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Ex-post evaluations in Norway and France

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Abstract

The paper presents the French and Norwegian ex-post evaluation frameworks and outlines questions that ex-post analysis should address. French and Norwegian results are compared, providing indications on ex-post evaluation frameworks' tailoring and feedback on the quality of ex ante assessments.

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1. Introduction

Countries throughout the world spend huge resources on transport investments and most countries also devote extensive attention to ex-ante project appraisal. The time and money spent on impact assessments, cost estimation and other project front-end activities are, however, rarely matched by the amounts used for ex-post project evaluation. The lack of feedback on the quality and performance of infrastructure projects entails a clear risk of making wrong choices for infrastructures that will be in use for decades or even centuries, and of spending less efficiently the high amounts needed for these projects.

Evaluation involves systematic data collection, analysis and assessment of a planned, ongoing or completed activity, a business, an instrument or a sector. It can be conducted before an action is taken or a project is implemented (ex-ante), during the implementation or after the project has ended (ex-post). The evaluation can be performed by internal or external experts.

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There are a number of reasons for carrying out ex-post evaluation. An overall purpose is to assess the value of a project or a policy. This involves an assessment of success, including if the original goals have been met. It can serve to hold involved actors responsible for success or failure. The results can feed back into the ex-ante methodologies and as such improve both forecasting tools and appraisal models. Most importantly though, the lessons learned from ex-post evaluation may help us make better policy decisions and project selection in the future.

Projects are evaluated more frequently than policies, reforms or institutions. This is because projects are temporary undertakings that are implemented during a restricted time-period, where the aim is to achieve a specific outcome or goal. A key issue of evaluation is to determine whether a project has been successful. Success is, however, a highly aggregated parameter and an issue that may depend on the viewpoint of the evaluator. Pinto and Slevin (1988) argued that until project management could agree upon determinants of success, attempts to monitor and anticipate project outcomes would be severely restricted. Samset (2003) thus suggested three measures of success that together could capture the ambitions of different project stakeholders. *Operational success* is related to the iron triangle of project management, i.e., whether the project has been delivered within the agreed budget, time and quality. *Tactical success* measures the extent to which the project has achieved its formal goals, if the impacts are positive and if it will remain in relation to people's needs in the future. *Strategic success* is related to the broader issue of long term benefits in the broadest sense and if the effects can be sustained in the long term.

Most ex-ante and thus ex-post evaluation is centred on the monetised impacts involved in the cost-benefit analysis (CBA). Value for money measured by the CBA is an important success criterion, but research has shown that even countries that put a lot of emphasis on CBA as an appraisal tool, make little or limited use of its results in the selection of projects (see Eliasson et al., 2015, and the references therein). Countries such as Norway and Sweden for example, which spend large resources on ex-ante economic appraisal and where the economic appraisal following the principles of CBA is in line with international best practice, routinely select projects with a negative net present value (NPV) for implementation. This means that decision makers have policy aspirations beyond those that can be captured by the CBA alone. Objectives related to regional development, economic distribution, social accessibility, changes in land use or population levels should thus form part of broader evaluation framework.

There are a number of ex-post evaluation schemes used by national transport authorities in several countries and in international organisations and lending institutions. The diverse uses of ex-post schemes are discussed for instance in Fitzroy et al., 2016. In Europe, we are not aware of any other countries that Norway, France and the UK that has implemented broad and comprehensive methodologies that are compulsory to the responsible transport agencies (Nicolaisen and Driscoll, 2016). This paper presents the Norwegian and French evaluation schemes, their differences and some results of the evaluations that have been carried out.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents ex-post evaluations in Norway. Section 3 presents the systems and results from France. Section 4 discusses the differences in the evaluations and feedback on the quality of ex ante assessments, then draws some conclusions.

2. Ex-post evaluations in Norway

In Norway as in other countries, individual academics have carried out ex-post studies of forecast and estimation accuracy comparing estimated traffic and construction costs with outturn results (see, e.g., Welde and Odeck, 2011; Odeck, 2014; Odeck et al., 2015). Such studies provide insight into important elements of the appraisal of projects and may contribute to the assessment of project success, but lack the broad focus that should be included in ex-post evaluation. At best, single-variable ex-post studies provide only a partial measure of project success.

2.1. Evaluation system

To capture a range of variables the Norwegian Ministry of Transport and Communications thus instructed the Norwegian Public Roads Administration (the NPRA) to annually evaluate the monetised costs and benefits of 3-5 road projects from 2006. Projects must have cost more than NOK 200 million (\approx EUR 22 million) and have been operational for a minimum of five years (Statens vegvesen, 2006). The purpose of the post opening assessment is to determine whether the benefits of the projects have exceeded the costs, and to analyse the reasons for deviations between the forecasted and measured impacts. The main objective is to test whether the information as included in

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