

Title: Att utvärdera i praktiken - en retrospektiv fallstudie av tre program för lokal folkbiblioteksutveckling (The practice of evaluation - a retrospective study of three programs for local change and development in public libraries)

Language: Swedish, with a summary in English

The study is placed within the area of library and information science (LIS) known as "evaluation research" and in particular, the area that relates to theory of evaluation practice. An analysis of previous research reveals that there is a need for conceptualising evaluation activities in the real life of libraries and information services and to reflect further on the conditions for evaluation in various institutional contexts.

The aim of this study is to identify evaluation practice in public libraries, delimited to programs for local change and development, and to create an understanding for how this practice reflects institutional conditions within this particular context. The theoretical frame combine concepts from theories of program evaluation, theories of evaluation in library and information service and institutional theory. Evaluation is here considered as an ex post, systematic study with the purpose of describing and judging the merit of the implementation and results of a given activity and intervention.

In this study an interpretative approach, based on the principles of hermeneutics and phenomenology, is used. The empirical study follows guidelines for qualitative case study and is designed in a retrospective and comparative manner. The study includes three different programs directed towards local change in public libraries, during the period 1986-1999. The sample includes thirty-nine (39) single studies each aimed at evaluating the programs. Data were collected from interviews and program documentation and were analysed on three levels. The first level concentrated on mapping the complex network of evaluation activities and identifying participants and their role in different evaluation processes. The second level was directed towards a clarification of the activities and subjective meaning of different tasks of evaluation in the context of each single program. On the third level of analysis certain aspects of evaluation practice were compared between the cases, which led to an aggregated description of both the pattern related to single tasks as well as to a more holistic description of the basic approaches through which evaluation practice in these kinds of programs can be understood.

One conclusion is that evaluation practice, even in this limited context, is experienced as a complex phenomenon filled with contradictions and paradoxes. The main result of this thesis is the identification of a certain pattern, here conceptualised as three strategies. Strategies are labelled "participatory evaluation", "rational-managerial evaluation" and "pragmatic-political evaluation". Some remarks are made about in what way this pattern correspond to traditional theories of practice in LIS. One conclusion is that the practice of evaluation has almost nothing in common with "scientific-expert" approaches, mainly, it is argued, because the basic conditions for such a model do not seem to exist. Another conclusion is that institutional rules and norms are reflected in evaluation practice in varied ways and that evaluation both produces and reproduces the legitimacy of institutional identity. Evaluation cannot and should not be seen as a neutral or technical tool. It is suggested that further research should focus more on problems related to pragmatic-political aspects of evaluation practice as well as going further in the analysis of the deeper interaction between evaluation practice and institutional change.

Key words: Evaluation, Evaluation Practice, Program, Project, Public Library, Library Management, Institutional Theory, Library and Information Science, Library and Information Services