TI POLICY Evaluation'27 CONFERENCE
25 - 26 Feb Vienna, Austria
SCOUTING PATHS ON SHIFTING MAPS

SPECIAL SESSIONS

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Special Sessions allow for highlighting a specific topic within the conference's (sub)themes. They provide an opportunity to give visibility to emerging or particularly relevant topics and to invite peers from specific communities to engage with the conference.

Authors for Special Sessions may submit extended abstracts that either apply to the general thematic strands or indicate that their contribution is intended for a specific Special Session, within the Easy Chair system. **If your submission is not intended to be part of a Special Session, please ignore this document.**

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REvaluation Conference 2027

"Scouting Paths on Shifting Maps"

February 25 - February 26, 2027, Vienna, Austria

Special Session 1 TIP:

Emerging approaches to evaluation of transformative innovation policies

Theories, concepts and practices in monitoring, evaluation and policy learning for transformative goals

Erik Arnold - Technopolis Group

Rowan Conway - University College London

Carolina Haddad - OECD

Matthijs Janssen - Utrecht University

Will McDowall - University College London

Michal Miedzinski - Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Karol Olejniczak - Institute of Social Sciences, SWPS University

Emily Wise - CIRCLE, Lund University

Harald Rohracher - Linköping University

Abstract/ Description:

The shift towards challenge-oriented transformative innovation policies (TIP) calls for revisiting existing monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches. The need for adjusting MEL methodologies and practices is increasingly recognised by policy practitioners and researchers alike.

There is growing academic interest and research on new challenges and approaches to MEL for TIP. Many research questions and methodological challenges, however, remain largely unexplored. Most existing methodologies and tools for identifying, measuring, and evaluating effects of policy interventions are not fit for capturing policy outcomes and impacts with a potential to transform systems. This is further challenged by the nature of TIP which addresses complex challenges involving risks and uncertainty. Consequently, evaluation approaches and methods need to beyond linear attributions of impacts to public interventions.

Objectives

The session provides a platform for researchers and policy practitioners to discuss existing practices and challenges for the MEL approaches for TIP. The engagement of the EC JRC provides a bridge between research and policy use of new MEL approaches.

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This session invites submissions that focus on theoretical approaches, methodologies and tools aiming to develop more robust and credible research designs and methodological approaches to MEL for TIP. It raises a wider question on how to adapt institutional and governance arrangements to encourage reflexive policy learning on transformative policy outcomes across the EU, national and regional levels. We also encourage discussion on how "traditional" and "transformation-oriented" evaluation can complement one another and where they may be fundamentally at odds.

Design of the session

The session is designed as a combination of track and a special session. The special session will take place at the end of the track. The special session will provide a space to present results of the ongoing JRC project on MEL for TIP which will be followed by a policy panel involving policy makers, academics and JRC. The co-organisers are all involved in the ongoing JRC research project on MEL.

Possible topics and questions for track

- **Conceptual and theoretical challenges:**
  - Why does the shift to TIP call for revisiting current approaches to MEL?
  - What are implications and new challenges of the shift towards TIP for scoping and implementing evaluations?
  - What are fundamental shortcomings of the established evaluation systems?
  - What is the importance of places and geography in the evaluation of TIP?
  - What is the nature of evidence and knowledge needed for TIP evaluation?
- **Methodological tools and techniques:**
  - How to choose appropriate scope and level of MEL for TIP?
  - What are relevant criteria and evaluation questions suitable for TIP?
  - How to adjust MEL methodologies to different scale of intervention (e.g. projects, portfolios, programmes, policy mix)?
  - How to deal with risks and uncertainties in MEL for TIP?
  - What are emerging approaches and tools for MEL for TIP (e.g. serious games, design thinking)?
- **Metrics and indicators:**
  - Design metrics for transformation, including innovative processes of co-designing metrics and the use of new data sources and indicators.
  - Novel approaches to measuring transformative outcomes, including co-creating indicators for transformative change.
  - The role and use of quantitative system models in the evaluation of transformative innovation policy?
- **Governance, reflexivity and policy learning:**
  - What are implications of the shift towards TIP for designing and implementing MEL and policy learning processes?
  - What are institutional and governance settings providing an environment enabling reflexive policy learning?

- How to design and implement collaborative and consultative arrangements of MEL (e.g., between policy makers, programme managers and scientists, cross-ministerial and cross-agency teams, multi-stakeholder bodies)?
- What are relevant MEL capabilities needed for MEL of TIP?

Extended abstracts are welcomed, please see the submission guidelines: Call for Contributions.
To directly submit your extended abstract, click here.
Deadline for abstract submission: July 31, 2026

Strand 7: ***Shifting science systems**: Changing conditions of research production*

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Special Session 2:

Rethinking Research Funding

New Instruments, for which purpose? And for what impact?

Carter Bloch - Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy (CFA), Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark

Erik Canton - European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, Chief Economist Unit, Brussels, Belgium

Nicola Francesco Dotti - European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, Chief Economist Unit, Brussels, Belgium

Ismael Rafols - INGENIO (CSIC-UPV), Valencia, Spain & UNESCO Chair, CWTS, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

Abstract/ Description:

Mainstream funding instruments aim to select 'excellent' research proposals based on expert peer review. The fundamental assumption is that by selecting the highest-rated proposals, research funding organizations (RFOs) maximize the impact of (limited, and often public) available budget. However, in reality often multiple criteria play a role, and RFO's typically also seek to promote interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research, collaboration, and scientific risk-taking.

In fact, evaluation methods used by research funding instruments exhibit a greater degree of diversity than is typically acknowledged. In recent years, increasing attention has been directed towards international funding schemes that address global challenges by supporting researchers across multiple countries. Additionally, many funding organisations are actively exploring strategies to enhance diversity, both in terms of the researchers and stakeholders supported and the range of research topics funded.

Against this background, funding instruments with alternative and/or complementary methods have been and are being proposed and experimented with the goal of pursuing new/different policy objectives with innovative implementation strategies.

Examples of new funding methods that have been widely discussed in recent years include, without being exhaustive:

1. 'Funding-by-lottery' proposes to introduce (some) degrees of randomisation in the selection of research proposals. The core idea is to incorporate randomisation to reduce the

administrative burden on applicants and reviewers, accepting that the selection will be (at least partially) made by a lottery. This approach also aims to increase equity by opening opportunities for underrepresented researchers, mitigating reviewer bias, and facilitating the selection of 'high-risk, high-gain' proposals (Shaw, 2023).

2. 'Portfolio approach' proposes allocating funding based on the collective attributes of a set of proposals rather than evaluating individual contributions in isolation. By adopting quantitative methods, the portfolio approach can maximize the synergistic benefits of a research cluster while balancing multiple policy objectives (Canton, 2025).
3. 'Distributed Peer Review' is a model in which applicants act also as reviewers. This model aims to overcome the structural shortage of reviewers that is even more critical given the diffusion of GenAI and the mounting pressure on researchers for funding. Furthermore, the model aims to reduce the submission of low-quality proposals, as applicants must 'internalize' the administrative cost of the review process (Stafford et al., 2025).
4. Recent models, such as the Villum Experiment and Volkswagen Foundation's The Experiment, have sought to promote creativity through assessment criteria that emphasise originality and a double-blinded review process (Bloch et al., 2025).

These evaluation methods for funding instruments are not mutually exclusive and can in some cases be combined. A variety of additional approaches have been employed, seeking to promote research that addresses societal challenges, with focus on collaboration, themes and societal goals (see Norn et al., 2024).

A central question remains: which models fits what purposes?

For example, the promotion of exploratory research may be viewed as the opposite of funding research targeting a specific mission. Therefore, funding-by-lottery seems well-suited to promote exploratory, high-risk/high-gain research, while a portfolio approach could help identifying a set of proposals with a multi-dimensional perspective on societal challenges. However, the selection of one approach over another might be influenced by other factors, such as cost-saving measures to reduce the burden of organizing large peer review panels, potentially undermining the quality of the evaluation process.

To address these dynamics, this session welcomes scientific contributions exploring the following questions:

- What funding models best align with specific policy scopes and purposes?
- How can these alternative selection methods be implemented effectively within specific instruments?
- How should we assess whether these alternative methods achieve their expected goals?
- What administrative frameworks are needed to implement these alternative funding models?

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Extended abstracts are welcomed, please see the submission guidelines: Call for Contributions.
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Deadline for abstract submission: July 31, 2026

Strand 8: ***Evaluators*** *under pressure: Changing demands and roles*

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Special Session 3:

The Austrian Micro Data Center (AMDC)

A New Infrastructure for Policy Evaluation in Austria

Tobias Herzog - Austrian Micro Data Center (AMDC)

Abstract/ Description:

Overview

High-quality policy evaluation increasingly depends on secure access to microdata linking administrative, survey, and register data. In Austria, such access has long been fragmented, legally complex, and resource-intensive for researchers. The Austrian Micro Data Center (AMDC), operated by Statistics Austria, represents a new and innovative opportunity for conducting policy evaluation in Austria.

This Special Session focuses on the AMDC as a new way of conducting policy evaluation in Austria. The AMDC provides a centralized and legally secure infrastructure that enables researchers of accredited institutions to access a wide range of pseudonymized microdata within a controlled environment. By enabling secure remote access to linked microdata, the AMDC has the potential to substantially expand the scope and improve the quality of policy evaluation research.

Objectives

The session pursues two closely connected objectives. First, it offers researchers the opportunity to present evaluation projects already conducted using the AMDC. Contributions may showcase advanced empirical designs, innovative data linkages, or substantive evaluation findings that would not have been feasible without this infrastructure. In doing so, the session aims to demonstrate the concrete value added of the AMDC for evidence-based policymaking and applied evaluation practice in Austria.

Second, the session explicitly invites reflection on remaining challenges and future development needs. While the AMDC marks a significant step forward, its full potential for evaluation research has not yet been realized. Contributors are therefore encouraged to discuss technical, practical, and institutional constraints encountered in their projects, including issues related to data availability and linkage, documentation, approval procedures, computational resources, or timelines. Reflections on legal, organizational, and governance aspects are equally welcome.

By bringing together applied evaluators, academic researchers, and stakeholders familiar with the AMDC framework, this Special Session seeks to foster a constructive dialogue on how the AMDC can be further developed to better support rigorous evaluation research and strengthen data-driven public policy in Austria.

Extended abstracts are welcomed, please see the submission guidelines: Call for Contributions.
To directly submit your extended abstract, click here.

Deadline for abstract submission: July 31, 2026

Strand 3:

Data, tools and technology in evaluation

Contact Person:

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Special Session:

Title Session: ***Combining concepts, integrating methods and exploring new data sources for societal R&I evaluation***

Susanne Bührer – ISI Fraunhofer
Sarah Seus – ISI Fraunhofer
Florian Wittmann – ISI Fraunhofer

Abstract/ Description:

With this proposal for a special session, we aim to discuss contributions on how to assess societal impacts (Bornmann 2013, Bührer et al, 2022, Bührer et al. 2023, Reale et a. 2018,) with activities beyond single funding programmes. This can be a strategy or a bundle of programmes (e.g. a mission or a comprehensive strategy) targeting a shared goal or the innovation system as a whole. While the need for systemic evaluation approaches is increasingly acknowledged, there remains a "gap" between more traditional impacts (research and economic impacts) and the SDGs or similar systemic concepts. This poses a considerable challenge for evaluations.

The special session will discuss how various concepts, methods, and tools can be combined and complement each other in order to better understand the interplay of different impacts and bridge the existing gap between different types of impacts. A specific emphasis should be on the discussion how to navigate between (traditional) research effects and the contribution of research and innovation activities to larges-scale systemic and societal goals. This session aims to discuss what this methodological opening of concepts means for conceptualising and doing R&I evaluation. We invite contribution to further think the ongoing debates (e.g. formative designs of evaluations (Molas Gallart et al., 2021)) or thinking ex-ante and ex-post approaches together, e.g. by including an impact orientation from the start of the interventions such as impact-oriented monitoring approaches (Bührer & Roth 2023, van Mierlo et al. 2010, Pfeifer & Helming 2024). Such approaches and concepts may help to tailor evaluation activities towards systemic changes. Furthermore, we invite contributions that expand the methodological toolbox and include methods not yet mainstreamed in (ex-post) evaluation. This can include methods frequently used in ex-ante impact assessments such as foresight, quantitative modelling, or methods seeking inclusive and participatory assessments of effects. AI supported methods helping to tap into new data sources are also welcomed.

This special session, calls on the evaluation community to submit contributions (conceptual and practice examples) providing evidence on the following questions:

1) What heuristics or theory-based approaches can be used to set up a robust evaluation design evaluating towards societal goals?
2) Introducing impact-orientation from the beginning of a funding intervention: what approaches are useful to gain insights beyond the programme level?
3) Methods for following the impact pathways towards societal/systemic impacts – what works and with what limitation?

4) How to fruitfully combine ex-ante impact assessment and ex-post evaluation approaches in an overall evaluation framework? What are conceptual and practical requirements and challenges when bringing together such approaches?

The session organizers have been engaged in a four-years research project on the topic and will facilitate the session bringing in their own experience. The session wants to be a dialogue session based on a world-café format that brings together different experiences and insights from similar projects and activities. Therefore, we invite speed talks as inputs being either focused on conceptional and design elements or the use of methods to provide a starting point for the later discussions.

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Molas-Gallart, Jordi; Boni, Alejandra; Giachi, Sandro; Schot, Johan (2021): A formative approach to the evaluation of Transformative Innovation Policies, *Research Evaluation*, Volume 30, Issue 4, October 2021, Pages 431–442

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Strand 6: *The big picture:* ***System-level evaluations***

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Special Session 4:

Future Funding Governance: Funding organisations and agentic AI

Thomas Palfinger - LBG OIS Center

Abstract/ Description:

If an AI agent can orchestrate a physical, expertise-intensive process such as brewing beer—from recipe development to production and marketing—why should it not also be able to coordinate a highly standardised funding process? After all, a core function of funding organisations, particularly those operating through strongly standardised procedures, is to orchestrate processes through which resources are allocated to advance defined public goals, such as fostering innovation. If we assume that agentic AI could take over substantial parts of this operational value proposition, the question arises as to what distinctive value funding organisations would continue to provide.

The aim of this special session, however, is not to assume the disappearance of human expertise or the replacement of funding organisations. Rather, it is to discuss how their role might shift from performing and administering processes towards functions in which their distinctive public value may increasingly lie: enabling communities and institutional learning, defining strategic goals, setting boundaries, and authorising or taking responsibility for critical decisions.

This is particularly relevant because many funding systems rely on procedures that are (1) repetitive, (2) highly standardised, and (3) partly depersonalised. Their repetitive character reflects the need to process large numbers of applications through recurring stages, decisions, and administrative routines. Standardisation is intended to increase consistency, fairness, transparency, and reliability by ensuring that comparable cases are treated according to common rules. Depersonalisation, in turn, seeks to reduce dependence on individual discretion and preferences, personal relationships, and the judgement of particular staff members. Yet precisely these features - recurrence, formalisation, and reduced reliance on individual actors - also make funding processes particularly accessible to automation. What was developed to manage the limitations and variability of human decision-making may therefore become the foundation for reducing the human component of funding systems.

Even if such a transformation remains partial, it can be seen as opportunity to ask fundamental questions for funding organisations and the evaluation system surrounding them. Once these processes can credibly be organised and delivered through different combinations of human and artificial agency, funding organisations must clarify how they deliver their distinctive public value, while actors in the evaluation ecosystem must reconsider alternative ways of organizing as well as benchmarks against which their performance is assessed.

Against this background, the special session treats agentic AI not merely as another tool to be integrated into existing funding organisations, but as an institutional counterfactual through which future roles can be reconsidered. It does not assume that funding systems will become fully automated.

Rather, it takes human, hybrid, and largely automated arrangements seriously as alternative ways of organising public funding. This perspective allows the session to move beyond incremental questions of AI adoption and to examine, which functions may be automated, where human involvement contributes to achieve distinctive public value, and how evaluation can help to compare and shape future institutional choices - at the process, organisational and evaluation levels. Hence, the aim is not to predict the replacement of funding organisations, but to open a more fundamental debate about their purpose, processes how they achieve this, and how their performance should be assessed in the future.

Specifically, the session invites for submissions of case studies, experiences and strategic considerations of funding agencies tackling these emerging institutional choices at three interconnected levels:

- **Process level**: Which activities involved in designing, administering, and monitoring funding programmes can be supported, transformed, or largely automated by agentic AI?
- **Organisational level**: What distinctive public value do funding organisations provide beyond the implementation of standardised processes, and which of their functions cannot - or should not - be substituted by automated systems?
- **Evaluation level**: How should the performance of funding organisations be assessed when human organisations are no longer the only credible benchmark, but must be compared with hybrid and largely automated institutional alternatives?

By introducing a new institutional counterfactual, agentic AI changes not only how funding organisations may operate, but also the standards against which their costs, complexity, speed, legitimacy, and public value can - and must – be evaluated.

Extended abstracts are welcomed, please see the submission guidelines: Call for Contributions.
To directly submit your extended abstract, click here.
Deadline for abstract submission: July 31, 2026

Strand 3: *Data, tools and technology in evaluation – Technical track*

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