

# The Policy Cycle and its Practicle Application

Masters Degree in Journalism and Media Studies

*Media Policies and Institutions*

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*Guest Lecture*

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# What is policy ?

- Policy often used term
  - often used in pers, television news, etc.
  - central concept in political debate
  - seldom question what it really means
- In current language use different meanings
  - What does policy mean according to you?

- Policy best seen as a process
  - Policy is a complex long-term process with many input and output factors
    - ✘ scientific view
    - ✘ seldom appears in daily language use
  - Policy often depicted as a snapshot of reality
  - However, in reality
    - ✘ complex non-linear process
    - ✘ multi-factorial process
    - ✘ not perfectly deleniatable
    - ✘ not reducible to a single document, decision or event

- Scientifically more interesting to see it as a process
  - also for journalists interesting to take a broader view
    - ✘ to situate events in their historical context
    - ✘ to see events as part of a more complex policy process

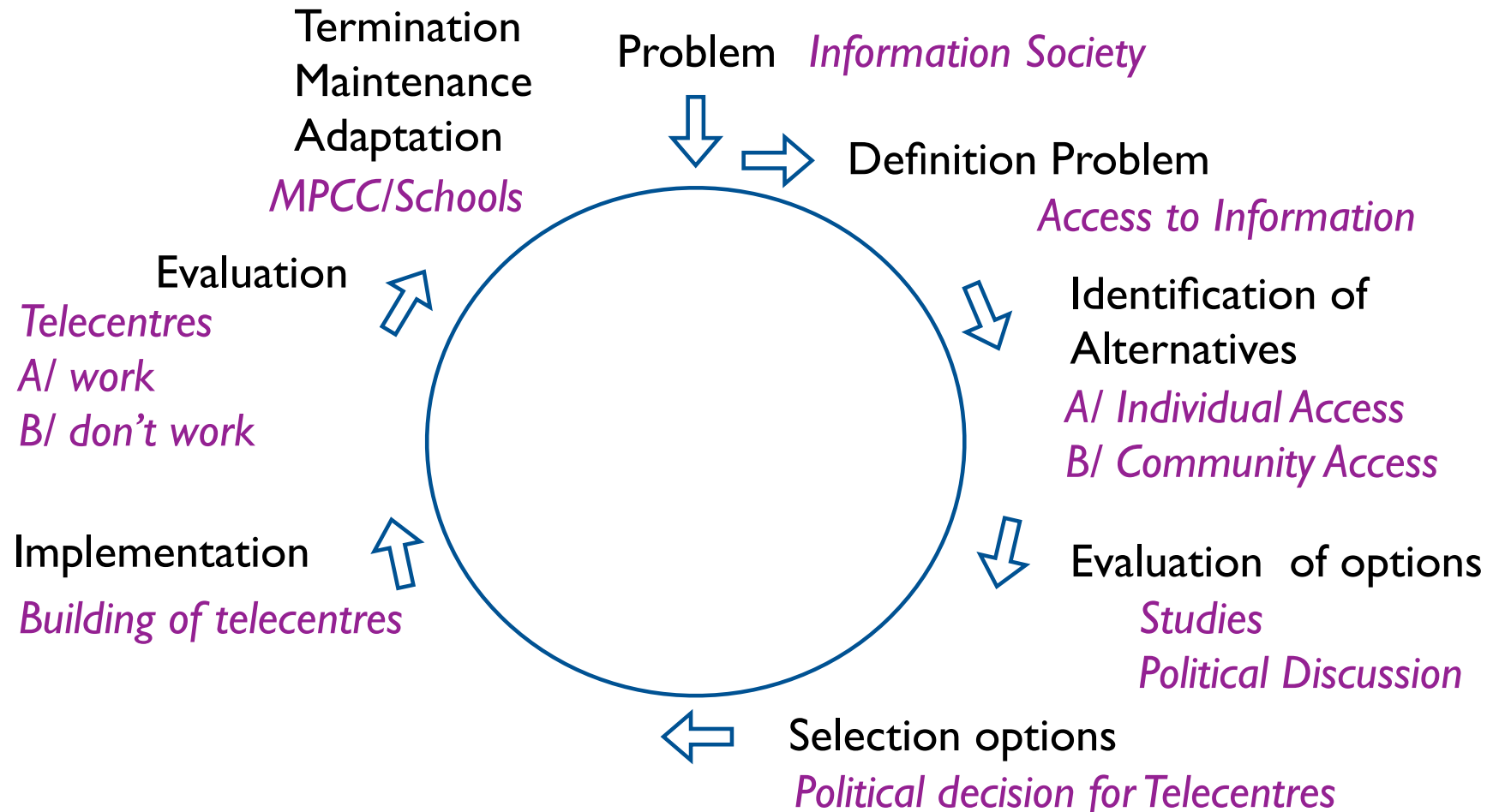
# What is policy?

- No single scientific definition
  - different points of view - diverging definitions
  - Parsons: Public Policy
    - ✗ two tear definition:
      - It is concerned with how issues and problems come to be defined and constructed and how they are placed on the political and policy agenda.
      - But it is also the study of 'how, why and to what effect governments pursue particular courses of action or **inaction**'

- Policy not only about politics
  - about implementation — administration
  - social change as result of government action (or inaction)

# Policy cycle

- Policy often seen as a *phased linear or circular process*



- Drawback of use of policy cycle
  - creates an artificial *idealistic* view on policy
    - ✗ in reality the course of policy is much more unpredictable
    - ✗ in reality policy not always rational goal-oriented process
      - many decisions at hoc and irrational
- Advantages of use of policy cycle
  - makes policy process more comprehensible
  - research stages easier to delineate
    - ✗ each phase can be looked at separately
    - ✗ phases can be compared e.g. in terms of evaluation
      - e.g. comparing goals with results



# Policy process and research

- Policy process: multiple actors who design and implement a specific plan
  - encompasses communicative, strategic and technical actions = can be the focus of empirical research
- communicative and strategic action
  - conversation: debate, meetings, negotiations, telephone conversations, etc.
    - ✗ Primary data: if directly accessible
    - ✗ Secondary data: e.g. through interviews, written accounts
  - written texts: preparatory documents, government statements, press releases, State of the Unions, political programmes, etc.

- technical actions
  - directly visible actions as a result of public policy
  - e.g. road construction, subsidizing of media, etc.

- Policy can be deducted from the study of communicative, strategic and technical action
  - texts are a central element in research into policy
    - ✖ main advantage easily accessible
    - ✖ main disadvantage
      - especially strategic action mostly covert
      - if no written evaluations available
        - difficult to assess impact (requires large scale research)
      - if evaluations available by government
        - terms of reference politically framed
  - might be necessary to use other research methods

# Policy cycle and research focus

## RESEARCH FOCUS

Political Discourse

Decision Making

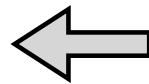
Formal Policy

Implementation

Impact

Evaluation

- Research focus can be linked to phases
- More static than phases in cycle
  - e.g. agenda setting broader than political discourse
  - e.g. formal policy a result of Decision Making
- Advantage:
  - Delineates nicely research fields
  - Can be used as practical tool to analyze
- Important to see policy as process



Not a phase in policy cycle. Part of research which has considerable impact on all phases and is central in evaluation.

RESEARCH FOCUS

Political Discourse



What different parties say about policy before decision is made (Rhetoric)

Decision Making



Processes of mediation and power to actually come to a choice on policy

Formal Policy



Actual policy as written down in laws, acts, constitutions, etc.

Implementation



Translation of formal policy into concrete action

Impact



Effects policy has on (aspects of) society

Evaluation



Review of effectiveness and efficiency of policy

# Research focus and practice

- With each research focus in policy cycle look at:
  - What questions are relevant?
  - What actors play a role? How?
  - What sources can be used?
  - What methods and techniques can be used?
  - How to frame the research?
- Journalistic practice
  - Very close to practice of researcher
  - Some of what I say might be obvious
  - Please intervene and contribute to the lecture

# The Research Question

- Delineating the research question is part of the whole research process
  - after initial question important to narrow down further
    - ✗ on the basis of initial literature review
    - ✗ on the basis of empirical exploration of the field
      - e.g. short interviews with experts
    - ✗ on the basis of both develop:
      - more specific research questions and sub-questions
      - develop hypothesis for (sub)questions
    - ✗ Objective: provides structure and direction in research process

- - operationalisation of empirical research
    - ✘ what methods to use for what (sub)questions?
    - ✘ Important to keep in mind:
      - What is possible within the given *timeframe* and *resources*?
      - On the basis of this narrow down scope and (sub)questions



- Practical recommendations
  - think about structure from the beginning
  - always justify your choices (in a scientific way)
    - ✘ acknowledge the shortcomings of your research and the methods used
    - ✘ also emphasise the strong points
    - ✘ makes critique by others more difficult
  - decide on time spend and pages to be written early in the process

# Research question

- Research always starts with a specific question
- Within policy analysis two types of questions
  - Descriptive questions (*Analyse of policy*)
    - ✘ What is South Africa's media policy?
    - ✘ What is the discussion on community radio?
    - ✘ Has South Africa's telecentre policy been effective?
  - Prescriptive questions (*Analyse for policy*)
    - ✘ What policy should SA adopt on 3G mobile?
    - ✘ What type of regulation is most effective to reach higher telephone penetration in rural areas?
  - Policy analysis often a combination of both
    - ✘ We focus on the first type of questions

# What Methods to Use

- Analysis of text
  - Critical reading
    - ✦ analysis of most important arguments, assumptions, goals and means in texts
    - ✦ often main source for simple analysis
  - Goals -Means analysis
    - ✦ schematic tool to map goals, means and their connections (often applied in formal policy texts, e.g. laws, etc.)

- Content analysis
  - ✗ in depth research looking at changes in texts
    - used for larger amount of texts
  - ✗ research focusses on evolutions
    - e.g. changes in language on multi-culturality in Flemish law
    - often used in comparative research
      - e.g. comparison of law texts in Holland and Flanders
- Discourse Analysis (qualitative research)
  - ✗ research into the change *of* concepts (language level)
  - ✗ look for binary oppositions

- Informant and expert-interviews
  - if not much written material is available
  - used to map the *practice* of policy as opposed to the *formal* policy
  - used to map the relations between stages in policy process
  - often used with other methods
- Focus group
  - small (mostly heterogeneous) groups of people (between 4 and 12)
  - discussing a certain issue from different angles to get first insight
  - discussion is guided by a moderator
  - not used when issues are controversial

- Expert panel
  - small group of experts
  - debate (guided or among themselves) specific issues
  - goal to come to consensus (in written form of report)
    - ✘ if consensus not reached different options are mapped
- Participatory observation
  - only possible if access is available
  - time-consuming
  - provides in depth insight into processes

# Research into Discourse

RESEARCH FOCUS

Political Discourse

Decision Making

Formal Policy

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Impact

Evaluation

- Policy Discourse
  - What different parties say about policy before decision is made (Rhetoric).
- What questions?
  - What is the political discussion around a certain topic ?
  - Has the discussion changes over time? Why?
  - What are the different points of view, assumptions and contradictions?
  - What are the actors involved and what are their views?

- What sources?
  - Political speeches
  - Press releases
  - Political programmes
  - Newspaper articles (reflecting political views)
- Methods
  - Text analysis
  - Interviews



# Discourse & WSIS

- Question:
  - What is the political discussion regarding WSIS?
- Actors:
  - National governments
  - International institutions
  - Civil society
  - Private sector
- Sources:
  - Press releases, internal reports, public discussions, interviews with participants of ≠ groups, etc.
- Method: critical reading
  - what points of view do actors defend?

- Results:
  - systematization via themes
    - × Contribution of civil society to the Summit
    - × Infrastructure, Access and Digital Divide
    - × Communication rights versus security
    - × Participation versus e-government
    - × Education
    - × vb. [www.worldsummit2003.de](http://www.worldsummit2003.de) (Themen)
  - systematization via actors
  - evolution in time

# Decision Making

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- Decision Making
  - Processes of mediation and power to actually come to a choice on policy.
- Remark
  - Close to political analysis
  - More complex empirical research
  - Should be imbedded in knowledge of political structure and culture of the country

- Questions

- What are the processes of decision making? What are the effects on policy content?
- What actors are involved?
- What is the interaction between actors and institutions?
- What are the power relations involved?
- What institutions play a role with what effect on formal policy?

- Sources
  - Less directly identifiable
  - Formal functioning
    - ✘ texts and rules on working of institutions (e.g. parliament)
  - Concrete functioning
    - ✘ transcriptions of parliamentary discussions
    - ✘ transcriptions and statements on meetings
    - ✘ internal notes
    - ✘ witness reports
    - ✘ interviews
    - ✘ participatory observation
  - (discourse analysis and content analysis)

- Methods
  - critical reading
  - complemented with
    - ✘ informant-interviews
      - balance between actors and institutions

# Decision Making in WSIS

- Background
  - WSIS organized under UN auspices
    - ✗ countries are formal members with voting rights
    - ✗ civil society only status as observer (both private sector and NGOs)
  - At start of negotiations around WSIS commitment to broader participation
    - ✗ national representatives of countries
    - ✗ civil society
    - ✗ private sector
    - ✗ international organisations

- Question

- What role has civil society actually played in WSIS?

- Sources

- Discussion over statutes, statutes of NGOs, reports and texts produced by NGOs, witness reports, interviews with participants.

- Methods

- critical reading & interviews with participants

- Results

- Although a lot of discussion on role of civil society
- in the end rather limited
  - ✗ both direct and indirect resistance to participation



- Direct resistance
  - ✗ role limited to that of *observer*
  - ✗ most important meetings behind closed doors with countries
  - ✗ civil society limited impact on *Declaration* and *Actionplan*
- Indirect resistance
  - ✗ no administrative support
  - ✗ meetings of civil society are kept away from official conference venue ⇒ makes communication more difficult

# Formal Policy

## RESEARCH FOCUS

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- Formal Policy
  - Actual policy as written down in laws, acts, constitutions, etc.
- Questions
  - What is South Africa's formal policy in audiovisual media?
  - How has policy changed over time?
- Sources
  - Laws, acts, white papers, etc. (in some countries judicial decisions part of formal policy) constitutional courts
- Methods: critical reading

# Policy content and theory

RESEARCH FOCUS

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- Theoretical reflections on policy
  - possible at the level of Discourse and Formal Policy
  - Starts from theory (or review of literature)
    - ✗ looking at most important theory
    - ✗ prescriptive policy
    - ✗ central issues

- confrontation between theory and policy
  - ✗ What are the differences ? Why?
  - ✗ Does theory provides us with insights on possible effects?
- Comparative analysis (between countries)
  - ✗ In what respect does policy differ from policy in other countries? Why? With what effect?

# Theory on IS-policy

- Theory: policy has to be made in five key areas
  - Infrastructure
    - ✗ access to ICTs, media and telecommunications
    - ✗ linked to theory on liberalization and privatization
  - Infostructure
    - ✗ development of services and content ≠ sectors
    - ✗ education, health, agriculture, information, etc.

- Skills and capability
  - individual skills to use technology effectively
    - ✘ both at home and at work
  - closely linked to the restructuring of education
- Institutional capacity
  - reforming administration and government
  - e.g. in terms of e-government
- All this has to be imbedded in a general socio-economic and innovation policy for the country

# Case I: WSIS Draft Declaration

- Question
  - To what extent WSIS Draft Declaration in line with theory of the information society?
  - Possible subquestion: What could be the consequences?
- Sources
  - Review of literature on IS.
  - WSIS Declaration
- Method
  - Critical reading

- **Result**

- Important emphasis on access

- ✘ great belief in liberalization as driving force to spread access
- ✘ From theory we know that liberalization is difficult process
- ✘ Many failures especially in developing countries.

- Very narrow vision on IS

- ✘ reduced to the advantages of ICTs
- ✘ not seen as a global economic process
- ✘ narrow view on digital divide
  - digital divide *more* than a problem of access
  - very complex issue which interacts with other divides
- ✘ very weak integration between parts



# Case 2: IS Policy in South Africa

- Question

- What is South Africa's policy in terms of the information society and how can we situate this in the theoretical discussion on the issue?

- Sources

- Problem: no central text
- But clear vision and lots of activities
  - ✗ policy texts, laws, implementation
  - ✗ spread over different departments
- Attempt to bring structure in sources on the basis of an analytical framework based on theory

# Formal IS policy in SA

- Five key areas (see example of WWSIS)
- Analysis for South Africa until mid 1996

<i>Policy document or initiative</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Department responsible</i>
<b>OVERALL SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICY</b> (economy, industry, technology and innovation)		
White Paper on Science and Technology (1996)	Science and technology geared at innovation	Arts, Culture, Science and Technology
RDP Base Document and White Paper (1993-94)	Development policy until 1996	ANC & Ministry without Portfolio
Growth, Employment and reconstruction (1996)	More neoliberal policy 1996	Presidential Office & Finance

<i>Policy document or initiative</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Department responsible</i>
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>		
Telecommunications Act (1997)	Telecommunications policy	Communications
Technology-Enhanced Learning Investigation (1996)	ICTs in education	Education
Library and Information System (1996)	Libraries and ICTs	Education & ACST
<b>INFOSTRUCTURE</b>		
Technology-Enhanced Learning Investigation (1996)	ICTs in education	Education
Library and Information System	Libraries and ICTs	Education & ACST
Comtask-report (1996)	Government communication and development communication	Deputy President
Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (1993)	Responsible for audiovisual in absence of policy after 1993	IBA & Communication

<i>Policy documents and initiatives</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Department responsible</i>
<b>Capacities</b>		
National Qualifications Framework (1996)	Qualification and certification for education	South African Qualifications Authority
Technology-Enhanced Learning Investigation (1996)	ICTs and education	Education
<b>INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY</b>		
White Paper on Public Service (1995)	Restructuring of public service	Public Service and Administration
Affermative Action (in different documents)	Policy geared at helping disadvantaged into work	Public Service and Administration

- Information society complex issue
  - spread over different departments
- Important questions in terms of policy
  - Is overall policy consistent?
  - Are there any overlaps or loopholes?
  - Are the right departments responsible?
  - **Result**
    - ✗ at first most emphasis on *infrastructure* and less on *infostructuur*
    - ✗ problem of integration of IS policy with overall socio-economic and developmental strategy

# Implementation

## RESEARCH FOCUS

Political Discourse

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Evaluation

- Implementation
  - Translation of formal policy into concrete action
- Questions
  - Questions can be varied and complex
  - What institutions are responsible?
    - ✘ How are responsibilities divided?
  - Is policy efficiently implemented?
    - ✘ Are there enough resources?
    - ✘ Is the institution capable?

- Remark
  - Policy making and implementation not separated
    - ✗ Political influence on way of implementation?
    - ✗ At implementation level room for interpretation?
      - e.g. Universal Service Agency
- Sources
  - Not easily accessible
  - Role of institutions specified in policy documents.
  - Institutions often have their own guidelines
  - Internal notes, internal or external evaluations, etc.
- Methods
  - Methods related to management and organization theory
  - Critical reading, Interviews, Participative observation

# Framework to examine obstacles confronting implementation in service delivery

- **Difficulties arising from operational demands**
  - Who are the people to be served?
  - What is the nature of the service to be delivered?
  - What are the potential distortions and irregularities in the population?
  - Is the programme controllable? Can it be measured? Are any parts not controllable?
- **Difficulties concerning resources**
  - What are the limits on funds? Prospects for more?
  - Is the personnel in place with the right qualification?
  - Is there enough space?
  - Is the technical equipment and infrastructure in place?



- Difficulties arising from sharing authority.
  - Overhead agencies: Dealing with authorities? Are they supportive?
  - Line agencies: How many involved? Do they work together?
  - Elected politicians: Are they supportive? Can they influence?
  - Private-sector providers: How dependent is the programme on providers?
  - Special interest group: What are their interests and political power?
  - The Press: Has the programme high visibility? Could the media do harm/good?

# Onderzoek naar impact

## RESEARCH FOCUS

Political Discourse

Policy Making

Formal Policy

Implementation

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Evaluation

- Impact
  - Effects policy has on (aspects of) society.
- Questions
  - What is de impact of policy?
    - ✗ in terms of social change
    - ✗ in termen of economic growth
- Sources (primary)
  - statistics
    - ✗ Population census
    - ✗ National Bank, Economist, etc.
    - ✗ Monitors
  - surveys
    - ✗ e.g. on Internet use

- Sources (secondary)
  - year reports, evaluations, monitors, etc.
- Methods
  - statistical reanalysis
  - surveys
  - interviews
  - etc.

# Evaluation

RESEARCH FOCUS

Political Discourse

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Impact

Evaluation

- Evaluation
  - Review of effectiveness and efficiency of policy
  - Analysis and interpretation of results
    - ✘ involves a value judgment
    - ✘ involves an analytic framework
    - ✘ over meerdere fases

- Questions
  - Has policy been effective?
    - ✖ comparison of goals, means and impact
  - What are the enabling and constraining factors?
  - Where are the problems situated, in what phase?
- Sources
  - as stated in policy phases
  - depends on the phases involved in the evaluation
- Methods
  - idem
  - comparison between goals and impact most common

# Reading Evaluations

- Analytic framework = selection and value judgment
  - look out if confronted with evaluations
    - ✗ look at what analytical frame was used
    - ✗ *who* developed the evaluation framework *with what purpose in mind*
    - ✗ what questions were asked and what questions not
  - think outside of the given framework
    - ✗ own critical reflection
    - ✗ knowledge of the field (literature)
  - in contract research read *terms of reference*

# Internal versus external

- Internal versus external framework
  - internal: analytic framework based on policy process
  - external: analytic framework going outside of policy process
    - ✗ best practice
    - ✗ model
    - ✗ theory
    - ✗ review of literature

# Computers in Flemish Schools

- **Question:** Is the infrastructural policy regarding computers in schools effective?
- **Method & Case I:** Internal evaluation
  - Goal Flemish Community in 1998 was 1 computer per 10 pupils by 2002
  - in 2001 goals reached in secondary education
- **Result I:** policy is successful



- **Method & Case II: External evaluation**
  - other goal is to learn pupils how to use computers and the Internet in their daily work at school
  - from the literature we know this only succeeds if pupils use computers in all subjects e.g. English, geography, etc.
  - in Flemish schools all computers are in special computer classes for teaching in technology or informatics
- **Result II: less successful**

# Development Cooperation

- Question:
  - Does Flemish development cooperation in higher education work?
- Actoren:
  - Universities in the South
  - Universities in the North
  - Donors in the North (VLIR)
- Methods & Case I:
  - Project-evaluation (Intern)
  - Critical reading of project evaluations

- Results I:
  - Projects as such often work well
  - Contribute to capacity building in specific areas
  - Problems with sustainability
  - Problems with scientific personal
    - ✗ motivation and time
      - topping-up

- **Method & Case II:** Broader external evaluation
  - Broader questions on the impact of cooperation at level of institution and country
  - Look at existing project evaluation
  - Look at international literature on cooperation
  - New research at a university in the South
    - ✘ interview with researchers involved
    - ✘ interview with researchers not involved
    - ✘ management of universities (deans, chancellor)
- **Resultats II:**
  - Isolated projects drawbacks at level of university
    - ✘ supported areas *in Western interest* (human rights)
    - ✘ competition for funds is destabilizing for institution
    - ✘ young scientists don't get any opportunity
    - ✘ disintegration of central library

# Evaluation and ethics

- Policy never reaches its goals
  - Interventions in social reality is very complex
  - Social change partly unpredictable
    - ✗ policy often fails because of unforeseen factors
    - ✗ often perverse effects
  - Politicians tend to overstate the goals
- Very easy to criticize policy (scientists & journalists)
  - What is social responsibility of journalist?
    - ✗ West: *sour society*, new extreme right movements
    - ✗ South: nation building, developmental goals