedures is introduced by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation Nr 1178: *Development of Planning Documents' development and impact assessment regulations*[9]. Hence, the Republic of Latvia's laws and regulations have defined the requirements for the evaluation techniques in both the development of normative acts, as well as the policy planning documents. However, the single policy impact evaluation framework has not guaranteed a balanced understanding of the overall evaluation of policy and policy impact evaluation specifically in all ministries.

Feasibility problems in individual ministries confirmed that the real practice of the various ministries of the Republic of Latvia is highly differentiated. The higher degree of systematisation in evaluation techniques is observed in cases where the evaluation is applied to the EU-funded program assessment. Both the above, and the lack of common understanding as to which study or analytical activity qualifies as an evaluation research, hinder the empirical research of the practical meaning of evaluation research in the Latvian policy-making environment. On the one hand, any annotation of a normative act of the Republic of Latvia, informative report, as well as (the policy planning documents

4 Policy planning document database of Latvia (2011). Electronic database. http://polsis.mk.gov.lv accessed at 10.09.2011
5 ibid.
6 ibid.
7 ibid.
8 Policy planning document database of Latvia (2011). Electronic database. http://polsis.mk.gov.lv accessed at 10.09.2011
9 ibid.

of the Republic of Latvia) guidelines, concepts and programmes contain elements of evaluation. At the same time, methodological techniques of evaluation are highly heterogeneous and often do not qualify for the quality requirements of evaluation. This hampers a correct recording of data about the evaluation research activities' frequency, and, thus, prevents the precise definition of the research object size and may introduce inaccuracies in the research of evaluation practical use. In addition, it should be noted that neither in the Republic of Latvia Chancellery's created research and publications' database, nor on the web sites of the subordinate institutions of the ministries of the Republic of Latvia, is it possible to clearly and accurately identify which of the published researches have been ordered for evaluation purposes. An exception is in the EU's total funding acquisition programmes, for which ex-post impact evaluation can be readily identified both by the names of these researches and also by their narrative, formally logical structure. Even greater difficulties result from attempts to identify a specific custom research results' usage in policy planning, and their links with normative acts or other political decisions. Reference to research data is quite rare, unsystematic – with vague argument of the use of these data.

This feature impedes the precise and objective identification of the situations when a methodological type of research is conducted. The preliminary insight into the issue has shown the diverse and polysemous understanding of the key concepts *evaluation, evaluation research, policy assessment*, and *impact assessment* in the affected social groups (which has been confirmed by an investigative research of the issue). This has encouraged the author to draw attention to the issue-related subjective opinions and interpretations expressed by all the parties involved, i.e., public administration, researchers and politicians. A particularly important objective of the research is to concretise the special character of the issue from the point of view of each party involved, as well as to state the practises of the use of terminology. The objective can be met by employing non-statistical data on policy impact assessment, evaluation researchers' understanding of evaluation and their experience in the field as well as techniques of non-statistical data analysis. Moreover, while collecting the data, it was important to take into consideration the fact that the issue explored is related to explicitly differentiated groups with different (both interest-wise and status-wise) experience and understanding of utility of evaluation research and its practical significance (e.g., different experience of *researchers*, *government officials* and *politicians*). Exploring the practice of evaluation research within a particular research study implies dealing with the perception of the phenomenon in the communicative context of the experience of each group involved. This is why this empirical research study is based on the principles of qualitative methodology. The main research questions formulated at the end of the theoretical part also imply qualitative data gathering. The qualitative approach and its constructivist perspective in particular include multiple characteristics that are considered necessary and important for the study of the subject matter, i.e., *assessment of the rational action strategy/ conducting evaluation research*. Such an approach implies the exploration of individual socially and historically constructive experience and its multiple meanings (Creswell 2003:19). The course of the research includes various parameters that are characteristic of the qualitative approach and facilitate understanding as well as identification of interconnections in the field explored: scholarly viewpoints and integration of personal values in the development of research, establishment of understanding and meaning clusters among the actors/ participants involved, focusing on a unified concept and phenomenon, the study of the context and environment by participants, the role of data interpretation in the overall development of the research.

In order to answer the main questions of this research, the qualitative investigative interview is considered to be the most relevant qualitative ***method of data collection***. The study employs the in-depth semi-structured qualitative interview. As the data providing group is formed by actors whose social action (within the framework of their professional activity) corresponds to the field explored, the informants are considered experts in the field of conducting evaluation and perceived as actors with sufficient eventual narrative competence in relation to the questions explored. "In expert

interviews, we talk to people who are daily in touch with the experience verified in our research/.../ or they may have comprehensive and special experience related to the topic of our research" (Atteslander & Cromm 2003:155).

The theoretical basis for the origin of the method is rooted in E. Husserl's phenomenological approach, A. Schütz's interpretation of the lifeworld concept, which was later developed by P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann 1966), and H. Garfinkel's ethnomethodological studies: "/.../ the qualitative approach to phenomenology is understood as a term that signifies interest in the understanding of social phenomena from the actor's perspective and describes the world as experienced by a subject sustaining the assumption that the meaningful reality is the one perceived by humans. The openness of the phenomenological approach to the meanings of the daily phenomena can also be employed in the analysis of interviews" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:26). The focus on the meanings of the subjective lifeworld experience in qualitative interviews is important in data analysis, when these meanings must be identified and purified. The phenomenological nature of the in-depth interview provides a possibility to collect data containing explicit respect for the interpreted meanings of the described phenomena. This type of interviewing is often employed as an intermediary with the technique of semi-structured data collection. The following features of the in-depth interview qualify as crucial and relevant to the research: the possibility to depict the life-world experience in relation to the world of science; the interview tends to identify the interpreted meanings of the lifeworld of an individual in the context of the concerning research issues; the interview allows detailed characterisation of different aspects of individual experience; it is possible to establish particular profiles of situations and consequences of actions taken; well-weighed and pre-planned naivete, which makes the researcher open to new and unexpected information discoveries; the interview implies the possiblity to include ambivalent provocative contradictory inferences on the interviewer's part; the interview implies sensitive reaction of the interviewer and the interviewer's profound understanding and knowledge of the themes explored (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:28-32).

The conducted semi-structured in-depth interview is based on the partial structuring of the corpus of thematic guidelines with precisely defined thematic fields (it is crucial to detect the informants' experience in these fields, which is reflected in their inferences during the interview), yet generally formulated questions, which are interpreted in accordance with the informant's experience and the general course of the interview. The interviews employed the so-called split questionnaire technique, which implies that one part of the themes is common for all groups of informants, but the other part differs according to the informants' experience in the context of certain issues.

The research employs ***purposeful sampling***. Qualitative methodology as well as the methodology of in-depth interviewing requires elaborating detailed criteria for the selection of informants according to the issues explored. In general, the questions of this study imply collecting data that reflect personal opinions on and understanding of evaluation and practices of evaluation research as well as the practical significance of evaluation expressed by those affected by the phenomenon. This is a particular type of experience that can exist in the following groups of actors:

- Policy makers at the level of public administration – government officials of the Republic of Latvia, who conduct evaluation within the framework of their professional activity and in accordance with the competence of their position. In this group of actors, one can identify at least two different types of experience: that of the civil servants of the State Chancellery, whose competence is to set evaluation requirements and ensure that the ministries of the Republic of Latvia comply with them in their work; and that of the administration of the ministries of the Republic of Latvia, who are responsible for implementing evaluation techniques within the framework of policy planning and coordination, including the processes of elaborating political documents and legislation.
- Conductors of evaluation research – scholars, who conduct certain research that is considered evaluation research by the parties involved and commissioned by the State Chancellery or executive bodies.

– Political decision makers – politicians who have served as ministers of the Republic of Latvia for more than two years.

The criterion used in the selection of civil servants was sufficiently durable and diverse experience in the issues of policy assessment as well as the commission and utilisation of evaluation research. The selection of the ministerial employees was based on the recommendations of the State Chancellery officials (former Director and Counsellor of the Department of Policy Planning and Coordination). Officials from the State Chancellery were selected according to their position and professional activity, i.e., from the former Department of Policy Planning and Coordination. The development of the policy assessment system in Latvian public administration was the Department's responsibility during the period of data collection, September-August, 2010. Ministry employees were selected according to the 'one ministry – one representative' principle with the interviewing of top-ranking officials who are responsible for policy impact assessment and competent in their fields. In the course of selecting the informants from the ministries for research, one could conclude that in different ministries the employees responsible for evaluation represented different administrative departments, which demonstrates a lack of uniformity in Latvian public administration regarding the delegation of competences in policy assessment.

The criterion for the selection of researchers who carried out the evaluation research required that they had specialised in conducting evaluation and carried out a substantial number of commissioned evaluation research. Exact use of this criterion was complicated by the fact that procurement documentation does not always reflect research implemented essentially for policy assessment purposes as evaluation research. Thus, it is difficult to state objectively which research teams (research enterprises or other research bodies) win the tender and how frequently they do so. Therefore, in the selection of scholars, the snowball sampling model was used, which implies that the first selected informant suggests the next expert in the field of evaluation research. The goal of such selection was to choose scholars with quantitatively and qualitatively extensive experience in the managing and implementation of evaluation research. Both researchers with experience in conducting methodologically and semantically diverse applied research and scholars with experience in evaluation consulting were chosen for interviews.

In the selection of political decision makers, the following criteria prevailed: ministers had to represent different political domains with the length of service as a minister no less than two years. In the selection of ministers, it was important that they represented ministries working on a diverse range of issues. The amount of EU competence in the policy making of a certain political domain was also taken into account (e.g., Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development).

The volume of selection is formed by 27 experts: 3 officials from the State Chancellery, 14 civil servants from the ministries (i.e., the number of the Ministries of Latvia during the data gathering period), 5 ministers, and 5 researchers. Inferences of the selected informants were verified regarding their internal validity in 4 focus groups. External validity was verified through consulting Sandra Briggs, an expert in policy impact assessment.

Data were gathered in July – September, 2010. All of the expert interviews were conducted by the author, which made it possible to reach a more profound understanding of the theme and flexibly broaden the research field. Therefore, it was possible to use the information collected in the preceding interviews and improve the structure of the issue in further discussions. The order of interviewing informants from different actor groups was established purposefully and was as follows: officials from the State Chancellery, civil servants from the ministries of the Republic of Latvia, researchers, and ministers.

Data of the empirical research

One of the major conclusions of the research is that the understanding of the essence, goals and functions of evaluation research, opinions on the preconditions for evaluation research, conceptualisations of the practical significance of evaluation research, as well as the general character of how the phenomenon is manifest in all the groups of informants related to evaluation research are highly differentiated and create an impression that the current practice of evaluation research in the policy making environment of Latvia is diverse. This is related to political acts as well as solving social issues in more ways than one.

Practical diversity in the framework of the research issue encouraged to seek a unifying principle that would allow us to understand the interconnections between the different elements of such practice, as well as typologise action models in the course of evaluation research to succeed in interpreting the preconditions for the formation of the practical significance of evaluation research. As previously mentioned, the theoretical analysis of the development of evaluation research makes it possible to conclude that the unifying argument, which serves as the basis for the development of the practice of evaluation research in any political system, is based on attempts to rationalise the policy making process, thus, facilitating the analysis of topical political issues, developing the practice of defining political goals that are most appropriate to the issues detected, and identifying the most appropriate political instruments for the effective attaining of these goals. However, rationalisation of the policy making process either does or does not take place in accordance with action strategies of the actor groups involved in the process. Evaluation research involves multiple groups of actors, and their social actions may be or may be not compatible with the overall functionality of evaluation research in the policy making system. Within the framework of this research, the presence of elements of rationality in the actors' action strategies, which are implemented in the course of evaluation and evaluation research, is considered a positivie feature of evaluation as well as an indicator of its practical significance. As previously mentioned, in the process of implementation of evaluation research, it is possible to identify different types of action performed by actors involved. On the basis of the empirical data, the author typologises the models of action performed by the actors involved in evaluation and identifies elements of rational action in them according to Habermas' types of rational social action. As previously stated, Habermas suggests different possible types of social action, which differ on the basis of the element of rationality manifest in them: *purposive rational social action* (this research employs a narrow understanding of Habermas' category of purposive rational action implying its strategic manifestation, which is implemented in the social context, and excluding its *instrumental* or *object-oriented* manifestation) and *communicative social action*. Each of these models of social action is characterised by certain features, according to which elements of action performed within the framework of evaluation research and their reflection in the interviewing of informants will be analysed. The analysis will structure the conducted evaluation research by suggesting the following elements characterising social action:

(1) Goals of evaluation/ evaluation research
(2) The focus of social action (focus on success or understanding) within the framework of implemented evaluation
(3) Coordination of social action plans (egocentric calculation of success or negotiation of action plans on the basis of common understanding of a situation)

The presence of the above-mentioned elements of social action in the interviews of informants allows us to classify such action as rational. Different manifestations of these elements permit the identification of the type of rationality (purposive or communicative rationality).

The collected data indicate that there are signs of rational action manifest in the experience of all the groups of informants and ideas on evaluation and/or evaluation research expressed in the interviews. On the basis of the informants' statements, one can identify purposive rational action as the

dominant model of rational action in the implementation of evaluation. On the contrary, communicative rationality is expressed scarcely and detected in a certain segment of action only. Features and manifestations of purposive rational action are observed in the behaviour of all the groups of informants, i.e., the State Chancellery officials, ministry employees, researchers, and ministers.

The notions of the goals of evaluation/ evaluation research

The informants' notions of the goals of evaluation research are rooted in the differeneces in opinions on the nature of evaluation research of the analysed actor groups. Each actor group interprets the meaning of evaluation in compliance with the nature of the social role it plays in the context of evaluation/ evaluation research, thus, introducing original conceptions and setting limits for action motivation. As was observed in the data analysis, the State Chancellery officials envisage evaluation as an element in the system of policy planning and assess its goals and functions from such a perspective. Opinions of the ministry employees differ; however, the general picture is that evaluation serves as informative support for the elaboration of legislative or other types of acts. Thus, the main function is the gnostic function of evaluation. Evaluation performs a support function in the analytic activities, which are within the professional competence of the ministry employees in cases of policy planning. Researchers have varying opinions as to the essence of evaluation, but they do not exclude each other. The opinion dominant among scholars is that the main goal of evaluation research is to provide answers to the research questions defined by the commissioner. The dominant view among the ministers is that evaluation is analytical information, which is prepared by civil servants, accompanies resolution drafts and often does not correspond to the context of adopting the resolution. There is also a correlation between such an understanding of the nature of evaluation and the views of each group of actors on the goals of evaluation/ evaluation research. As mentioned before, actors of all the groups, describing their experience in conducting evaluation/ evaluation research, clearly claim that they are determined to attain a certain goal in the evaluation process; however, the important feature of the actors' purposive rationality is that each group of actors envisages a different goal in the implementation of evaluation research:

- The State Chancellery officials envisage improvement of the policy planning system as the main goal of evaluation.
- Ministry employees suggest that the main goal of evaluation is the possibility to enlarge the informative basis that allows creating qualitative political documents.
- Ministers envisage the possibility of additional argumentation for the adoption of resolutions as the main goal of evaluation.
- Researchers believe that the main goal of evaluation is to acquire methodologically precise data that provide thorough answers to the research questions.

The focus of social action (on success or understanding) within the framework of implemented evaluation. Each group of actors defines the goal of evaluation according to the context of their social action and role, which results in non-homogenous action motivation and strategy implementation. When analysing the informants' statements, one can conclude that their expereience reflects egocentric benefit calculation, i.e., it is based on the particular interests of the group. It is worth emphasising once again that the actor groups analysed cannot be characterised as absolutely homogenous in relation to the observed model of benefit calculation within the framework of evaluative action. In the course of the research, it was discovered that experience in the explored issues differs; however, one can trace certain trends that characterise each group of actors as a whole. Thus, at the inter-group level, each group is characterised by its own purposive rational focus, which includes a mechanism of action coordination corresponding to the form of rationality, i.e., an egocentric calculation of success. Officials of the State Chancellery, ministry employees, researchers and ministers understand different consequences of evaluation activities as beneficial to the conducted evaluation. Successful action

in the field of normative regulation improvement, ensurance of legal justification for implementing evaluation and correspondence of implemented action models to such regulation during evaluation are perceived as benefits by the State Chancellery officials. The experience of ministry employees unveils the focus on strict compliance with the normative requirements for the implementation of policy impact assessment. Precise methodology and correct choice of data gathering techniques, as well as accurate fulfillment of requirements set by the contract of the commission are viewed as success in the implementation of evaluation research. The ministers' opinion of evaluation is formed in correlation with possibilities of its utility in the argumentation of resolutions.

Coordination of social action plans

The data of this research indicate that, in the course of evaluation/ evaluation research, it is possible to identify signs of communicative understanding-focused action strategies in special cases only. Such cases are characterised by a goal that unites all the actors' performance in evaluation as well as an overall actors' focus on inter-subjective understanding in a certain situation during evaluation. One of the ministry employees, who claims that the use of evaluation research in resolutions is evident in the work of the ministry, indicates that the presence of communicative bonds and cooperation is compulsory in the context of evaluation research, as this sets preconditions for successful problem solving. In the informant's statements, one can observe the motivation of all the parties involved in the regulation of the situation as well as their interest in the development of the (exports) programme, which serves as the basis for the focus on consensus and purposive orientation in support of evaluative action and reaching the consensus. Such cases, however, are observed in several ministries only, as the main precondition for this is that the politically solved problem is a priority issue for all the interested and affected parties, which is very rare in the process of policy making.

The dominant and most topical trend in the informants' statements, however, is the emphasis on the inappropriatenes of actions of other involved groups to the successful implementation of evaluation, which indicates a lack of unified vision of evaluation goals and the corresponding action strategies. In the analysis of views of each actor group on other groups involved in evaluation, it was discovered that the level of inter-subjective understanding in the communication of the 4 groups of actors is estimated as very low, although it is rarely directly admitted that there is no understanding between the actors conducting evaluation. The material examined is vast and diverse in terms of its content. It reflects the actors' evaluative judgements targeted at other actor groups. In the framework of this research, they are classified as 'social actions short of understanding focus' in the context of evaluation research. In support of the argument on the lack of understanding between the communicating groups performing evaluation activities, the author of this paper provides a brief stuctured overview of typical critical statements on other actor groups (see Table 1).

The statements on other actors' performance during evaluation/ evaluation research included in Table 1 reveal the signs of common mistrust and misunderstanding in the perception of these groups, which actually affects the successful development of collaboration in the context of evaluation research. The informants' statements on the other actor groups involved classify their action and motivation as obstructive for the implementation of evaluation and impeding the utilisation of evaluation results. Each group of actors experienced that the action goals of other groups involved in the implemetation of evaluation were not compatible with the goals of the groups implemeting evaluation. This demonstrates once again the importance of single purposive rationality within the framework of one group of actors in the implementation of evaluation. This does not demonstrate, however, the coordination of the purposive action of all the groups involved in accordance with the unified understanding of the essence of evaluation.

To sum up, each group of actors has its own strict understanding of the goals of evaluation/ evaluation research, which determines its particular social action focus in the course of evaluation, as well as affects the opinions of each group on the preconditions for successful evaluation. This, as

Table 1: Statements about other actor groups involved in evaluation

State Chancellery officials
– on ministry employees "The main thing at the level of civil servants is that they must not accept non-qualitative documents. However, this has taken place in a number of cases /.../ The reasons why this happens are different." "However, at the level of public administration and top-ranking public administration, there have been statements that evaluation makes no sense. Indeed, such things have been voiced, and quite publically, too."
– on ministers "/.../ under usual circumstances, the way out would be that decision makers at the policy level would at least to some extent trust the civil servants /.../ In the majority of cases, policies and decisions are elaborated in cooperation with NGOs, employers, the Association of Local and Regional Governments...I think that civil servants should be granted a credit of trust. Even more so it refers to the new Cabinets of Ministers, when they have just been formed, for it is very difficult to work if we are not trusted. Evaluation can be even more purposeful. Yes, a way out would probably be based on trust. Just trust, and... perhaps, putting some political ambitions aside and /.../.
– on researchers" "no critical judgements."
Ministry Employees
– on the State Chancellery "The State Chancellery doesn't know what they want from the initial evaluation. They don't hide it, but wait for us to manage ourselves. They don't explain in detail or decipher what the State Chancellery is waiting for, what there has to be or how elaborated or profound it should be."
– on ministers "Having worked in the ministry for so long, I have the impression that there is no minister who would care to know about the agenda of the Cabinet of Ministers with all the items on it, which are always many. The civil servants do that. That means that when we write anything, we write to each other. So, don't let them spin the yarn that some minister in the Cabinet has read all the documents in full /.../ They can afford not to read, not to explore and not to look into."
– on researchers "/.../ If we have a look at what is going on in research institutes and organisations, they concoct this topicality for their own sake... and then, when they perform a theoretical insight into this, they shelve it, because it so theoretical that one cannot make use of it. Researchers, certainly, have to look for funding somewhere. So? Why not ask the ministry for it? /.../ and this has become a business trend already. The first thing you need is funding, not the actual desire to get involved in the process. /.../ We have faced the problem in both these aspects, that is, the commissioner ordering research and, what you would call 'student work' in a polite manner, implying that the results of evaluation are at the level of BA studies, and as to what we were expecting, it apeared only when the supervisor came in. There are vey few people who are capable of analysing and ensure analysis at the appropriate level."
Ministers
– on public administration in general (the State Chancellery+ ministry employees) "Unfortunately, what I missed in my work was the intellectual debate with civil servants on possible courses of politics and political actio n /.../ I don't feel that they would be much interested in the direction of policy. I certainly don't want to generalise, there have been exceptions among civil servants; however, those involved in public administration tend to get rid of responsibility. For, if a civil servant came up to the minister with his or her suggestions, I don't think they would always be rejected, but he or she would have to take on certain responsibility, and that is in the way of any initiatives."
– on researchers "/.../ If we talk about independent evaluation in general, that is, policy evaluation, structural evaluation and so on, then we have to admit that they don't really exist in the country. At least, I haven't come across any work of independent researchers /.../ Any research I have seen has had someone's hands laid on it to ensure its development in a certain direction;" "/.../ I can say that it is very frequent that in Latvia, there are individual researchers of various social issues, who have their personal motives. It is quite often, well, it's clear that I don't want to offend anyone, these are financial interests, as reasearchers also need to survive somehow, but the final outcome is that when compiling the results of several studies, implemented in the same time period, politicians are forced to store all this heap of accounts in one pile without any understanding of what there is." /.../ Here in Latvia, all research and science is corrupt, pretty much like the mass media – everything is corrupt, we don't have a single independent medium as a matter of fact. How can one change it? I don't know. In research, we explore what we have started exploring before. And for that, we take the resources devoted to science, and we reproduce what we have explored so far, this is why all these new things we need in economics, we reproduce them according to the pattern established in the Soviet period. And what is really new, what comes from aside and is based on fresh ideas gets ousted and banished, for the research squadron has in a way its own mafia, the mafia of auditors and so on."
Researchers
– on public administration in general (the State Chancellery+ ministry employees) "There are cases when it is difficult to conduct qualitative reasearch, since the agency or institution that announces the competition gives only two months for the actual research in all this documentation on the procurement. This means that, let's say, in two months the final results have to be there. They should have either announced the competition earlier or they should have reworked their own working plan. It sometimes surprises me that a ministry or an agency decides that research is necessary all of a sudden. The feeling is that nothing is planned in good time." "When cooperating with civil servants, one comes across two extremes. It is either that they force you to comply with their conceptions or previously passed resolutions, or the fact that sometimes they have no plan for any action at all, and in that case, in your research, you are expected to define the focus of political action."

Source: author's compilation

a result, would ensure certain success of actions taken, be it the improvement of the policy planning system, or qualitative elaboration of the documents on policy planning, or the passing of a resolution in accordance with their interests, or methodologically precise conduct of research, which would ensure the successful fullfilment of contractual commitment.

Thus, in the implementation of evaluation research, the social action strategy that focuses on success is dominant in the respondents' statements. It corresponds to the prinicples of purposive action; however, these strategies are not uniform among the actor groups involved, if we evaluate them in terms of the goals of evaluation/ evaluation research.

The lack of unified understanding of the nature of evaluation, its goals, functions, preconditions, and practical utility results in a different understanding of the goals of social actions and implies, to a certain extent, the risks of the bureaucartisation of evaluation, since the essence of evaluation is only manifest in the perception of each group of actors. In many cases, this does not comply with the understanding of the actor groups of the essence of evaluation. Even though the representatives of the groups involved indicate the necessity to cooperate in the course of evaluation, the discovered experience of informants does not show any signs of the common vision of the situation, nor does it demonstrate any signs of common focus on the common understanding of evaluation goals, which, in fact, would be surprising to each of the actor groups in the context of their action sectors. In each group of informants, there are people who stress the role of different factors that could facilitate cooperation in the course of evaluation as well as achieve a higher degree of practical significance of evaluation.

Table 2 shows statements by a minister, a researcher, a ministry employee and a State Chancellery official, which give an insight into certain aspects of evaluation implementation, although all of them are focused on the cooperation factor as a prerequisite for successful evaluation. The statements mention the importance of opinions of each involved group, the importance of communication and cooperation during the implementation of evaluation, the importance of communication in defining value-judgement, as well as the necessity for the informative support of social partners and researchers in the elaboration of a certain political initiative or in providing a solution to a social

Table 2: Statements about the necessity of cooperation between the actor groups involved

Minister:	**Researcher:**
"This cooperation is absolutely, absolutely necessary, and by excluding one of the interested parties from the possibility to affect the process of evaluation, the risk of coming to incorrect results is very high. In this respect, I would advise that this cooperation, this desire to find a common solution is crucial. But there exists a necessity to give way to an opposite opinion, too. This is where the research could step in, if it is indubitable and trustworthy research!"	"Evaluation research is impossible if the work is totally isolated, as if the client sits at one end of the table and says "I need evaluation of this or that process" and I say "OK, now I'll go and, let's say in three months I will deliver it to you". The principle of evaluation research is somewhat a bit different... It is possible to ensure a valuable and objective research if the researcher works in a group responsible for elaboration of a new political initiative or implementation of a new programme."
Ministry employee:	**State Chancellery official:**
"One has to be very much capable of evaluating. It is a very much profound skill, which must be developed, and it has to be done by involving both researchers and social partners. I would say that it is highly irresponsible to evaluate with no communication, with no discussion of judgements."	"As far as we are getting along on our own as the State Chancellery, it is absolutely hopeless to succeed in problem solving. When we are together and do it with social partners, it is much better, but when it is stated by independent researchers, it has a different value. And all these judgements are important to both successful policy making and society, for this implies essentially true evaluation."

Source: author's compilation

problem. However, the experience of the informants suggests that the presence of these factors is not systematic in the social actions performed in the context of evaluation. It is likely to be defined as wishful thinking that is manifest in several statements of the infomants.

Thus, it is not possible to speak about a unified understanding of the goals and meaning of evaluation/ evaluation research shared by all groups of actors, which would result in coordinated and unified realisation of evaluation goals and definition of the meaning of evaluation in the context of solving social issues and/ or identification of models for doing so.

The experience of the actors interviewed identifies the strategy of purposive social action as dominant in the implementation of evaluation research, which, however, does not imply a unified understanding of evaluation goals in the context of a broader system of action of the actor groups. There is no unified mechanism of coordination of social action, i.e., in opposition to the practice of evaluation/ evaluation research. In Latvian policy making, there are strategies of communicative rational action, which presuppose a focus on understanding in implementing social actions; however, its manifestations are situational and non-typical.

Conclusions

In the process of the implementation of evaluation research, it has been possible to identify different types of action of the involved groups. The evidence gained in the experience and interviews of all the groups of informants in respect of the self-evaluation and/ or evaluation of research in practice sessions reveal features of rational action. The statements of the informants, seen as the model of the dominant rational action, allow us to identify purposive rational action; however, only as manifestations of communicative action that are not well-pronounced and that can be stated only in separate segments of evaluative action. Manifestations of the strategy of purposive rational action are evident in the results of all groups of informants: officials of the State Chancellery, ministers, ministry employees of the Republic of Latvia, and researchers. Actors of all groups have been oriented towards success in the process of conducting evaluation and the achievement of the specific objective; an essential feature of purposive rationality of these actors is the fact that each group of actors sees a different aim in the implementation of evaluation research:

- Officials of the State Chancellery consider that the improvement of the policy planning system is the dominant objective of evaluation;
- Employees of ministries of the Republic of Latvia consider that the dominant objective of evaluation is the opportunity to extend the information basis that would allow to create a qualitative policy document;
- Ministers consider that the dominant objective of evaluation is the opportunity to acquire arguments for decision making;
- Researchers believe that the dominant objective of evaluation is to obtain methodologically precise data that would provide exhaustive answers to the questions of the commissioned piece of research.

Thus, each group is characterised by a specific focus on purposive rationality that also encompasses the action coordination mechanism, which is typical of the given rationality: the egocentric calculation of success. Each group of actors distinguishes different consequences of evaluative actions to determine success in the performance of evaluation.

It is only in separate cases in the practice of evaluation/ evaluation research that it is possible to identify features of communicative or understanding-focused action strategies. These cases are characterised by a unifying aim for all actions in respect of the evaluation, as well as orientation towards the inter-subjective understanding of all the actors, who are involved in the given evaluation practice situation.

The action rationality model of groups of actors involved in evaluation is related to the possibilities of the practical application of the evaluation. The approach that is oriented towards a practical application of the evaluation envisages intensive cooperation of all the parties involved within the framework of all methodological steps of the evaluation research, including an agreement in the early phases of evaluation on the application forms of evaluation/ evaluation research and the identification of the main beneficiary of the evaluation. This kind of collaboration (that would promote the application of evaluation) is possible due to the existence of the communicative action model, which characterises the orientation of the subject of social action towards understanding and coordination of mutual actions by way of 'the act of understanding'. In the policy making environment of Latvia, the dominant purposive rationality model of the actors involved in the evaluation research practice encumbers gaining a unified notion of the application of evaluation research results, because each group of actors has a different notion of success or successful results of the action. The evaluation procedure does not include debates/ agreement either formally or informally on the models of the application of evaluation results and their users. Despite the objectives of evaluation prescribed by the legal acts of the Republic of Latvia and set by the technical procurement specifications of each evaluation research, which formally define a unified framework of evaluation objectives, the expectations of each group of actors differ in respect of practical significance of the evaluation. This kind of a differentiated purposive rational action strategy of the actor groups involved in a typical evaluation in the policy making environment of Latvia is not compatible with an approach oriented towards a practical application of evaluation. In the face of purposive rational action being the dominant type for the actors involved, the present practice of the application of evaluation research is characterised by a pronounced dependence on the political and economic context of the situation; hence, the results of the evaluation may become and indeed become the most significant actors in terms of power: a tool of manipulative argumentation for ministers. In the cooperation of the actors involved in the evaluation practice, the strategy of communicative action (rationality) is related to the development of an approach that is oriented towards practical application of evaluation; however, it is not typical of the present policy evaluation practice in the environment of Latvian policy making. At present, the purposive action strategy model that is typical of the dominant evaluation/ evaluation research implementation practice in policy making endangers trust in evaluation research, and it may diminish (in some cases, it has already diminished) the interest of policy makers in this kind of applied research, thus, affecting the scope of application of social research and scientific argumentation in the identification of social problem solutions in Latvia.

Without denying the significance of all social participation instruments that have been used in policy making in Latvia so far, one must especially underscore the importance of the function of evaluation research dialogue. Evaluation research practice that is oriented towards practical application would serve, in the opinion of the author, as an organic basis for the development of communicative action strategies of all actors involved (which at present work separately); it would also promote dialogue based on mutual understanding that would enhance the search for consensus and its attainment in political decisions. The practical understanding of the enlightening use of evaluation research would promote not only the identification of a more multifaceted analysis of the causes of social problems, which have emerged on the political agenda, and a more objective identification of models of political solutions that would be free from political pressure, but would also establish a structural framework for communication among researchers, the social groups affected by the problem to be solved politically, policy planners, and decision makers. Practical case studies, supported by evidence of informants (see enlightening application practice), testify that in the given research framework, the form of cooperation of the actors involved promotes the development of a common understanding of the situation in a purposeful and rational way, and constitutes a more effective elaboration and implementation of solutions to social problems in policy making.

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