



## PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION THEORY: FROM FIRST TO FIFTH GENERATION

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he objective of this research is to provide a detailed analysis of public policy evaluation as an emergent field of study. Despite the growing importance of this field, only in recent years has, public policy evaluation emerged as a crucial academic discipline in public policy analysis. As an embryonic field of study, policy evaluation has been developed through two opposing paradigms to improve public policy decisions. The traditional paradigm is largely elaborated as a perspective of positivist policy evaluation. The second paradigm adheres to the constructivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm of evaluation was developed through three key generations elaborated consecutively. Faraway from the systematic evaluation, the constructivist paradigm proposed that the fourth generation included evaluators moving toward a more flexible and reflective process. The fourth generation introduced the process development of evaluation. Currently, a group of researchers advocates the fifth generation of evaluation. This new generation believes that researchers have to move from a constructivist to a social constructionist paradigm. In this new ideology, action research represents a useful tool of evaluation to create a specific relationship between the theory and practice of evaluation.

**KEY WORDS:** public policy evaluation, positivist paradigm, constructivist paradigm, constructionist paradigm, first-generation: measurement, second-generation: description, third-generation: judgment, fourth-generation: process development, fifth-generation: action research.

### INTRODUCTION

Program evaluation became recognized as a discipline of research only from a few years ago (Beaudry & Gauthier, 1992: 425). During the 1960s, this discipline emerged, primarily in the United States, to explain the results of public action and its effects on society. It questions the success or failure of public policy in a specific context, and it examines the role of policies in favor of improving the environment in which a particular public action takes place (Beaudry et Gauthier, 1992; Crête, et al., 1994; Knoepfel et al. 1998, 2001, 2015).

As in any new field of research in serious search of its identity, researchers from different disciplines have participated in this enterprise. Obviously, public policy evaluation, fragmented between, e.g., political science, economics and sociology, was developed as a highly diverse concept in terms of its role and even its nature.

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF PROGRAM EVALUATION TO THE FIELD OF PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS

In search of a valid explanation of the results of public action and its effects on society, two major



paradigms, with different perspectives, have been successively developed within the research in the program evaluation field.

The traditional paradigm orients the evaluation on positivist assumptions that support the existence of immutable natural laws, the existence of objective reality outside of the observer. Thus, three major generations have successively emerged: measurement, description and judgment. The main one, that concerned this group of researchers, was the development of a methodological approach and an evaluation recipe applicable to public activities.

Differently from positivism, the methodology of the fourth generation joins the constructivist paradigm. Thus, the ideological context, political dimensions and the ethical aspect were the main supports of the new paradigm. In a more pragmatic perspective that does not involve an evaluation recipe, the group of researchers of this second tendency is interested in the process of evaluation and its implementation in terms of not only improving and changing public policies, but also influencing the decision process.

### **THE POSITIVIST PARADIGM: FROM FIRST TO THIRD GENERATION OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION**

Initially, three essential theoretical movements work together to develop the evaluation theory of the traditional paradigm (Shadish et al., 1991).

The first theoretical movement is that of Michael Scriven (1993, 1999a, 1999b) and Donald Campbell (1985). It emphasizes the roles of truth in solving social problems and scientific rigor, placing particular emphasis on valid knowledge of causes related to the effects of social programs.

Despite the different respective disciplines of this group, the two theorists Scriven and Campbell complement each other to underline rigorous epistemological and methodological standards for rational evaluation.

As Scriven does, Campbell insists upon the truth, the control of bias, the proposal for program evaluation methods, and ultimately practical suggestions to improve program evaluation. However, Campbell also differs from Scriven significantly. He has less attention given to the value, quality and merit. The two theorists give more attention to the ideal relationship between evaluation and society and the construction of knowledge (Scriven, 1993).

The second theoretical movement is that of Carol Weiss (Weiss 1972, 1998). She is more interested in pragmatic evaluation. Thus, according to her, evaluation must follow certain explicit or implicit standards to contribute to the improvement of public programs or policies.

As a more objective and accurate method of evaluation, Weiss is concerned primarily with evaluation research. In her view, an evaluation must establish clear and specific criteria for the success of the assessed action. Thus, she cannot linger over establishing specific steps for such an evaluation. These steps, by a purely systemic method, begin with establishing the criteria for success through the collection of evidences and then, they involve the translation of these criteria into quantitative terms, making a comparison with the established criteria, and finally producing a finding that illustrates the effectiveness, merit and success of the studied action.

Weiss advances the concept of “enlightenment” as an essential basis of program evaluation. This new term means using evaluation to properly define problems and to gain new ideas and perspectives. Truth and utility, according to her, are two major dimensions in the assessment.

What proves to be valid in the contribution of this trend is that it focuses on politics as a crucial element that affects the assessment. Weiss considers evaluation to be a political activity in a political context. She judges evaluation as a specific method to find specific answers that policy makers can use in the development of public policies.

The third theoretical movement of evaluation has primarily developed under Peter Rossi (1979, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1999 and revised 2004). His theory is to design an attempt to integrate the work of theorists of the past.

Incorporating the emphasis that Scriven has placed on the needs of valorization, the experimentation highlighted by Campbell and Weiss’ emphasis on the relationship between evaluation and politics, Rossi offers three concepts to facilitate an integration of: evaluations focused on understanding, tailored evaluations, and evaluations conducted by theory (Shadish et al., 1991).

Moreover, Rossi sees that the ultimate goal of program evaluation is to improve the fate of mankind by enhancing the social conditions of life in communities. However, he believes that evaluation provides incremental social changes. He argues that social programs are framed by the parameters of dominant political ideologies. Rossi also tries to obtain empirical guidelines and systemic

methods of program evaluation of a functional nature. Rossi's theories include not only the basis of theory but also the basis of evaluation practice (Peter Rossi 1979, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1999 and revised 2004; Shadish et al., 1991).

On this pathway, several researchers have tried to provide empirical guidelines and standard methods of program evaluation of a functional nature, while assuming that the evaluation should follow rigorous scientific methods.

Ulrick Klöti (in Bussmann et al., 1998) thus advances evaluation standards because professional assessments, according to him, are distinguished by the fact that they respect the rules of conduct. He proposes standards primarily distributed into four groups as follows: first, utility standards, which ensure that evaluations meet the information needs of participants; second, feasibility standards, which ensure that evaluations are feasible and politically bearable; third, integrity standards, which promote the ethical and legal accountability of evaluation research; and fourth, the accuracy standards, which are directly related to compliance with rules established for the social science work.

Andreas Balthasar (in Bussmann et al., 1998) is interested in the presentation of the path followed by an evaluation that makes it more extensive and scientifically founded. Thus, he presents the progress of an evaluation in five successive stages: 1- the definition of the problem; 2- the feasibility review; 3- the development of the causal model; 4- the definition of the research design and the analysis techniques; and, 5- the valorization of the results.

Moreover, the Scientific Council of Evaluation (1996) participated in this enterprise by resorting to the presentation of a small evaluation guide of public policies. The development of an evaluation project, from this perspective, has eleven essential steps of an analytical nature: the definition of the evaluation scope; the identification of official and implicit objectives; the identification of the evaluation purposes and issues; the departure hypothesis; the development of a referential; thematic and records of the evaluation; evaluation questions; the evaluation device; the informational appraisal; the program of study; and finally, the choice of operations. The observation made by the council, is that these steps may overlap or be addressed in a different order.

Expanding on the work of Balthasar, researchers Ulrich Klöti, Thomas Widmer and Hans-Martin Binder (in Bussmann et al., 1998) treated research designs and

techniques as the fundamental basis of the selection of a strategy with which an evaluation is addressed. According to the researchers, an evaluation design includes the transformation of an evaluation question in a strategy for empirical research. This group believes that empirical social science research proposes for this purpose a list of analytical concepts that can be differentiated into single case studies or comparative analyses; transverse and longitudinal analyses; sampling or exhaustive collection; and experimental and non-experimental designs.

## **THE CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM: THE FOURTH GENERATION OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION**

As a second step, a new break in the manner of conducting evaluations was announced among researchers of the new paradigm of program evaluation. Whereas traditional evaluation advances a grid and a recipe for program evaluation, the fourth generation seeks to raise awareness of an ongoing, recursive and interactive process of evaluation.

We can thus distinguish two essential trends. The first is primarily interested in the process of evaluating public action, and the second trend is concerned with the implementation and use of evaluation results.

The main theorists who are part of the first movement of the fourth generation of the theory of evaluation are: Guba, Lincoln, Zúniga and Conan (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Zúniga, 1994; Conan, 1998). What is shown to be valid at the contribution of this movement is that it is based on negotiations. Thus, according to these theorists, the best evaluation is that in which the subjectivity and judgment of the actors involved monitor the evaluation process.

On one hand, Guba and Lincoln (1989) implement the ideological background associated to constructivism, which is based on three main areas: 1- Relativist ontology: object interaction / observer; 2- Subjectivist epistemology: the creation of the evaluation process; and, 3- Hermeneutic methodology: continuous and iterative dialectic. In this case, the authors emphasize two essential dimensions focusing on programs evaluation. 1- the political dimensions, comprising the policy-development process. 2- the ethical aspect, concerning the purpose of social interaction for justice. The pragmatic contribution of the authors to program evaluation focuses on the highly analytical steps of the evaluation process, based on iterative, intuitive and interactive dimensions (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

On the other hand, for Zúniga (1994), an evaluation is based on three fundamental assumptions: 1- Subjectivity, which involves and recognizes the multiplicity of normative criteria as opposed to looking for only efficiency; 2- Identity, where normative sets are related to categories of actors; and, 3- Simultaneity, which requires that the evaluation be done during the action and not after it.

Zúniga highlights ethics, epistemology and politics, which are linked together with a restricted link. For him, adherence to a particular epistemology leads to a determined form of evaluation that, uses a particular methodology and serves equally specific political purposes. Thus, the researcher focuses on three key questions: first, the social and epistemological analysis of the evaluation; second, internal self-evaluation versus external summative evaluation; and third, the empowerment of actors versus the pursuit of social benefit.

Conan (1998), joins Guba and Lincoln (1989), by always taking constructivism as a theoretical basis of the evaluation of public policies. The main distinction is that, Guba and Lincoln tried to reform the debate on this subject in the philosophy of knowledge, whereas Conan sought to place it in the politics field. Therefore, the evaluation of public policies for Conan was attached to knowledge, reality, communication, politics and values.

At the heart of the debate, Conan highlights the knowledge of a purely constructivist perspective, setting in order and organizing the world formed by our experience. For him, this knowledge appears as a system of representations that allow for accommodating human action to the unknown diversity of the real world. Conan supports the idea that distinguishes reality and knowledge. He sees reality as beyond the reach of knowledge and the latter as a construction of the mind that depends on the material conditions of its realization like any other construction does (Conan, 1998: 53).

According to Conan, the evaluation of a policy, a program, or a public action is at the service of the realization of a point of common interest, i.e., of an object that contributes to the public good. Dialogue is an essential element in evaluation that helps build a shared point of view of the common good to pursue and thereby to achieve proposed actions to be taken together.

Moreover, Conan's theory of evaluation assumes and relies on a theory of political judgment. The researcher suggests the political concept that should make sense in relation to the idea of each actor's democratic participation in the fundamental debate of society. Therefore, an evaluation should lead to debates and political judgments

that fit into a context of political debate, making it possible for actors, as evaluators, to adopt a position that seeks to assert their independence and the judgments they pronounce against the context of the public policy on which the evaluation is conducted (Conan, 1998: 56). By adhering to a predominantly constructive point of view, Conan emphasizes the purpose of an evaluation that allows actors to reorient their actions in terms of deepening the values they share. This will enable a collective reflection on the values themselves.

A great number of researchers has emerged within this movement of the evaluation, presenting different approaches that follow the same basic theoretical constructivist paradigm of evaluation.

On one hand, Eric Monnier et al. (1992) and Pierre Lascoumes (in Kessler et al., 1998) support the approach of "pluralistic evaluation", which insists on negotiation and compromise as expressions of balance between the actors of public action. A pluralistic evaluation, according to the researchers, relates to actions, fields and variables selected by social actors, based on their operational assumptions (their action theory). Thus, this group of researchers aims to express the views of several categories of people concerned with the program and to evaluate the program taking into account the different theories of action of actors. Furthermore, the researchers emphasize the methodological controversy of this perspective, which reveals that the real issue regarding the utility of an evaluation is not methodological but is at the level of the credibility of the evaluation among social actors.

On the other hand, by emphasizing the importance of "network theory", Knoepfel et al. (in Bussmann et al., 1998) advance the approach of the evaluation of public policy networks. According to them, this approach allows not only for describing social interactions and power relations, but also studying the influence of networks on conducting an evaluation. The researchers assume that the actors of a public policy network are experienced specialists and active participants in public policy with knowledge of the field. An expert can influence, in different ways, the progress of the evaluation process and consequently the policies because each actor will attempt to use his knowledge according to his interests and to incorporate it into his own strategy.

This prompted a group of researchers, such as Weidner and Knoepfel (in Bussmann et al., 1998) to address the concept of "mediation" as a process of negotiable conflict resolution and as an essential component of the evaluation of public policies.

Mediation, according to researchers, is a process that intends to solve negotiable conflicts in which two or more opposing parties voluntarily participate with the objective to recognize their differences in a process of peaceful and direct communication, to determine the guiding margins of their future actions, and to reach an agreement on a specific solution supported by all participants. The parties are helped by a neutral person (a mediator) whose main task is to design the conflictual case, and these parties must be represented by persons with a certain skill to conduct a negotiation.

Moreover, based on new theoretical approaches oriented towards "cognition", which postulate that ideas, ideologies and knowledge exert an influence on the worldview and values of the actors, Kissling-Näf et al. (in Bussmann et al., 1998) emphasize the approach of "learning-oriented evaluation" which focuses on interaction and value pluralism. The evaluation that encourages learning is based primarily on bonds of interaction within public policies; it is therefore characterized by a diffuse circle of potential target groups. Thus, the direction of policy to ideological variables and scientific knowledge should help overcome the narrow framework of institutional analysis, i.e. what drives the learning process to be important factors of change and to modify public policies.

A new trend has been inserted into the heart of the debate of this theoretical movement, that of Scioli and Cook (1975), which advances the "citizen-oriented approach" as a key component in the evaluation of public policies. According to them, this approach increases the degree of applicability and the utility of an evaluation. The researchers highlight the notion of the citizen as an essential component in the input of the evaluation of policies, and they argue that the citizen is the real evaluator because he is the true consumer of policy outputs.

Whereas the first approach, which included the researchers of the constructivist paradigm of evaluation, was interested in the process of evaluating public action, second approach has appeared recently to build a real scientific branch, that of the use of evaluation results. Based on the essential interests of this research branch, we can conclude that there are two main groups of researchers. The first group is more interested in studying the factors and elements that influence the use of evaluation findings to ensure the best possible success for the latter. The second group is concerned with studying the nature of decision-making, which could influence the use of the recommendations and the results of an evaluation.

Through an analytical overview of works by various authors from the first group, collaborating in the development of research on the factors influencing the use of public action evaluation, we can classify these factors into five basic categories through a comprehensive assessment of reading as follows: the human factors, the decision makers, the context of use, the programs or the public policies, the evaluation process and the final report (Charih, 1990; Charih and Paquin, 1994; Alkin, 1985, 1978, 1977; Scriven, 1999; Scioli and Cook, 1975; Weiss, 1972, 1998; Monnier et al., 1992; Bussmann and Knoepfel, 1998; Balthasar, 1998; Feick in Kessler et al., 1998).

As a second step, the second group of researchers is more interested in studying the nature of the decision-making process as an essential element that affects the use of the evaluation results.

First, Friedberg (1993) addressed the explanation of the development of decision-making, which starts with the classic models of "objective and subjective rationality" models. For him, subjective rationality appears as a joint product of two effects: The Position effect, i.e., the position that a decision-maker occupies in a specific context of action that determines his access to available and relevant information and; the effect of disposition, i.e., the mental, cognitive and affective provisions of decision-makers. Indeed, the radical contribution of subjective rationality to the study of decision making is reflected in a better understanding of the complex dynamics built between behaviors and values; opinions and attitudes.

The work of Lindbloom (1959) (mentioned in Shafritz and Hyde, 1997) is complementary Friedberg's studies. Lindbloom rejects the perspective of pure rationality (optimization), and he emphasizes the benefit of incremental rationality (progressive). He considers the "rational comprehensive method" to be the method of the root according to which a starting point is based on previously established foundations. It applies to simple problems. The method of "successive limited comparison of incremental rationality" is, according to him, the method of the branch because it always depends on the new situation and is based on small incremental steps, i.e., step-by-step and progressive. Moreover, it applies to complex problems.

Then, Forester (1990) advanced the "critical approach" inspired by the "theory of communicative actions" of Habermas (1981, 1984). Forester was challenged to solve the problem of the disjunction between strategies in micro and macro research, "home-actor and home-institution". Therefore, Forester suggests a research

strategy that allows us to study actions as systematically organized, i.e., the interpretation of the influence of the institutional context as causal influences on communicative action, outlined, i.e., the interpretation of the actor himself.

To this end, Habermas (1981, 1984) focuses on the speech that proceeds from the absence of coercion between actors and from the presence of the power of the best argument. He argues that we need to consider our possible independence from social conditions and existing politics. While analyzing life of the world, Habermas goes against the idea of the colonization of the world because, according to him, “science and technology work as ideology”. Although decisions are controlled by technocratic ideologies, the formulation of problems and the proposal of solutions follow a narrow logic of ends and means. According to Habermas, the strategy, “Making sense Together” emphasizes the importance of analyzing the social interactions of organizational and institutional contexts.

Finally, we can consider the work of Cahill and Overman (1990) as a useful proposal to understand and improve decision making. They support a new argument model centered on the analytical capacity and divided into two main parts: “analytical reasoning”, which is the ability to find relationships between variables to produce new information and to assess the conditions which determine the structure of these relationships, and “logical reasoning”, which is the ability to understand, analyze and evaluate arguments.

### **THE CONSTRUCTIONIST PARADIGM: THE FIFTH GENERATION OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION**

After the fourth generation of program evaluation was introduced, the fifth generation emerged in recent years. A group of researchers has promoted the fifth generation of evaluation believing that all details related to evaluation steps have to be a subject of exchange between stakeholders to improve the public decision-making process in a new constructionist paradigm. Despite the growing number of research related to the fifth generation of evaluation, little is yet known about the theory and practice of this new paradigm. It may thus be introduced as an embryonic field of studies and it is too early for us to know much about it.

Lund (2011) argues that the fifth generation of evaluation represents a genuine epistemological shift in the paradigm, where an unusual “practice-oriented” evaluation process is proposed. From his point of view, the fifth generation is going beyond the constructivist

ideology, proposed mainly by the fourth generation, to a social constructionist paradigm, where the idea that advocates that the truth relies on its real context is denied. According to Lund, the new paradigm dismisses the concepts of neutrality and objectivity in the evaluation process and supports the idea that the context where the evaluation is elaborated will affect the researchers and the researched. The author highlights the importance of using common language and joint evaluation questions where all stakeholders participate in its elaboration with their knowledge and expertise, and their main goal to reach better future and to embrace best practices from the past (Lund, 2011: 3).

Lund (2011) promotes the following nine significant social constructionist assumptions that may be considered a framework for the new paradigm:

“1- Language creates reality; 2- Organizational roles and relationships are shaped by the language used; 3- Language establishes certain moral rights and obligations; 4- Focus is on a shared desirable future; 5- Focus is on the core function; “need to know” rather than “nice to know”; 6- Shifts the focus from individuals to relationships; 7- Better to know what works! Not what went wrong; 8- There are different understandings of “reality” and the notion of “one truth” is dismissed; 9- Challenging inquiry that is contextual, relational and open minded will create better opportunities for change and development than critical testing, exposure, diagnoses, analyses and conclusions” (Lund 2011: 5).

According to this new paradigm, through a common dialogue, the inputs of every stakeholder must be taken into full consideration in an ongoing interactive learning evaluation process between researchers and practitioners. The creation of solid knowledge and a learning culture represent valuable assets in this collaborative evaluation practice. From the early beginning, the objectives and practices of evaluation have been reciprocally initiated and planned between all actors engaged in this process with a collective accountability to improve the current situation by fostering a better ontological understanding. A good number of authors promote that this shift in the evaluation process may be better described as an “actor-oriented” paradigm, more than just a systematic process of assessment to manipulate participants’ action (see in particular VanderPlaat, 1995; Radaelli and Dente, 1996; Fetterman, 1997; Patton, 1997; Danilda and Stridh, 1998; Abma, 2001; Chacón-Moscoso et

al., 2002; Van DerMeer and Edelenbos, 2006; Van Der Winden et al., 2011).

The new generation of researchers emphasizes the value of the experience of every player concerned in a “bottom-up” approach of an evaluation taking place within its real context. Researchers of the fifth generation advocate that evaluation is about empowering all stakeholders involved, which stimulates innovation and creativity for problem solving (Danilda and Stridh 1998).

Van Der Winden et al. (2011) support the idea that the fifth generation focuses generally on the ongoing negotiation process between all concerned stakeholders to better understand the shared truth so that they can handle the formulation and the implementation of the evaluation practice. The authors clarify that the main features of this generation of evaluation are as follows: “a consensus on the issues and concerns; the iterative process between all stakeholders; inter-subjectivity to grant transparency and accountability; a continuous learning process; and the engagement of all related stakeholders evaluators and evaluatees simultaneously” (Van Der Winden et al., 2011: 2).

The fifth generation of evaluation believes that “action research” represents a useful tool of evaluation to create a specific relationship between the theory and practice of the evaluation process and between the researcher and all stakeholders involved.

As explained in the literature, the origins of action research are not clear; nevertheless, most authors state that action research was formally introduced by American psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. In his work titled “Action Research and Minority Problems” (1946), Lewin suggested an action research theory, which he described as a spiral process that starting with planning, proceeds through the ongoing reflection actions, and finally ends with the evaluation of the learning process, designed for fact finding and stimulating changes at the organizational and social levels (see in particular Masters, 1995; Dickens and Watkins, 1999; White, 2004; Wilson, 2013; Lesha, 2014).

Lewin proposed that to “understand and change certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social world in all phases of inquiry” (McKernan, 1991:10).

Zuber-Skerrit (1992) stated that many definitions are provided in the literature about action research, and he identified four common fundamental understandings among those definitions as: “the empowerment of all stakeholders, collaborative action, the learning environment and the creation of knowledge, and social development” (Zuber-Skerrit, 1992:2).

After a thorough literature review, action research may be described as a space in reality where there is a practical multiplicity dialogue among all researchers and all researched, where both sides have to create a bridge of knowledge between them through a fruitful and mutual understanding of the context in which they are working. Thus, all stakeholders are considered agents of change participating in the evaluation process with their knowledge and expertise to overcome current problems and to formulate effective policies intended for the achievement of an enhanced situation.

In the same vein, Danilda and Stridh (1998) support the idea that action research is a process where new knowledge is generated primarily from the dialogue of three interdependent sources: “among practitioners, between investigators and practitioners, and among investigators” (Danilda and Stridh, 1998: 12).

Lesha (2014) introduces the idea that the main purpose of action research is the development of performance regarding the individuals, groups, organizations and societies.

Carr and Kemmis (1986), Grundy (1982, 1987) and McKernan (1991) illustrated the distinction of three different types of action research: technical, practical and emancipatory action research.

Through action research, all parties are engaged in a constructive mutual dialogue to better understand the context within which an evaluation takes place to reach a consensus course of action and to respond to the needs of both the researcher and the researched (see in particular Van Beinum et al., 1996; Toulmin, 1996; Barazangi, 2006; Afify, 2008; Gustavsen, 2008; Friedman and Rogers, 2009; Poonamallee, 2009; Dick et al., 2009; Hinton, 2011; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014; Dick and Greenwood, 2015; Greenwood, 2015).

As proposed by McCutcheon and Jurg (1990:145-147), action research may be distinguished through the incorporation of three key paradigms: positivist, interpretivist and critical science.

Zuber-Skerrit (2001:8) argued that action learning and action research are framed in the literature through four basic interrelated theories: grounded theory, personal construct theory, critical theory; and systems theory.

Walker (1993) demonstrated that action research is built upon the central concepts of “democratic practice, enlightenment and emancipation” (Walker, 1993:97). Noffke and Somekh (2013) advocate that action research is “always rooted in the values of the participants”. The authors described this type of research

as “stories from the field” (Noffke and Somekh, 2013:91). They proposed that action research is “a collaborative work between all stakeholders with a “from inside” perspective” (Noffke and Somekh, 2013:89).

Zuber-Skerrit (1993:46) presented that action research aims to empower all stakeholders participating in the evaluation process which definitely creates new knowledge and builds a solid learning culture inside their real environment to better solve their own problems and to improve their communities and societies.

At the end, the fifth generation of evaluation believes that researchers have to move from a constructivist to a social constructionist paradigm. In this new ideology, action research represents a useful tool of evaluation to create a specific relationship between the theory and practice of evaluation and between the researcher and all stakeholders concerned in a more social constructive dialogue to improve the public decision-making process. Nevertheless we may conclude that this new generation is still an embryonic paradigm that needs to be elaborated.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to provide a detailed analysis of public policy evaluation as an emergent field of study. Despite the growing importance of this field, only in recent years has public policy evaluation emerged as a crucial academic discipline of public policy analysis. A thorough literature review reveals that most authors emphasize only three stages of policy elaboration: agenda setting, policy formulation and policy implementation. Nevertheless, policy evaluation did not gain much attention by researchers until recent years. As an embryonic field of studies, policy evaluation has been developed through two opposing paradigms to improve public policy decisions.

The traditional paradigm is largely elaborated as a perspective of positivist policy evaluation. This paradigm generally retains the idea of objective truth which usually exists independently of the researcher. Thus, the group of researchers adhering to this paradigm is primarily concerned with developing a methodological approach and an evaluation recipe applicable to public activities. The positivist paradigm of evaluation was developed through three key generations that were elaborated consecutively. The first generation supports the concept of the measurement of evaluation. The second generation investigates the concept of evaluation description. The third generation is a more judgment-oriented evaluation.

The second paradigm adheres to the constructivist perspective where the ideological context,

political dimensions and ethical aspects were introduced. Therefore, the group of researchers adhering to this paradigm is primarily concerned with understanding the process of evaluation in a more pragmatic perspective. Far away from systematic evaluation, the constructivist paradigm proposed that the fourth generation included evaluators who are moving to a more flexible and reflective process. The fourth generation introduced the process of evaluation development.

Currently, a group of researchers advocate the fifth generation of evaluation. This new generation believes that researchers have to move from a constructivist to a social constructionist paradigm. In this new ideology, action research represents a useful tool of evaluation to create a specific relationship between the theory and practice of evaluation and between the researcher and all stakeholders concerned in a more social constructive dialogue to improve the public decision-making process.

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