

Preface

Jan-Eric Furubo and Rolf Sandahl concluded quite recently - in the *International Atlas of Evaluation* (Transaction Publishers, 2002, eds. Furubo, Rist, and Sandahl) - that considerable changes can be seen when looking at global, transnational and national developments in the institutional and political environment for evaluation over the last ten years. The importance of evaluation as a form of intellectual and practical activity has grown dramatically. This is illustrated, for example, by the number of countries presented in the above anthology (extending from evaluation pioneers, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, to newcomers such as Spain, Zimbabwe and Japan) and in the amount of national evaluation societies established during the last decade.

No wonder, then, that it is almost a truism that evaluation has become a highly respected, appreciated and venerated enterprise. Evaluation ethics and values are words that now trip off the tongues of modern evaluators. Though the limits of evaluation activities are quite extensively covered as a theme in methodological literature, the basic idea seems to be that evaluation is widely deemed to be A Good Thing. Needless to say, many challenges lie ahead in the development of evaluation practices and cultures in Finland, Europe and the rest of the world. Today, evaluators have also emerged in large numbers at the regional level and local government and they have become new players in the evaluation field. The demand for professional guidance seems to be immense and immediate.

European evaluation challenges were addressed at the beginning of October 2002 in Seville, Spain, where the 5th conference organised by the European Evaluation Society (EES) was held. The conference attracted over 400 evaluation practitioners not only from Europe, but also from other parts of the world. The themes of the 2002 EES Conference were Learning, Theory and Evidence, and they accord well with the themes and focus of the articles in this supplement.

This supplement contains four articles written by Pertti Ahonen, Per Mickwitz, Riitta Seppänen-Järvelä and myself. Mickwitz's and Seppänen-Järvelä's contributions are based on the papers they gave in Seville, whereas Pertti Ahonen's article draws heavily on a research project conducted by him recently. My article, on the other hand, was written quite a while ago but, before this opportunity, I have never been able to incorporate it in any other publication project in which I have been involved. A note concerning the language is appropriate, perhaps. We chose to publish all of the articles in English, since three of the four were originally published in that manner and it was easier to translate one article into English than three articles into Finnish. Needless to say, however, all of the articles went through the referee procedure.

This is the second supplement to be published by the Finnish Evaluation Society (FES) as part of *Administrative Studies*, the first one having been published in October 2001 (*Administrative Studies*, Vol. 20, Number 3). Therefore, I wish to express my gratitude to the Association for Administrative Studies and the editor-in-chief, Professor Jari Stenvall in particular, for providing this opportunity to the Finnish Evaluation Society. Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Jaana Haatainen, Secretary of Administrative Studies, for her co-operation during the preparation of this supplement.

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