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Evaluation of results and adaptation of EU Rural Development Programmes

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Abstract

The EU Commission highlights evaluations as important for improving common policies. But do evaluations actually contribute? This paper examines whether this has been the case for the EU Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). We investigate 1) to what extent evaluations have influenced the design of national programmes and 2) if they have affected the Rural Development Regulation on which national programmes are based. Our main finding is that evaluations do not seem to affect future policy to any discernible degree. This is the case for both national programmes and the Regulation itself, which seems to have evolved in response to external pressures. Partly, this may be because evaluations tend to give vague or too general recommendations. Moreover, evaluations seldom apply counterfactual analysis, often because of a lack of data, implying that results may be methodologically questioned. Lastly, evaluations, and RDPs, are hard to locate and seldom translated from their native languages, impairing the possibilities of learning from the experiences of others.

Keywords: EU, Rural Development Programme, Evaluation

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1. Introduction

In May 2015, the EU Commission launched its Better Regulation Agenda. The First Vice-President of the EU Commission Frans Timmermans, stated on the occasion,¹ that: "We must rigorously assess the impact of legislation in the making so that political decisions are well-informed and evidence-based. ...we must devote at least as much attention to reviewing existing laws and identifying what can be improved or simplified." An implicit assumption in the statement is that a review will result in policy improvement if deficiencies are detected. Hence, it seems worthwhile to examine whether past policy reviews/evaluations of EU policies have *actually* resulted in better policies.

Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), which constitute the second pillar of EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), have been evaluated on several occasions. Accordingly, these evaluations could be an interesting case in point. Moreover, the CAP is the most expensive and extensive of the EU common policies and has a direct impact on land use. Rural development policy alone had a total budget of € 152 billion in the period 2007-2013 (ENRD, 2014a). The large sums involved make it particularly important to ensure that the money is used efficiently and the evaluations should ideally contribute to this aim.

Two main questions regarding the potential influence of evaluations on policy formation emerge: (1) whether the design of national RDPs has been affected by evaluations, and (2) whether evaluations have affected the development of the Rural Development Regulation on which national RDPs are based. To answer the first question we investigate:

- How evaluations have been conducted
- What recommendations they have resulted in
- To what extent the results have influenced the design of future programmes

With respect to the second question, we analyse:

- If the evaluation process is designed in such a way that a well-informed and evidence-based advice can be produced.
- If there is any link between changes in the Rural Development Regulation between programming periods and policy recommendations emerging from the EU syntheses reports of national evaluation results.

This paper is related to the broad literature, influenced by Weiss (1979) and Knott and Wildasvskys (1980), on how knowledge and research is utilised in society. Stimulated by the growing attention to "evidence-based" policy, the interest in analyses of the utilisation of scientific results for policy making has grown considerably. The resulting literature is however mainly focused on application within medicine, psychology and natural science; see Walter et al. (2003). Studies in the field of social sciences are scarce and ever scarcer are studies related to the primary interest of our work. Existing results are also conflicting. For example, Boswell (2008) investigates how scientific results are used by the EU Commission, when it comes to development of immigration policy, and finds that knowledge is primarily used to enhance the legitimacy of policy rather than to improve its performance. In contrast, by surveying scientific members of the Commission's expert committees, Rimkute and Haverland (2013) conclude that a strategic use of knowledge is not highly prominent in the process of proposal drafting.

¹ See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4988_en.htm

Results from previous studies on the utilisation of evaluation results in the design of RDPs are somewhat discouraging. Laschewski and Schmidt (2008) describe the exploitation of evaluation results in the Commission's internal decision process as poor after having conducted in-depth interviews with different stakeholders. Huelemeyer and Schiller (2010), using semi-structured interviews with experts from different member states (MS), conclude that evaluation results only have a limited input on programme development. The European Court of Auditors (ECA) has criticised the RDP evaluation process for, inter alia, bad timing which impairs the usefulness of results for policy making, and for there being too much focus on spending the budget instead of on the efficiency of spending (ECA, 2013).

Our analysis adds to the ongoing debate on whether EU policy evaluations serve to improve policy performance or to legitimise and defend existing policy. It is based on comparisons between recommendations in the mandatory evaluation reports of RDPs and subsequent policy revisions of programmes or a lack thereof. This contrasts from previous studies which are built on surveys and interviews. Hence, a major advantage of our approach is that it is based on objective sources and not on judgements or opinions of those involved in the process. Additional benefits are that we do not only focus on adoption of the recommendations made in the evaluations, we also examine if there *exists* any recommendations to adopt and how the evaluations have been conducted, i.e. if recommendations are the result of scientific analysis or more of the ad hoc type. A crucial issue is the accessibility of evaluations and RDPs. To our knowledge, we are the first to investigate how easy it is for MS to learn from each other's experiences based on the accessibility of the RDP evaluation results.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a background to EU rural development policy. Section 3 discusses the data and method used for our analyses. Sections 4 to 6 present our main results. Section 7, finally, contains a discussion of results and some suggestions based on our findings.

2. EU rural development policy

EU rural development policy aims at improving the competitiveness of agriculture and forestry, providing public goods such as environmental improvement, and enhancing the conditions for creating lively and attractive rural areas (European Communities, 2003; Council Regulations (EC) No 1698/2005, art. 4, and (EC) No 1305/2013, art. 4).

Rural development policy was formally introduced through RDPs as the second pillar of the CAP in 2000. As each RDP covers a period of seven years, there has been three programming periods: 2000-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 (ongoing). MS can choose between having one RDP for the whole country, regional RDPs covering different parts of its territory, or a national programme complemented by a set of regional RDPs (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1257/1999 art. 41; (EC) No. 1698/2005 art. 13; (EC) No. 1305/2013 art. 6). MS are required to submit their RDPs, constructed from a large menu of eligible measures, to the Commission before implementation and make them available to the public (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1257/1999 art. 41; (EC) No. 1698/2005 art. 18 and 76; (EC) No. 1305/2013 art. 10). Policy objectives have remained more or less unchanged, but there have been changes in the programme's formal structure, the number of measures to choose from, and the funding arrangements. This will be discussed further in section 5.

2.1 The common monitoring and evaluation framework

MS are obliged to monitor how the money is used and to evaluate the effects of the support given (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1257/1999 art. 49, and 1260/1999 art. 40-43; (EC) No. 1698/2005 art. 84; (EC) No. 1303/2013 art. 55 and 56, and 1305/2013 art. 66). Evaluations take place at certain points – ex ante, mid-term, and ex post – according to a standardised process regulated through the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF). Evaluators must be independent of the implementation, management and financing of the programmes (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1260/1999 art. 43; (EC) No. 1698/2005 art. 84; (EC) No. 1303/2013 art. 54).

The CMEF includes a set of common evaluation questions for each measure and a set of common horizontal questions for the entire program. To help answer the questions, there is a set of indicators for assessing the implementation and performance of the programme: input, output, result and impact indicators (see, for instance, EU Commission, 2006a).

Assessing the impacts of the measures requires some kind of counterfactual analysis, i.e. comparing the outcome for beneficiaries to the outcome for non-beneficiaries. The CMEF recommends, but does not require, quantitative counterfactual analysis of empirical data (EU Commission, 2006a). As the full effects of several measures may not manifest themselves immediately data should preferably be longitudinal and cover a sufficient period of time.

Evaluation results are to be made available to the public on request (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1260/1999 art. 40; (EC) No. 1698/2005 art. 84; (EC) No. 1303/2013 art. 54). This should improve the prospects of making the RDPs more efficient by learning from each other's experiences. However, as programming for the next period starts well before the current RDP has expired, the timing of the evaluations is not optimal in this respect. In particular the ex-post evaluation of the previous RDP is done *after* the next programme has been launched. Nevertheless, the standardised evaluation process, requiring all MS to analyse the effects of their RDP-measures using identical evaluation questions and make results public, has the potential to generate valuable information for decision makers.

3. Material and method

To answer our first question – if national choices are affected by evaluations – we analyse how the RDPs have developed over time and how the development corresponds to the results and recommendations of the evaluations.

Despite that MS must submit their RDPs and their evaluation reports to the commission, these documents are surprisingly hard to find. Apparently no records are kept at the Commission. Instead, we were referred to the websites of “the relevant authorities in the respective MS”. After spending considerable time locating these websites, the RDPs and the evaluations turned out to be available only in their native languages. Hence, we base our analysis on the RDPs and evaluation reports of nine countries/regions – Austria, France (Hexagon/Languedoc-Roussillon), Germany (Bremen/Lower Saxony), Ireland, Italy (Marche), Latvia, Spain (Navarra), the Netherlands, and Sweden – as research units from these countries participate in the TRUSTEE-project, which this paper is a part of, and could assist in finding the documents. Still, we include countries of different sizes, types of farming and traditions when it comes to rural policy.

We focus on three different measures depicting three different types of policy rationale: (1) *support to investments in agricultural holdings*, which could improve competitiveness if the financial system does not function well; (2) *grassland support* intended to increase biodiversity and/or reduce nutrient leakage which concern externalities that farmers are unlikely to be fully compensated for by the market; and (3) *support for basic services for the rural economy and population*, that is, investments in what could be characterised as local public goods which also are unlikely to be fully compensated by the market.

To track programme changes over time, we utilise the earliest available version of the RDPs for each period assuming that these best reflect policy makers' intentions (during a given period external factors, such as the financial crisis, may enforce them to alter programmes). Changes are examined in relation to the results of the ex-post evaluation of the RDPs for the period 2000-2006 and of the mid-term evaluations of the RDPs for the period 2007-2013. Because of the timing issues, we do not expect these evaluations to affect the programme for 2007-2013. However, it is still of interest to examine changes in programme design from 2000-2006 to 2007-2013.

To answer our second question – If evaluations affect the Rural Development Regulation – we examine how the Regulation has changed over time regarding the menu of measures and priorities, as well as regarding the requirements and recommendations guiding the MS in the organisation of the evaluations: clarity of evaluation questions, allocated resources, timing and quality requirements. Especially quality requirements are decisive to insure soundness of the recommendations as inadequate methodology, and/or data, is likely to result in misleading assessments of the impact of the evaluated policies.

We then analyse how changes in the Regulation relate to the results from the national evaluations. In addition to recommendations in the national evaluations of the three measures in our nine chosen countries, we also utilise the results in two special reports, commissioned by the EU Commission (Kantor, 2011, and ÖIR, 2012). These reports synthesise the results of, respectively, the national ex-post evaluations of the RDPs for 2000-2006, and of the national mid-term evaluations of the RDPs for 2007-2014.

The evaluations' impacts on the design of the RDPs, and the Rural Development Regulation, are hypothesised to depend on their scientific foundation. Since supports are not distributed randomly, results from counterfactual analysis using empirical data on target variables and other factors that could affect the outcome for both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are regarded as having better scientific foundation than results obtained from simple before-after comparisons. Moreover, as some of the influencing factors may not be observed, results based longitudinal data for matched beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are regarded as more reliable than results based on cross-sectional data. Results elicited from survey questions targeting beneficiaries only or from expert opinions are considered to have weaker foundations. Beneficiaries' responses may be governed by strategic incentives and clouded by difficulties in assessing the hypothetical counterfactual situation and it is often unclear which factors have influenced the verdict of experts.

In some cases, notably environmental measures, practically everyone may receive the support, making it difficult to identify a control group. Evaluators might then attempt to assess the effects of the measures using simulation models. Simulation models rely on input from other studies concerning key parameters and conditions affecting these key parameters may have changed from when

they were first elicited. Case studies, an alternative suggested in the CMEF to overcome problems with lack of data, can provide important insights but results may be difficult to generalise. Accordingly, results from both simulation models and case studies are regarded as less reliable than those obtained from counterfactual analyses of (good) longitudinal empirical data.

4. Impact of evaluations on the design of national rural development programmes

4.1 Support to investments in agricultural holdings/physical assets

The measure has changed name over time but its principal aim – to improve the overall performance of agricultural holdings – has remained (see Council Regulations (EC) No. 1257/1999, art. 4-7; (EC) No. 1698/2005, art. 26; (EC) No. 1305/2013, art. 17). In most cases, the support is a grant aid, expressed as a percentage of pre-specified eligible costs. Countries can choose the level of intensity, but the maximum allowed aid intensity is specified at EU level. An overview of the development of the measure can be found in Table A.4 in the Appendix. All our chosen countries/regions use the measure.

4.1.1 How have evaluations been conducted?

Some form of comparison before and after support has been received seem to be most frequent. In some cases the analysis appears to be restricted to beneficiaries (Idom Consultoria, 2008; Indecon, 2010) but it is more common to do a before-and-after comparison of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (e.g. Ati Ecoter-Resco-Unicab, 2008 and ELFLA, 2010). Differences between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are tested statistically in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), France (MAP, 2008) and Germany (VTI, 2008a and PRU, 2010).

Many countries have also applied qualitative analysis, asking beneficiaries or experts how they experience the support using various methods: interviews (MAP, 2008; MAAPRAT, 2010; LEI, 2008; ECORYS 2010a), case studies (MAAPRAT, 2010), expert consultations (MAAPRAT, 2010; PRU, 2010; LEI, 2008; ECORYS 2010a), surveys (VTI, 2008a; Indecon, 2010; Ati Ecoter-Resco-Unicab, 2008, ECCO SFERA, 2010; SLU, 2009; ECORYS 2010a) and visits to beneficiary farms (MAAPRAT, 2010).

Five evaluations use more advanced statistical methods. In two cases the analysis is limited to effects on beneficiaries. First, the ex-post evaluation of Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a) uses a logistic regression to examine effects on the development of beneficiary farms. Second, the average gain from support for those who received support is estimated by a difference-in-difference regression in the Austrian mid-term evaluation (BMFLUW, 2010). Three studies take both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries into account. The French ex-post evaluation (MAP, 2008) examines if the support affects farm-level growth using a Logit model. Lastly, the Swedish ex-post (SLU, 2009) and mid-term (SLU, 2010) evaluation both use a fixed-effect, difference-in-difference analysis on matched supported and unsupported farms to investigate the effect on investment, productivity, value added and employment.

Several evaluators mention problems when conducting the evaluations. Lack of data is mentioned in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), France (MAP, 2008; MAAPRAT, 2010), Latvia (ELEFLA, 2010), Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a) and Sweden (SLU, 2009; SLU, 2010). At times the problem precludes statistical analysis (MAAPRAT, 2010). In other cases the evaluator is unable to assess the impact of certain support types (MAP, 2008) or effects on specific target variables (SLU, 2009; SLU, 2010). Other problems are

difficulties to construct an appropriate control group when most farmers receive the support (BMFLUW, 2010) and that the short time frame may make it difficult for the effects to materialise (BMFLUW, 2010; SLU, 2009). There are also complaints connected to the evaluation process in general such as a lack of time and money to perform a proper evaluation (BMFLUW, 2010).

Evaluations are sometimes unclear regarding the methodological choices made. Results can be presented without explaining their origin, the analysis split in several documents without cross-referencing, and the method section sometimes refers to the whole evaluation, making it impossible to know how a certain measure has been evaluated. This should be kept in mind when reading our analysis.

Results are mixed. The simple comparisons tend to show that beneficiaries have a more positive development than non-beneficiaries. For example, beneficiaries invest significantly more than non-beneficiaries in France (MAP, 2008) and are more financially stable in Bremen - Lower Saxony (PRU, 2010) but it cannot be concluded that this is caused by the investment support. The econometric evidence on actual effects is more unclear. In Lower Saxony the support is found not to have affected farm development (VTI, 2008a) while, in Austria, positive effects are found on increases in facilities, livestock, milk quotas and income growth among beneficiaries (BMFLUW, 2010). In the French ex-post evaluation (MAP, 2008); one type of investment support (PAM) is positively linked to growth but not another (CTE). In Sweden, both the ex-post (SLU, 2009) and the mid-term evaluation (SLU, 2010) find positive effects on investment, although there are also indications of crowding-out. The mid-term evaluation (SLU, 2010) further shows that the effect on employment is small but positive, that the effect on value added is small but negative and that the effect on total factor productivity is insignificant.²

4.1.2 What types of recommendations are given?

In several cases no or very few recommendations are given (MAAPRAT, 2010; Idom Consultoria, 2008; VTI, 2008; ECCO SFERA, 2010; SLU, 2009). Among the relatively clear recommendations actually given, the suggested policy changes vary. Yet, some common themes emerge, such as targeting some form of market failure. Investments in public goods is recommended for Bremen - Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a; PRU, 2010), Marche (ECCO SFERA, 2010), and Sweden (SLU, 2010) which also recommends supporting investments with positive external effects such as investments that benefit the environment. Related recommendations can be found in the MTE of Navarre (Red2Red, 2010) that suggests more focus on investments in renewable energy.

Innovation-related investments and implementation are highlighted in France (MAP, 2008), Marche (Ati Ecoter-Esco-Unicab, 2008) and the Netherlands (ECORYS, 2010a; ECORYS 2010b). Evaluators in Austria (Le 08, 2008; BMFLUW, 2010) and the Netherlands (ECORYS 2010a and 2010b) suggest more focus on larger investments/projects while those in Latvia (ELFLA, 2010) recommend redistributing support to small and medium-sized farms as well as to give less money to those that already have received support. Other types of recommendations are to better target local problems in France (MAP, 2008), to introduce a more comprehensible intervention logic in Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a) and to concentrate support on farms with development potential in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010). Finally, better data collection for future evaluations is recommended in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), France

² We focus on the results in the Swedish mid-term evaluation because they are seen as more reliable by the evaluator. Both the ex-post and mid-term evaluation use the same data and methods but a longer panel is available for the mid-term evaluation.

(MAP, 2008), Sweden (SLU, 2009), and Latvia (ELFLA, 2010). A list of all recommendations is available in the Appendix, Table A.1.

4.1.3 Have recommendations been followed?

Recommendations have been followed on 13 occasions. Disregarding recommendations not requiring policy changes, only 10 recommendations have been followed of the almost 50 identified. We consider the number of followed recommendations to be low. However, we are generally not able to see if recommendations that do not concern measure design have been followed.³ All followed recommendations are presented in Table 4.1 below. For example, the lower limits for eligible costs have increased in the Austrian RDP for the period 2014-2020 (Austria, 2014; ÖPUL, 2000; Le 07-13, 2007). The recommendation to target larger investments is therefore followed. Another example is that the French investment support becomes more decentralised over time (MAP, 2000; MAP, 2011; MAP, 2015). Hence, we consider the recommendation to better adapt the support to local conditions to be followed

Table 4.1: Followed recommendations

Recommendation	Country/Region
Target larger investments	Austria
Remove bonus for creating an operational concept	Austria
Target local problems/adapt to local conditions	France
Keep support for investments that lets farmers anticipate new standards or go beyond existing levels	France
Continue to target young farmers	France
Target technological innovations	France
Focus on the provision of public goods such as animal welfare and environmental protection	Bremen - Lower Saxony
Focus investment support on interventions that differ from ordinary business activities (e.g. quality improvement, certification, new technologies, protection of environmental resources)	Marche
More support to farmers/sectors that have not received support before, less to those that have been supported	Latvia
Redistribute support to small and medium-sized farms	Latvia
Target investments in collective goods or investments with positive external effects (e.g. animal welfare, environment)	Sweden
Continue to support investments that improve the durability and structure of the sector	the Netherlands
More product innovation-oriented implementation	the Netherlands

4.2 Grassland support

The grassland support aims to enhance or preserve biodiversity. Its design differs depending on the circumstances in each country/region. In some areas, focus may be on extensification of grassland management to prevent too intensive use, while in other areas, it may be to support continued use of grasslands that would otherwise not be managed. The grassland support is one of several sub-measures within the category of agri-environment measures.⁴ Inclusion of an agri-environment

³ A few recommendations of this type are found, for example to change the content of business plans or to conduct further investigations of certain issues.

⁴ The fact that grassland support is a sub-measure is a potential aggravation for comparisons of the design of RDPs over time as changes in the budget or conditions for support of the sub-measure may be “hidden” in the broader measure.

scheme in the RDP is compulsory in all MS⁵ but not all choose to include a grassland support. Table A.5 in the Appendix gives a more detailed overview of the grassland support. All our chosen countries/regions but Navarra use the measure.⁶

4.2.1 How have evaluations been conducted?

Our impression is that the evaluations have focused on monitoring payments instead of on eliciting their effectiveness. Generally, it appears to have been difficult to evaluate the impact of the support due to lack of data in France (MAP; 2008; MAAPRAT, 2010), Ireland (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2008), Latvia (ELFLA, 2008) and Sweden (SLU, 2009). In Austria (BMFLUW, 2010) the data available only covers a short period.

Interviews are the most common method and used in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), France (MAAPRAT, 2010), Marche (ECCO SFERA, 2010), Sweden (SLU, 2009) and the Netherlands (ECORYS, 2010a and 2010b). Surveys are also relatively common and used in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), France (MAP, 2008) Ireland (Indecon, 2010) and Marche (ECCO SFERA, 2010). Ireland (Indecon, 2010) and France (MAAPRAT, 2010) employ case studies and workshops while comparisons of indicators for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are used in Ireland (Indecon, 2010) and Marche (Ati Ecoter-Resco-Unicab, 2008). Other methods are consultations with stakeholders (Indecon, 2010 and LEI, 2008), literature reviews (SLU, 2010), expert evaluations (SLU, 2009) and inventory of species on meadows and pastures (SLU, 2009).

Only a few evaluations attempt to assess the actual impact of the grassland support. The Swedish ex-post evaluation (SLU, 2009) uses simulation models to compare two regions with different conditions. Simulation models are also used in the Swedish mid-term evaluation (SLU, 2010) to compare the current situation with a reference scenario without support. The Austrian ex-post evaluation (Le 08, 2008) uses model calculations and logistic regression analysis to estimate effects on the breeding population of water birds. Lastly, the Austrian mid-term evaluation (BMFLUW, 2010) employs model calculations to, among other things, estimate nitrogen leakage.

Data problems make it difficult for most evaluators to assess effects. When conclusions are drawn, both negative and positive effects are found. For example, in France (MAP, 2008; MAAPRAT, 2010) the evaluators find, at best, very small effects because the current support mainly functions as a money transfer. In the Netherlands (LEI, 2008), the number of meadow birds declined after the support was introduced which makes it difficult to say that the support has a positive effect on biodiversity. The Swedish ex-post evaluation (SLU, 2009), finds effects to be limited but positive. The support can, for example, encourage continued farming where farming is needed for the preservation of biodiversity. The mid-term evaluation also found that the support has a positive effect on the number of cattle and continued use of grasslands (SLU, 2010).

4.2.2 What types of recommendations are given?

Since the design of the grassland support differs substantially between countries there are also quite large differences between recommendations. Some evaluators suggest to more or less abolish the

⁵ In geographical terms, the requirement seems less restrictive in the 2014-2020 period, as inclusion of an agri-environmental scheme is compulsory at national and/or regional level (EU Regulation 1305/2013, Article 28), whereas the member states in the 2007-2013 period are obliged to ensure that support is available throughout their territories (EU Regulation 1698/2005, Article 39).

⁶ Navarra does introduce a grassland support comparable to those in other countries in the period 2014-2020, this is however too late for us to be able to include the region in our analysis.

current support (MAP, 2008; VTI 2008a; VTI 2008b) while others suggest considerably smaller changes such as a review of the cutting rules (ELFLA, 2010).

There are nonetheless common points. First, there appears to be a general demand to make the support more effective when it comes to environmental goals. For example, the mid-term evaluation of Austria (BMFLUW, 2010) suggests a greater focus on objectives relating to Natura 2000 and the ex-post evaluation of Marche (Ati Ecoter-Resco-Unicab, 2008) recommends prioritising the protection of biodiversity. The French ex-post evaluation (MAP, 2008) further proposes to introduce a more goal-oriented support system rewarding actions with environmental benefits. A similar recommendation is found in the Swedish mid-term evaluation (SLU, 2010) that suggests letting the environmental effects determine measure design.

Second, several recommendations concern future evaluations: i.e. review effects on flora and fauna, habitats and the landscape (Austria, Le 08, 2008), use environmental time series data to develop statistical models of the impact of the support (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2008), improve availability of field data to evaluate environmental effects (Sweden, SLU, 2009).

Third, there are more specific recommendations on measure design, for instance: introduce support to protect special habitats on grasslands in Sweden (SLU, 2010), increase support rates for areas where management conditions are difficult in Latvia (ELFLA, 2010), diversify cropping systems in Marche (Ati Ecoter-Resco-Unicab, 2008), expand the result-based support in Bremen - Lower Saxony (PRU, 2010). All recommendations concerning the grassland support are found in the Appendix, Table A.2.

4.2.3 Have recommendations been followed?

Twelve recommendations have been followed and an additional three have been followed to some extent. This is again considered low as we identified almost 60 recommendations in total.⁷ Table 4.2 present the followed recommendations, recommendations in italics are considered to be followed to some extent.

Examples of changes due to recommendations are that the Austrian 2014-2020 programme (Austria, 2014) includes a pilot project to test a result-based environmental support in the 2014-2020 period. France (MAP, 2015) introduces a new goal-oriented support system in the 2014-2020 programme, and Bremen - Lower Saxony (PFEIL, 2014) increase the premium for result-based measures (however, premiums are raised for action-based measures too). We also find that Latvia (2014) differentiates the payment rates according to land type.

Considering recommendations followed to some extent, we first note that the recommendation to make use of the potential of action-based measure in Bremen - Lower Saxony is somewhat vague. We consider it as partly followed since the action-based measure is still in the programme (PFEIL, 2014). The Irish recommendation to possibly fine-tune eligibility criteria by raising the ceiling on eligible ha is also followed to some extent. The upper limit on ha that can receive support is abolished but the effect of this change is dampened since the maximum annual support becomes limited to € 5000 /farmer (DAFM, 2014). Lastly, it is recommended to carry out research in order to review the

⁷ As above, we are not able to tell if some of the recommendations are followed. These recommendations mainly concern further research on impact and implementation of the measure.

payment system and rules on cutting and stocking density in Latvia. We are unable to confirm if research has been carried out but the payment system, mowing dates and stocking density are all changed in the 2014-2020 period (Latvia, 2014).

Table 4.2: Followed recommendations

Recommendation	Country
Use pilot projects to test future measure design	Austria
Optimise the design of the biodiversity measures with respect to the time and frequency of the cuts, take regional considerations into account	Austria
Make the support more goal-oriented, give support to concrete actions with a clear connection to environmental benefits	France
<i>Make use of the potential of the action-based B1 measure</i>	Bremen - Lower Saxony
Increase the premium for the results-based grassland support B2	Bremen - Lower Saxony
Continue the KoopNat and expand it geographically	Bremen - Lower Saxony
Abolish the grassland support in its current form	Bremen – Lower Saxony
<i>Carefully monitor the impact of REPS in environmentally vulnerable areas, measure eligibility criteria may need fine-tuning (e.g. raise the ceiling on eligible ha)</i>	Ireland
More focused structure to support delivery of proactive environmentally friendly farm practices, including guidance on best practice	Ireland
Investigate if the support to mountain pastures could be shifted to other areas	Marche
Continue the support for grassland management	Latvia
Differentiate the support rates for different type of grasslands	Latvia
<i>Carry out research to create a differentiated payment system, review cutting rules and stocking density</i>	Latvia
Increase the flexibility in the management of valuable pastures	Sweden
Let the environmental effects determine how measures/payments are designed	Sweden

4.3 Support to basic services for the rural economy and population

This support aims to improve quality of life in rural areas. Many areas may receive support and MS can choose what type of services to include (for example, small-scale infrastructure, investments in broadband access, health clinics and culture facilities). However, it is not as widely used as the previous two. Table A.6 in the Appendix gives a more detailed overview. Only Lower Saxony uses the measure in all periods. The rest of our chosen countries/regions, except Navarra, use the measure in at least one period.

4.3.1 How have evaluations been conducted?

The MS that do analyse the support focus on monitoring and we do not find any attempt to estimate the impacts with quantitative methods. However, several qualitative studies are done. Interviews are the most popular method (MAP, 2008; ELFLA, 2010; SLU, 2010; LEI, 2008; ECORYS 2010a) followed by case studies (BMFLW, 2010; MAAPRAT, 2010; Indecon, 2010; LEI, 2008).⁸ Surveys are also relatively popular (Indecon, 2010; SLU, 2010; ECORYS 2010a; ECORYS 2010b), as are workshops with stakeholders (Indecon, 2010), focus group discussions (ELFLA, 2010), and expert consultations (ECORYS 2010a; ECORYS 2010b).

Several countries note problems making evaluation difficult. Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), Ireland (Indecon, 2010) and the Netherlands (LEI, 2008) mention lack of data. France (MAAPRAT, 2010),

⁸ Note that these two methods are often combined.

Ireland (Indecon, 2010) and Marche (ECCO SFERA, 2010) experienced problems in implementing the support meaning that there is not much to evaluate. In Bremen (VTI, 2008b), Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a) and Sweden (SLU, 2010) the number of supported projects is low and in Latvia (ELFLA, 2010) supported projects have only been running for a short time.

Problems aside, evaluators are generally positive towards the support. It is, for example, considered to have a positive effect on quality of life in Austria (BMFLUW, 2010), France (MAP, 2008), Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a) and the Netherlands (LEI, 2008, ECORYS 2010a; ECORYS 2010b). However, no counterfactual evidence support the conclusions made.

4.3.2 What types of recommendations are given?

Eight evaluations give recommendations. The most common is to expand the support to new areas. Evaluators in Latvia (ELFLA, 2010) recommend introducing support for better broadband access while Austria (BMFLUW, 2010) advocate support for the production of biogenic fuels. In Lower Saxony (VTI, 2008a) it is recommended to expand the support to new areas such as broadband access and climate protecting services. The support was not a part of the RDPs of Austria (ÖPUL, 2000) or Marche (Regione Marche, 2004) in 2000-2006. Interestingly, the ex-post evaluation of Marche (Ati Ecoter-Resco-Unicab, 2008) recommends activating it in future RDPs and the Austrian ex-post evaluation (Le 08, 2008) recommends giving more financial weight to article 33 measures, of which support to basic services is one, in the future. Examples of other recommendations are to market the support better in Sweden (SLU, 2010), give higher priority to road projects in Latvia (ELFLA, 2010) and to possibly remove the support to ICT services in the Netherlands (ECORYS 2010a, ECORYS 2010b). A list of all recommendations is available in the Appendix, Table A.3.

4.3.3 Have recommendations been followed?

Five of the 15 recommendations have been followed but only four require policy changes. Three MS (Ireland, Latvia and the Netherlands) choose to remove the support from the 2014-2020 RDP (DAFM, 2014; Latvia, 2014; The Netherlands, 2014). We can therefore not track changes of the policy design in these countries. The share of followed recommendations is higher for this support than for the others.⁹ On the other hand, very few recommendations are made.

Followed recommendations are presented in Table 4.3 below. More article 33 measures are included in the Austrian 2007-2013 (Le 07-13, 2007) and 2014-2020 (Austria, 2014) RDPs compared to the 2000-2006 programme (ÖPUL, 2000). Hence, the recommendation to give more financial weight to such measures is followed. The ex-post evaluation in Lower Saxony recommended expanding the support to new areas. This is followed as the 2007-2013 and the 2014-2020 joint RDP of Bremen - Lower Saxony introduces new areas eligible for support (PROFIL, 2007; PFEIL, 2014). The recommendation to keep the support in the Bremen - Lower Saxony RDP is also followed but only for the Lower Saxony region (PFEIL, 2014). Both the 2007-2013 (Regione Marche, 2005) and the 2014-2020 (Regione Marche, 2014) RDP of Marche contains a support to basic services. Although the support was never activated in the 2007-2013 period due to implementation problems, we still consider the recommendation to introduce the support in Marche to be followed. Lastly, we find that

⁹ Again, there are recommendations that we are not able to track. In this case they are three and concern the level of control in the administrative system, the marketing of the support and the evaluation questions.

the goals of the measure has been somewhat clarified in the Swedish 2014-2020 RDP which was recommended (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015).

Table 4.3: Followed recommendations

Recommendation	Country
Examine if there should not be more financial weight attached to article 33 measures	Austria
Expand the support to new areas such as broadband access and climate protecting services	Lower Saxony
Keep the measure in future programmes	Bremen – Lower Saxony
Introduce support to basic services	Marche
More precise definition of the objectives	Sweden

5. Changes in the Rural Development Regulation and syntheses of evaluations

If the evaluation process is supposed to result in betterment of policies, the regulation on which the national RDPs are based is likely to be affected. In addition to the results for the three selected measures from the national evaluations, we base our analysis on the reports commissioned by the EU Commission to provide a summary or synthesis of the national reports.

5.1 Changes in Rural Development Regulation

There have been several changes in the Rural Development Regulations and the regulations concerning the provisions for their financing over the years. Starting with the second period, the financial arrangements of the two pillars of the CAP were separated into two different funds: the *European Agricultural Guarantee Fund* (EAGF) for the first pillar and the *European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development* (EAFRD) for all rural development measures (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1290/2005 art. 2 and 4).

The main changes between the first and the second period i.e. between Council Regulations (EC) No. 1257/1999 and (EC) No. 1698/2005 are as follows. In period two, the programme was structured in four axes (competitiveness, environment, rural economy/quality of life and Leader). MS were required to use at least 10% of the funding for Axes 1 and 3 measures, at least 25% for Axis 2, and at least 5% for Axis 4. In period one, only agri-environment measures were compulsory. The number of eligible measures increased from about 30 to 42 (Kantor, 2011; EU Commission, 2006a, Annex 2). However, it is not obvious how to define measures. Some are very narrow while other are broad amalgamations of different instruments and could be regarded as more than one measure. We define measures by the codes assigned to them, because this is the level at which the RDPs are evaluated. The designs and aims of our three selected measures remained basically unchanged from period one to period two.

Between the second and third periods the programme structure changed from four axes to six priorities (Knowledge transfer and innovation; Farm viability and competitiveness; Food chain organisation, animal welfare, and risk management; Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems; Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy; Social inclusion and economic development). MS are required to address at least four priorities but only agri-environment measures are compulsory. The number of eligible measures has increased to 69. Risk management instruments, introduced in Pillar 1 in 2009, have been moved to

the RDP. Early retirement support is now only offered to small scale farmers (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1698/2005 and (EC) No. 1305/2013). The designs and aims of our selected measures, have not changed between period two and three, however, additional sub-measures (for instance investments in broadband or small scale infrastructure) have been included in the Support to basic services.

5.2 The two synthesis reports

5.2.1 The synthesis of ex-post evaluations of the RDPs for 2000-2006

The synthesis report by Kantor (2011) was to draw conclusions on the relevance of measures and programme for policy objectives; the coherence between measures and policy objectives; the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of measures and programmes, and make recommendations for future policy design. The evaluators were also asked to analyse the complementarity between RDPs and other instruments; the coverage, content and consistency of programmes; the delivery systems; the monitoring and evaluation systems.

5.2.1.1 How has the evaluation been conducted?

The evaluation combines information from three sources: the national ex-post evaluations, a survey involving questionnaires to managing authorities and members of monitoring committees in the MS, and case studies in 14 regions/MS. For the analysis of impacts in case study regions (except Italy and the UK) and Input-Output model is used (see section 4 in Kantor, 2011).

5.2.1.2 Conclusions reached

All measures, except Early retirement, are regarded as both *relevant* for and *coherent* with policy objectives. Conclusions concerning *efficiency, effectiveness and impact* are mixed. Of our selected measures, the Investment support is found to be efficient while the efficiency of the Agri-environment (including the Grassland support) and the Adaptation measures (including the Support for basic services) are found ambiguous. Further, the Investment support is found to have positive impacts on farm competitiveness and the environment, the Agri-environment measures on farm incomes and biodiversity, and the Adaptation measures to have positive impacts on infrastructure investments, land improvement, and re-parcelling. *Complementarity* between the EAGGF and other funds (ERDF, ESF) is regarded insufficient because of lack of coordination (sections 5 and 6 in Kantor, 2011). *Monitoring systems* have not been successful in ensuring the availability of relevant and comprehensive data for evaluation. As a result, ex-post *evaluations* have limited capacity to quantify policy impacts (sections 5 and 7 in Kantor 2011).

5.2.1.3 Recommendations given

The most frequent recommendations at the *measure level* (section 6 in Kantor, 2011) are to improve the targeting, improve complementarity and to enhance synergies with other measures. This is the case for all our selected measures. For Adaptation measures, it is also recommended to create more consistent “packages” of measures. However, it is not clear how these improvements are to be accomplished. It is only suggested to drop measures in one case – Early retirement. It appears that the synthesis evaluators have encountered difficulties in coming up with very strict recommendations. This is not surprising considering their reliance on the national ex-post evaluations (apart from

the input-output analysis, the synthesis evaluators do not conduct any quantitative analysis of their own), and the differences in economic, social and natural conditions between MS/regions.

Most recommendations for improving the Relevance, Coherence, Complementarity, Consistency, and Delivery systems at the *programme level* (section 7 in Kantor, 2011) appear rather self-evident and not very stringent (keep the “best” measures – which include all our three selected measures – and identify the reasons why the others do not perform so well). For the dimensions Results, impacts, effectiveness and efficiency, and Monitoring and evaluation, recommendations tend to become more hands on (prioritise quantification of impacts in monitoring systems, reduce the number of evaluation questions, identify the best quantitative evaluation methods, consider moving the mid-term evaluation forward in time).

The synthesis evaluators also present *overall recommendations* to improve the efficiency of measures, the impact, the coherence, consistency, and efficiency of programmes with regard to the 2020 priorities (section 8 in Kantor, 2011). The most concrete are: Include simple compulsory schemes for Training and Start-up assistance, and assess training needs to achieve better match; Improve the quality of Training and Start-up assistance; Consider merging the most closely inter-linked measures into consistent packages; Improve monitoring and evaluation tools by identification of baseline indicators.

5.2.1.4 Have recommendations been followed when updating the Regulation?

The number of common evaluation questions has been reduced from 150 at the time of the mid-term evaluation to 24 at the time of the ex-post evaluation of the RDPs for 2007-2013 (ENRD, 2014b). Hence, this recommendation has clearly been followed while the others seem to be more or less ignored. The Early retirement measure has not been dropped, there are no compulsory schemes for Training or Start-up assistance, and measures have not been explicitly merged into packages. The mid-term evaluation has not been moved forward in time but is no longer compulsory. Better targeting of measures was also recommended. It is hard to say that this has been implemented as few changes have been made.

5.2.2 The synthesis report on mid-term evaluations for 2007-2013

The synthesis report of the mid-term evaluations for the period 2007-2013 (ÖIR, 2012) investigated the results of the analyses of horizontal evaluation questions regarding the themes: Implementation, Impacts, Complementarity between the RDPs and other support instruments, Delivery systems, and Monitoring and evaluation. Hence, it was more directed at investigating the functioning of the programme as a whole than of the individual measures.

5.2.2.1 How has the evaluation been conducted?

The work was based on the 88 mid-term evaluation reports supplemented by the corresponding annual progress reports, information from the RDPs, and the national strategy plans. It concerned the uptake of measures, the quantification of targets, the availability of data and indicators, and the economic and environmental impacts of the programmes (see section 3 in ÖIR, 2012).

5.2.2.2 Conclusions reached

Regarding *impacts* (sections 5 and 11 in ÖIR, 2012), overall impacts are too early to judge. Economic impacts are assessed more completely than environmental. Explanations offered are that there is a longer tradition for assessing economic than environmental impacts, causal relationships between expenditures and changes in environmental indicators are not established or demonstrable, and lack of data for measuring environmental impacts. There is also very little focus on social impacts. On the issue of *complementarity* (sections 6 and 11 in ÖIR, 2012), it is noted that assessing this was not compulsory in the mid-term evaluations and the existing information is primarily based on the evaluators' judgement and on results from social research. It is therefore not possible to assess whether more complementarity leads to better performance of the RDPs. Finally, *monitoring and evaluation* was found to be confronted with issues of data availability and data gaps. Indicators vary in quality and often considered non-relevant (especially environmental indicators). The number of evaluation questions (155) was found to be too excessive, especially since some of them appear to overlap (sections 8 and 11 in ÖIR, 2012).

5.2.2.3 Recommendations given

Recommendations are given both for the future CMEF and for the future programme. As to the CMEF, recommendations include the timing of the mid-term evaluation (shifting it to a later point in time so that more results are available), or changing the character of the mid-term evaluation making it more concerned with analysing programme implementation rather than results and impacts. It is also recommended to reduce the number of indicators and ensure that data are available to allow evaluation of results and impacts. Finally, it is recommended to revise the guidance on evaluation methods in the CMEF as the present guidelines are regarded as confusing (section 11 in ÖIR, 2012).

As to the future RDP, it is recommended to consider focusing on a more limited number of measures as the cost effectiveness of some measures is questioned (section 11 in ÖIR, 2012).

5.2.2.4 Have recommendations been followed when updating the Regulation?

The number of measures has not decreased. Requirements for data provision have not changed either (the regulation has always said that the MS/managing authorities are responsible for ensuring that sufficient data is available). There is a more thorough discussion of evaluation methods in the CMEF, but this seems to be the result of an ongoing process that started already in the period 2007-2013. On the other hand, there is no longer a requirement for a mid-term evaluation of the whole programme.

6. If evaluations have not affected policy design then what has?

Our analysis does not give strong indications that national evaluations or synthesis reports have influenced the Regulation. It may be argued that this is more or less what could be expected given the findings in sections 4 and 5 above which do not give that many stringent recommendations for change. Also, the recommendations that are given may, in several cases, be questioned on methodological grounds.

Instead, the analysis hints to the influence of external forces. This is confirmed by analysing the broad pattern of the evolution of the Regulation. Because of re-arrangement, division or slight modification of measures, the Regulation may appear to have changed more than it actually has. The sheer number of measures is misleading since it depends on how policy instruments are arranged

into measures. The major changes in the overall architecture of the Regulation can be summarised as follows:

- Pre-existing measures/initiatives from other areas have been incorporated
- Support has been extended to new kinds of beneficiaries such as small businesses in rural areas
- Supports have been extended to new types of activities/areas, for instance, co-operation for promotion of innovation or provision of green care, installation of broadband
- Focus on environment, animal welfare, climate change, renewable energies, water management has increased
- Measures to accommodate the needs of small farmers have expanded

It could be argued that these changes are mainly due to two factors: the evolution of EU policies in other areas and the influence of external forces. One primary cause of the changes between the first and second periods appears to be the conclusions at the meetings of the European Council in Lisbon (2000) and Göteborg (2001) emphasising that economic development should be coupled with sustainable use of natural resources and that this should be reflected in the CAP. Other causes seem to be the reforms of the CAP in 2003 and 2004, which aimed at improving the market orientation and competitiveness of European agriculture; and the enlargement (see EU Commission, 2005 and Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005). The EU Commission (2005) suggested that rural development policy should be focused on growth, jobs and sustainability. Hence, the “four-axes” structure of the RDP, the creation of EAFRD and the inclusion of new measures.

Changes from the second to the third period appear to primarily be the result of the CAP Health Check in 2007 (EU Commission, 2007 and 2010a) and the European Economic Recovery Plan in 2008 (EU Commission, 2008a and 2010a). The “Health Check” identified climate change, renewable energy, water management, biodiversity, and increased sensitivity to changes in world market prices caused by the reduction in price supports and coupled supports as important new areas of challenge for European agriculture. This resulted in Council Regulation (EC) No. 74/2009 where a greater emphasis was placed on measures targeting the new challenges. Risk management instruments were introduced as an option in Pillar 1 under art. 68 (national envelope) in 2009 (EU Parliament, 2014).

In 2010, the Commission suggested reforming the CAP, making the first pillar greener and more equitably distributed, and the second pillar more focused on competitiveness and innovation, climate change and the environment (EU Commission 2010b). This resulted in the new regulations for rural development policy for the period 2014-2020 (Council Regulations (EC) No. 1303/2013 and (EC) No. 1305/2013). The change in structure from four axes to six priorities seems to be the result of the need to integrate the major policy objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy (Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1305/2013 and EU Commission 2010c).

7. Discussion

The implication of the analysis for the Commission’s “better regulation initiative” is not encouraging. It could be argued that our results are hardly surprising since recommendations in the evaluations often are vague and much too general. Moreover, the methods applied to arrive at the recommendations may be questioned regarding their scientific foundation.

A considerable part of the problem in coming up with firm, scientifically based, recommendations is caused by lack of relevant data. This issue has been raised by several national evaluators, as well as the two synthesis evaluators. The availability of data at the time of the evaluation is to a large extent a result of past policy decisions. If longitudinal data has not been collected in preceding years, they will simply be not there when needed.

Compared to the large sums devoted to monitoring and implementing the programmes, the amounts spent on evaluations are tiny and hardly sufficient for proper analyses. Particularly if the monitoring system has not managed to produce the information necessary for evaluation and data has to be generated by the evaluator, a revision of the allocation of the funds for technical assistance is called for.

The focus on results at the *programme level* in the synthesis reports is problematic. Competitiveness may be improved by investing in new technologies. New technologies might also improve the environment. However, they frequently have negative effects on employment and the liveliness of rural areas. Agri-environment measures are likely to reduce productivity as measured in national accounts because the monetary value of the public goods produced is not accounted for while the cost of producing them is. Measures to improve the attractiveness of rural areas also concern public goods. Aggregating the impact of such measures with those of measures aiming at higher productivity and growth is meaningless. This suggests that it would be more interesting to focus evaluation on individual measures.

Systematic comparisons of merits and weaknesses of different choices of measures for tackling similar challenges in different countries could indeed be very useful. Designing novel policies is difficult, especially in case of agri-environmental schemes due to the complexity of the systems. Ideally, an experimental design, varying key parameters across locations would help identify the best design. However, this may not be practical at the national level. International comparisons could provide a substitute. Our findings suggest that there is potential for improvement here as both evaluation reports and RDPs are surprisingly hard to find and generally only available in their native language. Hence, the possibilities of utilising results from other MS are presently limited.

Regarding domestic policy formation, the evaluations provides national decision makers with information which they have not demanded, perhaps not wanted. Allocation of funds between beneficiaries and objectives reflects a balance of interest i.e. equilibrium on the domestic political market. It is unlikely that this equilibrium will be disturbed by new information generated on request from the Commission. The recommendations from the evaluations may not necessarily make everybody better off. Potential changes risk being about redistribution since the total RDP-budget is fixed. Farmers, the main beneficiaries, are likely to defend their interests since they are well organized, knowledgeable about the RDP and strongly motivated as RDP-payments account for a sizeable share of their net income (5% on average for 2010-2013, EU Commission, April 2016). Competing groups are, albeit more numerous, hardly properly organized and not critically dependent on the transfers from the programme. Moreover, the immensely complicated structure of the RDP deters other potential stakeholders from entering the competition. Opposition to change may also come from the agricultural bureaucracy who has been involved in designing the evaluated RDP.

Accordingly, there may be a bias against changes which is strengthened if evaluations are vaguely positive and recommendations imprecise. This is likely to happen if evaluation methods are

inadequate. Subsidies from the RDP are likely to correlate with positive changes for the beneficiaries simply because payments are conditioned on them taking the required actions, for instance investing. If only such changes are recorded, and comparison with a properly selected control group is omitted, the impact will be overestimated. As demonstrated in this paper, counterfactual analysis using empirical data has not been a prominent feature of the evaluation process. Conversely, a well-substantiated evaluation of a particular scheme, questioning its “intervention logic” could trigger changes. After all, the objectives of rural development policies are highly legitimate, especially in the case of environmental protection where market failures abound. If evaluations can credibly demonstrate that the policy is not fulfilling those objectives and suggest better options, there may be some chance for improvements.

The fact that recommendations are seldom followed combined with the lack of effort to assure provision of more reliable evidence in the process of policy evaluation points to strategic rather than instrumental use of knowledge in the EU decision making. In other words, evaluation results seem to have been used for legitimizing rather than improving rural development policies.

If betterment of the policy is to be achieved, the quality of the evaluation process at the national level needs to be improved. In addition, there is a need to change the utilization of the national results at the EU level. Possibilities to develop more efficient domestic policies by learning from others and to strengthen weaker groups in competition for resources are potentially valid arguments for common rural policies. Presently, those possibilities are not taken advantage of, as our analysis indicates. Below, we summarize our key recommendations for how the evaluation process could be improved.

7.1 Suggestions

Managing authorities should be obligated to ensure that suitable data are available at the appropriate time.

When practically possible, counterfactual analysis entailing the use of control groups should be demanded. “Guestimates”, assessments based solely on the opinions of the beneficiaries, or on “expert judgement” should not be accepted.

If evaluation questions cannot be answered in a meaningful way, it should be possible to leave them unanswered as long as a thorough explanation why is given.

It is recommended that the requirement of formally independent evaluators is upheld.

A sufficient amount of the funding for technical assistance should be earmarked for evaluation purposes.

Results from national evaluations, as well as from special reports requested by the EU Commission, should be made public on the Commission’s web site. All evaluations should be translated from their native languages.

Results from national evaluations should be synthesised using a proper methodology for meta-studies, focusing on well-defined measures or sub-measures.

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Appendix

Table A.1 Recommendations on the investment support

	Recommendation	Country/Region	Followed
1	Investment support should be based on economic rather than social criteria. Animal welfare goals should be reached by higher support rates.	Austria (ex-p)	
2	Replacement investment in e.g. stables in farms with negative income should undergo a business consultancy before support is granted to prevent negative results	Austria (ex-p)	
3	If support aims at reducing the need for labour, this should be taken into account and a target number should be specified in the investment plan	Austria (ex-p)	
4	Support for mountain farms should also be subject to a business/improvement plan	Austria (ex-p)	
5	Target larger investments	Austria (ex-p, MTE)	x
6	Higher support rates in certain areas	Austria (ex-p)	
7	Concentrate support on farms with development potential	Austria (MTE)	
8	Collect data for future evaluation purposes	Austria (MTE)	
9	Remove bonus for creating an operational concept	Austria (MTE)	x
10	Remove support for some investments (projects regarding internal traffic routes e.g. asphaltting of yard areas)	Austria (MTE)	
11	Collect data for future evaluation purposes	France (ex-p)	
12	Define and update objectives of the support	France (ex-p)	
13	Target local problems/adapt to local conditions	France (ex-p)	x
14	Keep support for investments that lets farmers anticipate new standards or go beyond existing levels	France (ex-p)	x
15	Continue to target young farmers	France (ex-p)	x
16	Target technological innovations	France (ex-p)	x
17	Focus on the provision of public goods such as animal welfare and environmental protection	Bremen (ex-p), Lower Saxony (ex-p), Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	x
18	Introduce a more comprehensible intervention logic	Lower Saxony (ex-p)	
19	Combine investment support with other measures to improve effectiveness	Lower Saxony (ex-p)	
20	Offer state guarantees for larger investments	Lower Saxony (ex-p), Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	
21	Lower capital funding	Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	
22	Support only to farms contributing to solving the identified problems in the RDP, evaluate the need for funding with respect to income	Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	
23	Examine the need for capital grants	Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	
24	Consider if other policy instruments are more appropriate	Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	
25	More weight to the project selection criteria defined by the ministry	Bremen-Lower Saxony (MTE)	
26	Ensure that the banking sector provides credit to viable farming business and support inv in young farmers	Ireland (MTE)	
27	More detailed and market oriented business plans wanted from farm holders	Ireland (MTE)	
28	More precise selection criteria	Marche (ex-p)	
29	Focus investment support on types of interventions that differ from ordinary business activities (e.g. quality improvement, certification, new technologies, protect environmental resources)	Marche (ex-p)	x
30	Support the promotion of investment in renewable energies	Marche (MTE)	
31	More support to farmers/sectors that have not received support before, less to those that have been supported	Latvia (MTE)	x
32	Consider allocating a portion of the funding for investment support to measure 112 or 141 in axis 4	Latvia (MTE)	
33	Redistribute support to small and medium-sized farms	Latvia (MTE)	x

34	Collect data for future evaluation purposes	Latvia (MTE)	
35	More detailed assessment recommended	Latvia (MTE)	
36	Connect the investment support and start-up aid for young farmers	Navarre (MTE)	
37	More focus on renewable energy	Navarre (MTE)	
38	Collect data for future evaluation purposes	Sweden (ex-p)	
39	Support investments in collective goods or investments with positive external effects only (e.g. animal welfare, environment)	Sweden (MTE)	x
40	Combine investment support with support to adding value to agricultural and forestry products	Sweden (MTE)	
41	Await results from ex-post for long-term recommendations	Sweden (MTE)	
42	Continue to support investments that improve the durability and structure of the sector	the Netherlands (ex-p)	x
43	Involve interest groups if the scheme changes	the Netherlands (ex-p)	
44	Test potential changes	the Netherlands (ex-p)	
45	Broader access	the Netherlands (MTE)	
46	More product innovation-oriented implementation	the Netherlands (MTE)	x
47	More focus on larger projects	the Netherlands (MTE)	

Table A.2 Recommendations on the grassland support

	Recommendation	Country/region	Followed
1	Review of the effects of the agri-environmental measures on flora and fauna	Austria (ex-p)	
2	Review of the effects of the agri-environmental measures on habitats and landscape level taking into account the cultural characteristics of the landscape (development dynamics of landscape elements)	Austria (ex-p)	
3	Increasing the acceptance of nature conservation measures on individual areas or within the framework of a conservation plan - in particular project-related conservation measures	Austria (ex-p)	
4	Implementation of regional (quantitative) conservation targets for biodiversity	Austria (ex-p)	
5	An increase in acceptance and a stronger initiative to implement the conservation plan in order to achieve the regional and quantitative objectives	Austria (ex-p)	
6	Further development of the content of nature protection measures (appropriate harvest and harvest dates, gentle functioning, such as reduced speed)	Austria (ex-p)	
7	Development of the ÖPUL programme to effectively compensate for the dependence of the biodiversity in the agriculture-dominated culture land of economic closures	Austria (ex-p)	
8	Development of comprehensive monitoring networks for the assessment at species- and habitat-level	Austria (ex-p)	
9	Maintaining existing, more environmentally friendly ways of economy	Austria (ex-p)	
10	Target information regarding fertilization and crop protection better	Austria (MTE)	
11	Design specific and mandatory training schemes for farmers participating in conservation actions	Austria (MTE)	
12	Reduce technical problems affecting the acceptance among farmers	Austria (MTE)	
13	Use pilot projects to test future measure design	Austria (MTE)	x
14	Optimise the design of the biodiversity conditions/requirements of the sub-measure through improved construction, size and management of bloom strips in agriculture	Austria (MTE)	
15	Improve information and communication about the goals and purpose of specifications to deal with the skepticism of farmers and farmers	Austria (MTE)	
16	Optimise the design of the biodiversity measures with respect to the time and frequency of the cuts, take regional considerations into account	Austria (MTE)	x
17	Simplification and development of individual requirements	Austria (MTE)	
18	Stronger regionalization concerning objectives and requirements, which also lead to a simplification and reduction of handling costs	Austria (MTE)	
19	Greater focus on objectives relating to Natura 2000	Austria (MTE)	
20	Rethink the mass support structure	France (ex-p)	
21	More goal-oriented support, give support for concrete actions with a clear connection to environmental benefits	France (ex-p)	x
22	Clarify the goals of the support	France (ex-p)	
23	Abolish the grassland extensification support in its current form	Bremen (ex-p); (Lower Saxony ex-p)	x
24	Introduce measures to support low-intensive use of grasslands	Bremen (ex-p); (Lower Saxony ex-p)	
25	Make use of the potential of the action-based B1 measure	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	(x)
26	Increase the premium for the result-based grassland support B2	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	x
27	Use the 331B scheme for training related to the result-based support	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	
28	Continue the KoopNat and expand it geographically	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	x
29	Take action to increase the coverage of the agri-environmental measures with positive effects on animal and plant species and habitats f.eg. B1	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	
30	Support the participation in the action-oriented permanent pasture program (FM412) to promote continuity and to avoid potential conflicts	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	
31	Carefully monitor the impact of REPS in environmentally vulnerable areas, measure eligibility criteria may need finetuning (e.g. raise the ceiling on eligible ha)	Ireland (ex-p)	(x)
32	Utilise the extensive local area (or geo-coded) environmental time-series data in order to develop detailed statistical models of the impact of REPS	Ireland (ex-p)	
33	Establish the impact of REPS on the awareness and attitudes of participant farmers towards on-farm environmental issues vis methods such as attitudinal surveys	Ireland (ex-p)	

34	Possibly adjust the payment structure to increase participation in regions where uptake is low	Ireland (ex-p)	
35	Evaluate the merits of including appropriate mechanisms in the new Agri-Environment Options Scheme to incentivise the achievement of explicit targets for reduction in farm greenhouse gas emissions	Ireland (MTE)	
36	More focused structure to support delivery of proactive environmentally friendly farm practices, including guidance on best practice	Ireland (MTE)	x
37	Promote integrated actions to ensure the maintenance of the balance of the crop to reach the main objectives in the coming programming period (promote biodiversity)	Marche (ex-p)	
38	Diversify cropping systems in time and space	Marche (ex-p)	
39	Manage non-productive areas by maintaining herbaceous vegetation and spontaneous and stable shrubs by keeping uncultivated plant coverage, margin fields and natural ditches	Marche (ex-p)	
40	Prioritise protection of biodiversity and avoid direct aid to cultivation on lands with high biodiversity	Marche (ex-p)	
41	Investigate if the support to mountain pastures could be shifted to other areas	Marche (MTE)	x
42	Continue the support for grassland management	Latvia (ex-p)	x
43	Introduce measures that would promote increases in grassland areas in which extensive pasturing is applied as a management form	Latvia (ex-p)	
44	Increase the support volume to wetland areas where management conditions are more complicated	Latvia (ex-p)	
45	Review the support criteria so that the most valuable grasslands are included in the programme	Latvia (MTE)	
46	Make sure that owners of valuable grasslands can apply for the agri-environmental measures	Latvia (MTE)	
47	Differentiate support rates for different types of grasslands	Latvia (MTE)	x
48	Carry out research to create a differentiated payment system, review cutting rules and stocking density	Latvia (MTE)	(x)
49	Do not reduce the amount of aid to biologically valuable grasslands	Latvia (MTE)	
50	Increase the flexibility in the management of valuable pastures	Sweden (ex-p)	x
51	Introduce a landscape perspective	Sweden (ex-p)	
52	Improve the availability of field data and the knowledge about the connection between the environment and the biological effect	Sweden (ex-p)	
53	Let the environmental effects determine how measures/payments are designed	Sweden (MTE)	x
54	Considerable simplification needed, assess how this can be done asap	Sweden (MTE)	
55	Take the landscape perspective into account in the design of measures	Sweden (MTE)	
56	Consider a support for permanent unsprayed blooming habitats	Sweden (MTE)	
57	Revise the definition of pasture, the old definition should be used again	Sweden (MTE)	
58	More guidance on spatial coherence, reinforcement of the management measures and promotion of continuity in management	the Netherlands (ex-p)	

Table A.3 Recommendations on the support to basic services

	Recommendation	Country/Region	Followed
1	Examine if there should be more financial weight attached to article 33 measures	Austria (ex-p)	x
2	Keep the support to basic services in the current form	Austria (MTE)	
3	Introduce support to projects focusing on the production of biogenic fuels	Austria (MTE)	
4	Expand the support to new areas such as broadband access and climate protecting services	Lower Saxony (ex-p)	x
5	Keep measure like the support for basic services in future programmes	Bremen - Lower Saxony (MTE)	x
6	Introduce support to basic services	Marche (ex-p)	x
7	Introduce support to better internet access	Latvia (MTE)	
8	Give higher priority to road projects	Latvia (MTE)	
9	Decrease the level of control in the administrative system	Sweden (MTE)	
10	Better marketing of the support	Sweden (MTE)	
11	Increase the budget	Sweden (MTE)	
12	More precise definition of the objectives	Sweden (MTE)	x
13	Better link between the goal of the measure and the evaluation questions	Sweden (MTE)	
14	Move the support to axis 4 to avoid overlap with Leader	Sweden (MTE)	
15	Rethink the support for ICT services, appears to be no need for it	the Netherlands (MTE)	

Table A.4: The investment support

	2000-2006	2007-2013	2014-2020
Name of measure	Investment in agricultural holdings	Modernisation of agricultural holdings	Support for investment in physical assets
Measure code	Measure a	Measure 121	Measure 4, sub-measure 4.1 ¹⁰
Regulation and article	Regulation (EC) No. 1257/1999, Article 4-7	Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, Article 26	Regulation (EC) No. 1305/2013, Article 17
Beneficiaries	Farmers or groups of farmers	Farmers or groups of farmers	Farmers or groups of farmers
Limitations for support	<p>Support for investment in agricultural holdings shall:</p> <p>Contribute to the improvement of agricultural incomes and of living, working and production conditions. Such investment shall pursue one or more of the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce production costs • improve and redeploy production • increase quality • preserve and improve the natural environment, hygiene conditions and animal welfare standards • promote the diversification of farm activities. 	<p>Support for modernization of agricultural holdings shall be granted for investments which:</p> <p>(a) improve the overall performance of the agricultural holding</p> <p>(b) respect Community standards applicable to the Investment concerned.</p>	<p>Support for investments in physical assets shall cover investments which:</p> <p>(a) improve the overall performance and sustainability of the agricultural holdings</p> <p>(b), (c) and (d) refer to other sub-measures that previously had their own supports – processing, marketing and development of agricultural products (b); infrastructure related to the development. Modernisation, and adaptation of agriculture and forestry (c); non-productive investments linked to the achievement of agri-environment –climate objectives (d)</p>
Maximum aid intensity	<p>Standard rate: 40% LFA: 50%</p> <p>Young farmers: 10 % extra in both non-LFA and LFA areas.</p>	<p>Standard rate: 40 % LFA: 50 %</p> <p>Young farmers: 10 % extra in both non-LFA and LFA areas.</p> <p>In certain other areas: up to 75 %</p>	<p>Standard rate: 40 %</p> <p>Up to 60 %¹¹: for young farmers, collective investments or producer organisations, areas with natural constraints, operations supported under the EIP, investments linked to agri-environment-climate actions or organic farming.</p> <p>50 %: in less developed regions and regions whose GDP per capita during the 2007-2013 was less than 75 % of the EU25 average, but above 75 % of the EU27 GDP average.</p> <p>In certain other areas: up to 75 %</p>

¹⁰ It is important to note that investment support is a sub-measure (4.1) within measure 4 for the period 2014-2020. This impairs the possibility to compare budget figures over time.

¹¹ Up to 60 % given the maximum combined support does not exceed 90 %.

Table A.5: The grassland support as a sub-measure of the agri-environmental measure

	2000-2006	2007-2013	2014-2020
Name of measure	Sub measure of Agri-environment and Animal Welfare	Sub measure of Agri-environment payments	Sub measure of Agri-environment-climate measures
Measure code	Measure f	Measure 214	Measure 10, sub-measure 10.1
Regulation and article	Regulation (EC) 1257/1999, Article 22-24	Regulation (EC) 1698/2005, Article 39	Regulation (EC) 1305/2013, Article 28
Beneficiaries	Farmers who make agri-environmental commitments for at least five years.	Farmers who make agri-environmental commitments voluntarily for a period of five or seven years. Where justified, other land managers are also eligible.	Farmers, groups of farmers or groups of farmers and other land managers who undertake, on a voluntary basis, to carry out operations consisting of one or more agri-environment-climate commitments for a period of five or seven years. Where justified, other land managers or groups of land managers are also eligible.
Limitations for support	<p>Support shall promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ways of using agricultural land which are compatible with the protection and improvement of the environment, the landscape and its features, natural resources, the soil and genetic diversity an environmentally-favourable extensification of farming and management of low-intensity pasture systems the conservation of high nature-value farmed environments which are under threat the upkeep of the landscape and historical features on agricultural land the use of environmental planning in farming practice 	Support cover only those commitments that go beyond the relevant mandatory standards, minimum requirements for fertiliser and plant protection product use and other relevant legislation.	<p>Support shall preserve and promote the necessary changes to agricultural practices that make a positive contribution to the environment and climate.</p> <p>Support cover only those commitments that go beyond the relevant mandatory standards, minimum requirements for fertiliser and plant protection product use and other relevant legislation.</p>
Maximum aid intensity	€450 per hectare	€450 per hectare	€450 per hectare

Table A.6 Support to basic services

Period	2000-2006	2007-2013	2014-2020
Name of measure	Basic services for the rural economy and population	Basic services for the rural economy and population	Basic services and village renewal in rural areas
Measure code	Measure n	Measure 321	Measure 7.4
Regulation and article	Regulation 1257/1999 Article 33	Regulation 1698/2005 Article 52.b.i and article 56	Regulation 1305/2013 Article 20
Beneficiaries	Not mentioned in regulation	Not mentioned in regulation	Not mentioned in regulation
Limitations for support	Support shall be granted for measures, relating to farming activities and their conversion and to rural activities, which do not fall within the scope of any other measure.	Support shall cover the setting up of basic services, including cultural and leisure activities, concerning a village or group of villages, and related small-scale infrastructure.	Support under this measure shall only concern small-scale infrastructure, as defined by each Member State in the programme. Derogations from this rule may be allowed for investments in broadband and renewable energy.