

Abstract

Evaluation is a traditional topic in the political debate: public institutions evaluate public policies in order to get a measure of their effectiveness. In spite of their importance, it is well known that evaluation policy tools are difficult to apply in complex and dynamic contexts of social interventions, because of heterogeneity and plurality of actors and specific social needs. In this framework, the Social Network Analysis (SNA) techniques are particularly within useful evaluation practice to view the policy making process through the lens of relationships rather than just attribute among actors involved in the public policies. So it is possible to know about the nature, structure, development and potential sustainability for the future of the relationships between people, organizations, events or ideas in a specific project, program or initiative.

Aims of the present PhD thesis are: *i)* to investigate the potential of using SNA techniques to stress the relevance of relationship dimension in decision-making arenas at different levels of policy design and *ii)* to study the effect of context and individual actions on public policy design, implementation and evaluation. Starting from this theoretical framework, the experimental part of the work focuses on one Italian regional program, part of the Seventh Framework Programme (2007-2013) of European Commission, whose aim was the contrast of social exclusion of disadvantaged families with children aged 0-3 years.

The work is divided in two parts. The theoretical background briefly introduces: *i)* the social policies related to the transition from centralized to mix welfare state model in which everybody has to contribute for the community well-being through social capital creation; *ii)* a review of the most important approaches used in the evaluation programs according to three different stages in which it can be applied (*ex ante*, *in itinere*, *ex post evaluation*); *iii)* the usefulness of network perspective in program evaluation, focusing on network concept and the difficulties about its creation and its sustainability for the future. The case study reported in the **experimental part**, by using qualitative and quantitative methods in the research design, exploits the SNA techniques to describe the relationship among different actors involved in different stages of the policy making process. First a presentation of the nine projects financially supported in this Italian regional program along with the interviews obtained by managers projects is presented. Second, the focus switches on two of the nine projects to pick out individual traits and relationships among different actors involved in the projects. The main results of the statistical analysis on data gathered through administrative archives and a survey, using questionnaire, interviews and focus groups for data collection process, are discussed according to the kind of network's coordination and the peculiarity of the role played by all the actors involved in the two projects and their capability to recognize themselves in the network structure.