Received: 11 November 2020 | Revised: 8 April 2022 | Accepted: 9 April 2022

DOI: 10.1111/apce.12380

SPECIAL ISSUE

Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics
Annales de l'économie publique, sociale et coopérative

WILEY

Recent advances on impact measurement for the social and solidarity economy: Empirical and methodological challenges

Marie J. Bouchard[1] | **Damien Rousselière**[2]

[1]Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

[2]Institut Agro, INRAE, SMART, Angers, France

Correspondence
Marie J. Bouchard, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada.
Email: bouchard.marie@uqam.ca

Abstract

The interest in evaluation and impact assessment of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) is reaffirmed year upon year. In the recent decades however, demands have grown and changed the way SSE organizations report on their activity. We are moving from a culture of evaluation of processes and results to the development of an expertise in measuring economic, social and environmental impacts. This represents an opportunity of the SSE, but it also poses challenges. This special issue aims to contribute to understand the approaches being developed for the SSE and examine the incidences they have on organizational practices and overall representation of the sector. In this editorial introduction we introduce the research topic, describe the content of the current special issue, and conclude with possible directions for future research.

KEYWORDS

evaluation, impact measurement, social and solidarity economy, social finance

© 2022 Edgard Milhaud Foundation.

1 INTRODUCTION: NEW TRENDS IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The interest in evaluation and impact measurement of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) is reaffirmed year upon year. Each organization, at some time or another in its development, will come to ask itself about the effects that it generates in order to improve its efficiency and the repercussions of its actions, but also to enhance its recognition among the external stakeholders. For the SSE, evaluation is not a new affair (Bouchard et al., 2001; Bouchard, 2009; OECD, 2021). In fact, organizations of the SSE are well accustomed to it, and it is often considered as being a mandatory function of management, namely in organizations oriented towards the collective and general interest and in which members and stakeholders take part in the governance.

This concern takes part of the general trend for social, environmental, and economic impact assessment that emerged in the 1960s and gained great momentum in the recent decade (Alomoto et al. 2021). Social accounting practices evolved from corporate social responsibility in the 1970s, to triple-bottom-line (economic, social an environmental) accounting in the 1990s, to standardized reporting guidelines in the 2000s (such as the Global Reporting Initiative and the balanced scorecard), and to standardized societal goals since the adoption in 2015 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mook 2020). The movement aims to align the sustainable development strategies of international organizations, governments and businesses. The trend also applies to the SSE.

In recent decades however, a new culture of evaluation has emerged, fuelled by the reduction in direct public spending by welfare states, who contract public services through social investment policies. This leads to focusing on accountability and demonstrating impacts. A multitude of stakeholders (governments, clients, donors, funders) carrying a plurality of visions of what to value, increased their demand for qualitative and quantitative assessments (Eynaud & Mourey 2015), to the extent that evaluation has come to play an implicit role in the governance of SSE organizations (Perret 2014). Evaluation is seen as a way to manage organizational performance without having to manage it directly (Arvidson & Lyon 2014). The premise is that, like profit in the marketplace, measurable impact is meant to serve as a disciplinary force that guides action, while bureaucratic rules and controls become more flexible (Benjamin & Misra 2006). In this arena, the influence of venture philanthropy, social entrepreneurship and social investment is strongly felt. In Europe and in some countries such as France, social impact has become an integral part of an economic growth policy (Alix & Beaudet 2014, Eynaud & Mourey 2015).

This context affects how the SSE is being evaluated, renewing and multiplying the occasions to assess its contribution, but also posing new questions regarding the meaning and the consequences of these new trends. One has to do with the shift from evaluating SEE organizations' inputs, outputs and processes, to proving their actual contribution to outcomes, something that is more easily said than done, at least if you want to do it with a little rigor. Another is the growing importance of quantification and monetization in impact measurement frameworks, sometimes to the detriment of qualitative and participatory practices of evaluation. Moreover, social impact assessment instruments are imbued with the tools of non-social economy enterprises (Mook 2020), with the choice of metrics not necessarily fit for the SSE missions and modus operandi. This can pose unrealistic or unreasonable expectations over the SSE. Tools may be unsuitable for hybrid-mission organizations, or for small or atypical organizations. They are often ill adapted to the governance of SSE organizations, creating information and power asymmetries with the authorities evaluating them. This exerts strong coercive isomorphic pressures over SSE organizations, calling for their professionalization, but at the same time augmenting the risks of mission drift (Eynaud & Mouret 2015). To these new demands, SSE organizations can either conform, resist or they may self-promote (Ardvison & Lyon 2014). This may lead to a new form of competition between SSE organizations. Nonetheless, evaluation practices can also be used to actively shape the organizational environment and challenge dominant authorities. It can be seen as an opportunity for dialogue between the various stakeholders to define the public interest (Alix & Beaudet 2014).

Some of the papers here published draw from the CIRIEC International working group on Impact measurement for the social economy, which was launched in 2019. CIRIEC International enjoys a tradition and a notoriety in research on the notional framing, the perimeter and the measurement of the social economy. The creation of this working group is an extension of this work, aiming to comment on the approaches, methods and indicators of impacts of the social economy in order to inform public decision-makers and practitioners about the challenges posed and opportunities presented by the current global-scale trends. For this purpose, the working group brought together the contribution of researchers and practitioners specializing in the evaluation and measurement of impacts, particularly in the context of the social and solidarity economy. This group produced a number of working papers which have been published in the CIRIEC International Working Paper series[1]. Another set of papers were submitted to be published in this special issue following an open call for papers by this journal. We are grateful to all authors, including those whose papers have not been accepted because of space constraints, and to over 30 anonymous reviewers who generously helped to reach a final decision. After an introduction of the research topic, we present the nine papers selected for this special issue. We conclude with questions addressed for future research.

2 | FROM EVALUATION TO IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Evaluation is a vast domain. The field covers an array of methodologies and frameworks that aim at assessing and understanding the effects or consequences of an intervention, a program or a policy. It can focus on different aspects, such as verifying whether the objectives are met, whether these objectives are coherent with the goals to achieve, whether the process is efficiently using inputs to obtain the results, or whether these results contribute to the expected outcomes.

Evaluation has many definitions and its practices have evolved over time. As the term evaluation refers to the idea of value judgment, it always (implicitly or explicitly) expresses a viewpoint about the nature of things, the relation between causes of problems and the effects of actions upon these, the expectations one should have about a certain action, and so on. Until the 1990s, dominant evaluation practices had tried to apply to social engineering the techniques or technological engineering, even if these were proving to be less and less adequate to apprehend complex social issues. Four "generations" of evaluation have succeeded one another—still without replacing each other—ranging from a positivist to a constructivist posture. These generations focused first on measurement, then on description, on judgment and, in the fourth, on negotiation between the stakeholders involved (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The Fourth Generation Evaluation can be considered a more informed and sophisticated form than the previous ones, as it does not deny the other approaches but allows to fill their gaps and reach a superior level of complexity. As a participative approach, it becomes an instrument of negotiation and empowerment (Dubois et al., 2011). It can also be conceived as a utilization-based approach (Patton, 1997) or even an instrument for

[1] See: https://www.ciriec.uliege.be/publications/wp/

the empowerment of those concerned by the evaluation (Fetterman et al., 1996). Evaluation is therefore not purely scientific: it is a collective approach for constructing practical judgments, with the goal of taking action or making a decision. Evaluative judgment hence never is the sole result of mechanically applying a methodology, be it quantitative or qualitative. As any judgment, it is also a discursive representation of reality (Perret, 2012). In this sense, evaluation supposes the construction of a scientifically valid and socially legitimate judgment (Dubois et al., 2011).

In recent times, the term "measurement" has become more and more frequently used, alongside terms such as "evidence", "scaling" and "impact". The trend for impact measurement seems to express a shift from the logic of co-construction of consensual evaluative frameworks by stakeholders, to one of comparison to determined goals or norms, where quantification by experts (systems or persons) is allegedly a signal of objectivity (Ogien, 2013).

3 | WHAT IS IMPACT MEASUREMENT?

The impact evaluation chain framework differentiates four dimensions of programmatic interventions: inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. The terms impact and outcome are often used interchangeably. However, their meanings are distinct: Impact is defined as a change in social, environmental or economic outcomes (positive or negative, expected or unexpected) that is directly attributable to an intervention, a program or an investment (Brousselle et al., 2011). It is therefore not only a matter of defining indicators of resource consumption (inputs) and of outputs, specifying the relationships of efficiency and efficacy between them, but also of measuring the results and their contribution to changes in the outcomes. This distinction is important since the outcome could have resulted from some external cause, such as a general improvement in the economy. Experimental and quasi-experimental approaches are presently given much attention, with random controlled trials (RCT) often considered as the gold standard for rigorous impact evaluation (Government of Canada, 2019). In practice however, such approaches may present financial, logistic and process-related challenges, if not also ethical and political issues (Bédéracarrats et al., 2020). Other methods can be used, limiting themselves to making credible causal claims about the contribution an intervention is making to observed results (Mayne, 2012).

Indeed, impact is incredibly hard to prove. Methodological precautions regarding causality, attribution and control of biases are crucial to provide robust evidence that the observed results are attributable to an initiative itself, rather than other factors. Financial resources, time and expertise to produce a hardy demonstration are often lacking. More fundamentally, the complexity of interactions within a society can render it difficult to establish causal links between a specific intervention and a given outcome.

In practice, "impact measurement" is often used as a generic term, associated with an array of objectives from improving organizational performance, examining program efficiency and efficacy, or assessing global social, environmental and economic outcomes. Hundreds of tools and methodologies can be found under the large umbrella of "impact measurement" (Salathé-Beaulieu et al., 2019). Some of the most popular are cost–benefit analysis (CBA) and cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA), social return on investment (SROI), life-cycle impact assessment (LCIA). While each method shows limitations, rigor lies more in their implementation than in their names, (Government of Canada 2019). This explains why evaluation expertise is a growing professional field.

4 | SOCIAL INVESTMENT AND SOCIAL FINANCE

The growing private sector's interest in showing environmental, social and governance (ESG) positive externalities led to an expansion of market-led instruments to stimulate and to evidence positive social change. These were progressively adopted by public administrations, in social finance and in various outcome-based procurement mechanisms towards the SSE (OECD, 2021). A new ecosystem emerged, through business schools in conjunction with large corporations and philanthropic foundations, also influencing government practices, involving public–private financing schemes, in which the provision of finance to organizations addressing social needs comes with the explicit expectation of a measurable social, as well as financial, return. The rise of social investment over the past decade has accentuated this trend. At the heart of the model is the need felt by the financial backers, whether public, private or charitable, beyond mere accountability, to "see" the effects of their action at the same time as getting a financial return. We assist to the emergence of a generation of initiatives and impact measurement indicators focused on the needs of the financial world: Impact Reporting and Investments Standards (IRIS), Social Return on Investment (SROI), Global Impact Investing Ratings System (GIIRS) supported by the B-Lab, Measurement and monitoring of the social impact of investments in France (MESIS).

The current of social finance goes farther, in seeking to mobilize venture capital to generate a return both social and financial. This model presumes a better effectiveness of social services through the injection of private capital and by the obligation of demonstration of results, as can be seen with the contracts of social impact bonds (SIBs). While the demonstration has not been made (Maier & Meyer 2017; McHugh et al. 2013; Rijpens et al. 2020), the craze for this type of approach nevertheless spreads very quickly.

The emphasis put by financial partners—whether public, philanthropic or private—that SSE organizations prove their impacts has become adamant. Impact measurement has become a signal to trigger investment decisions that previously were based on risk and return calculation (Alix 2015). This trend is also being adopted by governments who are moving away from a culture of redistribution and towards that of "social investment". It takes roots in the institutional setting of new public management (NPM) and its evidence-based policies and pay-for-performance schemes, which accentuate market regulation—that is, competition for niches but also for subsidies and public contracts. This shows the importance of demonstrating efficiency and accounting for responsible management of resources. On the other hand, it transfers the burden of the weight from measuring outputs to measuring outcomes and demonstrating the contribution to the later.

5 | WHAT ISSUES FOR THE SOCIAL ECONOMY?

As already mentioned, evaluation in the SSE is not a new affair. Practices range from accountability centered on examining processes and results related to objectives determined *ex ante* (as is the case for government programs), to voluntary disclosure of responsible social or environmental practices (cooperative balance, societal balance, social audit, *utilité sociale*) (Bouchard, 2009). Some SSE sectors have measured their economic impact (cost–benefit analysis, intersectoral input–output model, avoided social costs, expanded value added statement), their social impact (health and welfare of the population), or environmental impact (carbon footprint, product life cycles). Many case studies have exposed the contribution of social economy organizations to sustainable development goals (SDGs) in various national settings (see COPAC, ILO and

UNRISD[2]). Governments are increasingly interested in measuring statistics concerning the SSE (Bouchard & Rousselière, 2015; Bouchard & Salathé-Beaulieu, 2021).

In the SSE, evaluation practices tend to involve stakeholders (Nicholls, 2018) who bring various perspectives on what is valuable. This can sometimes lead to contradictory views about what should be evaluated, who should evaluate, when, what for and for whom. Various perspectives on the role of the SSE also offer different angles from which to appreciate its actions (Carman, 2011; Gadrey, 2005). Evaluation is therefore a tension field which calls for participation, deliberation if not negotiation among stakeholders (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Examples of participative and negotiated evaluation frameworks for the SSE can be found in places where social actors representing community-based organizations have been recognized by State and have managed to obtain some measure of control over their operating environment (White, 2012). This is possible through an SSE ecosystem that is built upon bottom-up alliances and working relationships between activists, financial experts, policy makers, planners and so on (Mendell, 2010).

Yet, as the terms "social impact assessment" and "social impact measurement" become more frequently used, there seems to be a will to reduce the views to those of experts, and to show a preference for indicators that can be evaluated through quantitative measurement and monetary values. This trend accompanies the rise of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, and of the interest for social issues shown by social investment and social finance actors.

This shift does not come without consequences. Evidence-based policies and practices may be seen as a way towards de-politicizing public decision-making and countering particularism biases of philanthropic donations. However, they pose many technical, ethical and even political questions, namely with regards to the SSE. This craze for assessment and for impact measurement can indeed prove to be demanding for social economy organizations, as it requires additional resources to manage evaluation expectations. The ability of organizations to cope with the demands of evaluation varies greatly (Carman & Fredericks, 2010). While some organizations feel poorly or inadequately equipped to match such requirements, others find here an opportunity to stand out of the crowd (Eynaud & Mourey, 2015).

The many literature reviews concentrating on social impact measurement as conceived for social investment list around one hundred different approaches, tools and methods (Salathé-Beaulieu et al., 2019). The diversity and fragmentation of these initiatives is seen as a common problem for the organizations of the social economy and for their financial backers. Some approaches seem to be fit while others are less adapted to the social economy (Besançon & Chochoy, 2019). Some methods are also subject to controversy (Cupitt, 2015; Mertens et al., 2015). Standardized assessment methods and indicators[3] are said to be poorly suited to the social economy, given the variety of its forms and the sectors of activity where it is present (GECES, 2014), which may lead stakeholders to refuse to submit to it with blindfolded eyes (TIESS, 2019). At the same time, we see efforts being put into finding common yet flexible standards for the social economy.[4]

Are there suitable approaches for the social economy? The specificity of the mode of production of SSE organizations recommends going beyond traditional measurement tools (Mertens & Marée, 2015; Mook et al., 2003). This vogue for impact measurement can therefore represent an

[2] See: COPAC: http://www.copac.coop/transforming-our-world-a-cooperative-2030-cooperative-contributions-to-sdg-3/; ILO: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1247ilo.pdf; UN: https://www.un.org/development/desa/cooperatives/; UNRISD: http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BD6AB/(httpEvents)/https://ABE0A432A9D42782C12583AE004AF31COpenDocument.

[3] See the Impact management project: https://impactmanagementproject.com/

[4] See the Common approach project: https://www.commonapproach.org/

opportunity for the social economy to "demonstrate" its value (Vo & Christie, 2018) and develop stronger relationships with its stakeholders (Greiling & Stötzer, 2015). Indeed, the incentive does also come from the SSE organizations themselves wishing to assess their effectiveness in meeting their goals as well as respond to funders and investors requiring these assessments (Salathé-Beaulieu et al., 2019).

The question that arises is the effect—not to say the impact!—on the SSE of the craze to measure its impacts. What are the ramifications of impact measurement? What are the ins and outs of the methodologies of impact measurement? What are the similarities and differences between evaluation as conceived by social actors and impact measurement as conceived from a social finance perspective? What are the advantages and limitations of different evaluation and impact measurement practices? What effects do they have on the practices and development of SSE organizations and their ecosystems? As initiatives proliferate wishing to "show" the place and role of the social economy in attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), what are the methodological approaches and appropriate tools to do so? Knowing the particularities of the action model of SSE enterprises, should we consider using specific indicators so that its impacts can be recognized at their true value?

6 | ABOUT THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue is composed of nine articles which were submitted following a call for papers. While they do not cover all aspects nor do they answer all questions relating to impact measurement of the social economy, they offer a sample of contributions ranging from experimenting specific methodologies in certain areas of the SSE to proposing indicators that could be specific to it, to offering a general overview of the how impact measurement "impacts" the representation we have of the field.

In her article, **Jany-Catrice** recognizes that evaluating the social impact is becoming a common cognitive reference as well as a new coordination mechanism, substituting for the ideas of productivity and performance. This paper aims to examine this observation in a historical perspective. Evaluation has always existed, but its modalities have been deeply modified as a result of a slow transformation in the nature of the social state and of the instruments of its evaluation. Evaluation procedures have become subject to heteronomy, quantification, standardization, and globalization. Public services and more generally the welfare state are no longer immune to this, nor is the social and cooperative economy field. The claim for measurements of social impacts emerges as the manifestation of concomitant changes among which are the mutation of production and the rise of services, as well as the increase and changes (in volume, nature and ends) in the evaluation of public policies. Behind the evaluation tools that underpin the discourses and representations of what "effective" means, actors whose function it is to carry out evaluations allow themselves the right to determine objectives previously viewed as public policies, despite avowedly distancing themselves from the political sphere. Focusing on the part of the social economy to which the state delegates public services, the paper insists that the main issue is the transition from subsidies to procurement, in which the logic of guardianship and trust have given way to a logic of quasi-market and quantitative justification, with the aim of technicization, depolitization and removing the human element from the criteria on which judgements are made. The paper analyzes various methods of impact evaluation, emphasizing the epistemological, technical and political assumptions underlying them.

Building on the question of the plurality of conventions at the hearth of social impact measurement, **Studer** presents the economies of worth theoretical framework for which the act of evaluating is connected with the issuing of sometimes contradictory judgements on a value. This plurality of judgements leads to the emergence in the evaluation process of hesitations, experimentation and compromises between the actors engaged in the deliberations. While this framework has already been applied to understanding the many and diverse representations of value in impact investing and social impact bonds, the originality of the article is to compare two case studies, belonging or not to the field of the SSE. This comparison sheds light on the specificity of evaluations at stake in the SSE. Two evaluations conventions were identified: the managerial convention based on methodological individualism, causal logic and objectivation through the use of numbers, on the one hand, and the deliberative convention emerging in reaction to this first convention and based on collective dimension, systemic logic and complementarity between quantitative and qualitative approaches on the other hand. Compromises between these two different conventions may give rise to a plurality of social impact evaluation processes depending on the actors responsible for their implementation. Studer shows that managerial representations have made significant inroads into evaluation practices in a field traditionally opposed to these representations.

Cooperatives serve a competitive yardstick role in non-competitive markets dominated by market power. **Novkovic**'s paper argues they can also serve a normative yardstick role in efforts to provide contextual social indicators for sustainability reporting that aims to instigate transformative change. The paper presents an analytical framework for such transformative indicators, informed by the purpose of cooperative organizing. According to the author, cooperatives have the potential to instigate transformative change as they rest on a different (not for profit, and people-centered) economic logic. Anchored in local communities, they operationalize ethical values such as self-help, equity and solidarity. Their members address the structural causes of inequality and social injustice, rather than just treat the symptoms. Studies show that cooperative organizations strengthen social capital, mitigate risk, as well as increase total surplus (welfare). Evidence abounds that sustainability practices inspired by cooperative values fall at the minimum under areas of transformative micro-level impact. In particular, cooperative enterprise model contributes to fair income distribution, promotes economic democracy, de-commodifies necessities and fictitious commodities, and contributes to community development by investing in the real economy. These impact areas, according to the author, ought to be measured and disclosed. As it is, cooperatives assume these areas of impact to varied degrees and use different indicators to assess their performance depending on their purpose and context. The paper provides examples of broad categorizations of indicators that assess the cooperative difference and relates those to their potential with regards to transformative change. Novkovic recognizes that, while there are many ongoing impact measurement projects, cooperative specific ones may lack clarity in purpose. In some cases, indicators used by cooperatives are too vague and inconsequential; not transformative, and not bold enough. In others, cooperatives follow industry trends, not capturing the essence of their raison d'être, or are localized to the specific needs of one cooperative. Novkovic calls for a concerted effort to develop transformative indicators inspired by the goals of cooperative enterprises. Efforts to operationalize the cooperative principles, by sector and cooperative type, should be accompanied by indicators which can serve as the yardstick in respective industries. Using these to create benchmarks for context-based indicators would be the next stage in development of indicators exerting transformative (social) pressure.

Therefore, at the microeconomic level, the impact of cooperative membership may be mixed due to specific institutional and contextual situation. In developing countries, numerous case studies have been published underlining that the effectiveness of cooperatives in assisting farmers in obtaining higher production and marketing performance may vary with region and commodity. In an empirical study held in Nepal**, Neupane, Paudel, Adhikari and He** show that cooperative membership may increase the technical efficiency of smallholders. The major issue is the endogeneity of cooperative membership, as membership is self-selected, which might depend on the socioeconomic character of the household. This problem of counterfactual situation (the situation the farmers would have been in but for the presence of cooperatives) may be addressed by various methodologies, such as experimental or quasi-experimental approaches. However, as these methods are based on many theoretical and empirical assumptions, with some that are untestable, one needs to develop robustness analysis based on cross-comparison of empirical results. Therefore the authors estimate an original econometric model belonging to the general class of productivity analysis and compare it to more traditional matching methods. The convergence of the estimations supports the findings that cooperatives can increase the welfare of their members through a better technical efficiency. Through the utilization of credit, the access to training, or providing them with fodder, cooperatives help farmers adopt better management farming and help them in the commercialization of their product.

For non-profit organizations (NPOs), the request for social impact evaluation can be seen as a kind of institutional pressure influencing actors' practices. Such demands can be considered as a norm or even a rational myth—that is, a shared belief that adopting a particular behavior will increase an organization's efficiency and rationality. Evaluating therefore increases the NPO's legitimacy, especially in the eyes of its partners and funders. In their paper, **Kleszczowski and Raulet-Croset** examine the organizational response to such an institutional demand, shedding light over the local dynamics of social impact evaluation implementation. Authors focus on how actors inside this organization take ownership of the evaluation, analyzing the decisions and micro-actions that are implemented. The research is based on a case study, using an action–research methodology to investigate the long-term appropriation process of social impact evaluation in a large French charity that supports young people facing social difficulties. Although the process has mostly been supported by external actors, the authors show that internal actors have gradually developed a localized and "pragmatic" response to the institutional pressure of social impact evaluation. In this case, the organization deliberately chose to include in the evaluation only what it considered effective and useful for internal actors. The authors show that this response has been constructed through different phases of appropriation and has modified the institutional prescriptions of the evaluation. This study of such micro-dynamics leads to a better understanding of how organizational actors adapt the institutional demand for social impact evaluation to the specificities of nonprofit organizations. The authors observe that the NPO's response is built over time, through phases—a plan of a coupled response, the discovery of the mythical aspect of the institutional demand, and a response considering the discoveries—that could be tested on other building processes of institutional responses in other organizations. This more optimistic view of social impact evaluation practice highlights the importance of considering evaluation as a reflective process that should involve stakeholders. It also alerts to caution about claims regarding ready-to-use social impact evaluation tools.

Sheltered workshops (SW) are a specific type of work integration social enterprise (WISE), seeking to provide paid employment to people with disabilities through the development of a productive activity, thus contributing to their socio-labor integration. In recent years, there has been a growing demand to evaluate the socio-economic impact generated by WISEs and other social enterprises. Both the entities themselves and the investors, public or private, are keen to know to what extent the contribution of social enterprises is helping to tackle social problems. **Savall**

Morera, Guzman and Santos article focuses on studying the socio-economic impact of SWs, applying the Social Return On Investment (SROI) approach to the specific case of a SW from the Spanish region of Andalusia which employs more than 1,000 disabled people. The SROI methodology assigns a monetized value to outcomes and compares it with the investments made, after discounting the dead weight (what would have happened if the activity had not been carried out), the displacement (what results were displaced by the activity analyzed), attribution (what other organisms contribute to the outcome) and decrement (if outcomes decrease over time, this calculation only reflects results that last more than one year). The authors conclude that the SROI constitutes a very suitable tool for a social enterprise such as a sheltered workshop. It reduces the complexity by translating the impact into a single figure using the cost-benefit analysis and financial proxies. The SROI also has the advantage of counting on all the stakeholders involved in the company's activity, assessing if the expectations of the different collectives affected by the activity are being satisfied, and allowing decisions to improvement based on data. In this case, the use of the SROI methodology made it possible to affirm that SWs generate an impact much higher than could be expected, surpassing the economic and personal limits of the people involved, and benefitting society as a whole. Finally sensitivity analysis can be conducted under various scenarios and hypotheses for the counterfactual situtation to determine to what extent the results obtained under the SROI method are consistent or dependent on the hypotheses and estimations carried out.

Because of their efforts on work integration, WISEs are particularly praised in economies struggling with unemployment issues. As WISEs gain prominence as key partners in the provision of welfare services, and as they become a topic of interest in the political agenda, the questions pertaining to their performance appear of a particular interest, as part of a more general trend towards evaluation methods. While the previous article estimates the economic and social impact of a given WISE, **Dufour, Petrella and Richez-Battesti** look at the way WISEs use existing performance models and develop new ones in strategic ways when interacting with public actors. The authors mobilize the Public Value Theory (PVT), while expanding on the traditional presentation of the strategic triangle, proposing nine entries to guide a more granular analysis of case data. Based on this augmented framework to investigate a topic not usually covered by Public Value Theory academics, the empirical investigation is a qualitative comparative work with an embedded design (two countries—France and Denmark—with two case studies in each country). The authors establish a link between the environment in which WISEs operate and the purpose they associate to impact measurement activities. In France, the Neo-Weberian state turns WISEs into legitimacy-seeking organizations, where the bureaucratic nature of legitimacy devices threatens to alter the entrepreneurial essence of the organization, whereas in Denmark, WISEs see impact measurement as an opportunity to amplify existing mechanisms of simultaneous competition and cooperation, in a situation described by the authors as a "relationship-based quasi-market". In both cases, these tendencies are however balanced by the innovations that WISEs manage to bring about in terms of impact measurement (France) or the promotion of a tripartite conversation with their "clients" such as the beneficiaries and the municipality (Denmark).

SSE projects tend to respond to unmet needs. These are necessarily place-based, situated in a territorial setting. **Billaudeau, Bioteau, Vérité, Grémy-Gros and Christofol** suggest a fourth dimension to impact measurement, adding territory to economic, social and environmental dimensions. Having territory in mind when designing impact assessment should lead to considering the lasting effects of both the territory over the SSE, and of the SSE over territory. Drawing on three French case studies, the authors test this proposition. The article suggests an approach to measure territorialized impacts of the sustainability of the social and solidarity economy (SSE).

To consider the inscription of the evaluated action in a given territory, it becomes necessary to go beyond traditional measurement tools and to integrate stakeholders in the procedure. This article proposes to follow and analyze the methodological pathway to the construction of impact measurement indicators of three SSE initiatives. The authors illustrate how the territorial dimension of the SSE becomes a support for the co-construction of an original form of impact evaluation of SSE projects. This territorialized analysis covers the stakes of sustainability, questioning the criteria from which a project can be transferred or scaled through new partnerships. This paper offers a detailed exposition of the posture adopted to conduct action research in the field of impact measurement. Each of the studied projects involves a dense network of partners, some of which are the researchers who drive the impact measurement activity. In this process, the impact measurement protocol is co-elaborated and co-animated with a multidisciplinary research team involved from the inception of the project, contributing to defining it and to establishing its breadth and scope. The consideration for territory also helps envisage the issue of transferability to another territory of scaling up to a larger one.

Indicators may not only measure results but may also promote transformative processes within entities. **Begiristain-Zubillaga, Etxezarreta-Etxarri and Morandeira-Arca** presents the process of elaboration of a system of indicators designed for and by the social entrepreneurs of the Koopfabrika program in the territory of Gipuzkoa (Basque Country) and the results obtained. This tool, developed through Participatory Action Research methodologies, aims to facilitate the establishment of objectives, criteria and measurement indicators so as to enable new social entrepreneurs in the territory to move towards more transformative forms of social economy. The authors develop therefore the theoretical framework of Transformative Social Economy (TSE) as the incorporation of new transformative elements in the social motivations that have traditionally been linked to social economy experiences. As TSE proposal seeks to incorporate transformative elements in the social objectives of social economy organizations, the proposed system of indicators consists of the following objectives: labor sovereignty, collective approach, territorial and social transformation, sustainability of life, ecological balance and life at the center, and economic sustainability. The practical contribution of this study for the TSE entities themselves is that the system of indicators is a tool that helps to materialise the social purpose, bringing it within the management of the entity's activity—that is, defining which actions contribute to which objective of the entity.

7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

The papers in this special issue present an array of approaches and indicators to evaluate and measure SSE impacts. Because of the complexity of SSE as a *total social phenomena* (Fu, 2021), the diversity of methodologies underlined in each article is clearly a call for reflexive mixed approaches to SSE (Small, 2011), that combine both qualitative and quantitative dimensions and develop a critical investigation to the plurality of indicators used in the process of evaluation. As evaluation is not neutral, different methodologies will find different usages, but they will also have varied incidences on the way SSE organizations assess their work and production. The authors agree on the need to identify suitable approaches, to eventually adjust them to the context and reality of the SSE, or even develop new ones that may reflect better its values, its territorial anchorage and its transformative potential. The values and principles at the core of the SSE may even serve as a basis for genuine approaches that could eventually reverse the burden of proof in the direction of the non-SSE economy, namely with regards to the achievement of SDGs.

Evaluation and impact measurement can help improve efficiency, they can be a source of legitimacy, but can also be the ground for competition between organizations. In any case, the SSE is no exception to the trend of social impact measurement found in public management as well as in the procedures set by philanthropic and private social investors. This situation increases the technical requirements imposed on organizations, calls for their professionalization, and may also be conditioning the renewal of their financing. The case studies presented in these papers show the importance of involving stakeholders and of having SSE actors take ownership of the evaluation process. SSE actors wish to define themselves rather than be defined by external agents.

It will be important to follow this trend of impact measurement with future research in order to see if this is just a smoke screen or if it represents real improvements of SSE practices and of the outcomes it generates. It will be interesting to observe how impact measurement intersects with two other functions that are crucial to the SSE, which are, on the one hand, its needs for partnership financing, and, on the other, its requirement for independent and autonomous governance. Evaluation, finance and governance are indeed intertwined in what can either be a virtuous or a vicious circle for the SSE. Further work will be needed to better understand if impact measurement favors increased resources for the SSE or if these are only reallocated through a different rationale if not, in worse-case scenario, reduced. Moreover, as one of the SSE's essential qualities resides in its hybrid nature, impact evaluation and assessment will forcibly generate debates, if not tensions and paradoxes. Studying this phenomenon will inevitably lead to study also the conditions by which the SSE is democratically seizing this issue.

REFERENCES

Alix, N. (2015). Mesure de l'impact social, mesure du 'consentement à investir', *RECMA, Revue internationale de l'économie sociale*, 335, 111–116.

Alix, N., & Beaudet, A. (2014). *La mesure de l'impact social : facteur de transformation du secteur social en Europe*. CIRIEC international Working Paper No. 2014/15.

Alomoto, W., Niñerola, A., & Pié, L. (2021). Social Impact Assessment: A Systematic Review of Literature. Social Indicators Research, Published Online: 2021-10-16, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02809-1

Ardvison, M., & Lyon, F. (2014). Social impact measurement and non-profit organizations: Compliance, resistance and promotion. *Voluntas, Austria, Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 25(4), 869–886.

Bédécarrats F., Guérin, I., & Roubaud, F. (Eds.) (2020). *Randomized control trials in the field of development: A critical perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Benjamin, L. M., & Misra, K. (2006). Doing good work: Implications of performance accountability for practice in the nonprofit sector. *International Journal of Rural Management*, 2(2), 147–162.

Besançon, E., & Chochoy, N. (2019). Mesurer l'impact de l'innovation sociale: quelles perspectives en dehors de la théorie du changement? *RECMA, Revue internationale de l'économie sociale*, 352(2), 42–57.

Bouchard, M. J. (2009). *The worth of the social economy. An international perspective*. PIE Peter Lang, CIRIEC Collection, Social Economy and Public Economy.

Bouchard, M. J., Bourque, G. L., & Lévesque, B. (2001). L'évaluation de l'économie sociale dans la perspective des nouvelles formes de régulation socio-économique de l'intérêt général. *Cahiers De Recherche Sociologique*, mars 2001, 31–53.

Bouchard, M. J., & Salathé-Beaulieu, G. (2021). *Producing Statistics on Social and Solidarity Economy: The State of the Art*, Geneva, United Nations Research Institute on Social Development (UNRISD).

Bouchard, M. J. & Rousselière, D. (Eds.) (2015). *The weight of the social economy. An international perspective*. CIRIEC/Peter Lang.

Brousselle A., Champagne, F., Contandriopoulos, A.-P., & Hartz, Z. (2011). *L'évaluation : concepts et méthodes*. Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2E Édition.

Brown, L., Carini, C., Nembhard, J. G., Ketilson, L. H., Hicks, E., McNamara, J., & Simmons, R. (Eds.) (2015). *Co-operatives for sustainable communities—Tools to measure co-operative impact and performance*. Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada /Centre for the Study of Co-operatives.

Carman, J. G. (2011). Understanding evaluation in nonprofit organizations. *Public Performance and Management Review*, 34(3), 350–377.

Carman, J. G., & Fredericks, K. A. (2010). Evaluation capacity and nonprofit organizations: is the glass half-empty or half-full? *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(1), 84–104.

Chaves, R., & Monzon, J. L. (2012). Beyond the crisis: the social economy, prop of a new model of sustainable economic development. *Service Business*, 6(5), 5–26.

Cupitt, S. (2015). *Randomised controlled trials—gold standard or fool's gold? The role of experimental methods in voluntary sector impact assessment*. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

Dubois, N., Lloyd, S., Houle, J., Mercier, C., Brousselle, A., & Rey, L. (2011). Discussion: Practice-Based Evaluation as a Response to Address Intervention Complexity. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 26(3), 105–113.

Duguid, F. (2017). Non-financial tools and indicators for measuring the impact of co-operatives. *Journal of Co-Operative Accounting and Reporting*, 5/1, 40–54.

Eynaud, P., & Mourey, D. (2015). Apports et limites de la production du chiffre dans l'entreprise sociale. Une étude de cas autour de la mesure de l'impact social. *Revue française de gestion* 247(2), 85–100.

Fetterman, D. M., Kaftarian, S. J., & Wadersman, A. H. (Eds.) (1996). *Empowerment evaluation: Knowledge and tools for self-assessment and accountability*. Sage.

Fu, H. (2021). Social action as "a total social phenomenon": Comparing leadership challenges facing community-based labour organizations in China and Japan, *Human Relations*, 74(9), 1396–1420.

Gadrey, J. (2005). L'invention de l'utilité sociale des associations en France: à la recherche de conventions, de régulations, de critères et de méthodes d'évaluation. *Économie et Solidarités*, 36(1), 7–26.

GECES Sub-group on Impact Measurement (2014). *Proposed approaches to social impact measurement in European Commission legislation and in practice relating to: EuSEFs and the EaSI*. Brussels, GECES.

Government of Canada (2019). *Measuring impact by design: A Guide to methods for impact measurement*. Impact and Innovation Unit. Available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-hub/services/reports-resources/measuring-impact-design.html#toc44

Greiling, D., & Stötzer, S. (2015). Performance accountability as a driver for changes in nonprofit–government relationships: An empirical insight from Austria. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26(5). 1690–1717.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Sage.

Hudon, M., & Huybrecht, B. (2017). From distant neighbours to bedmates: exploring the synergies between the social economy and sustainable development. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 88(2), 141–154.

Maier, F., & Meyer, M. (2017). Social impact bonds and the perils of aligned interests. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(3), 24.

Mayne, J. (2012). Contribution analysis. Coming of age? *Evaluation*, 18(3), 270–280.

Mendell, M. (2010). Reflections on the evolving landscape of social enterprise in North America. *Policy and Society*, 29(3), 243–256.

McHugh, N., Sinclair, S., Roy, M., Huckfield, L., & Donaldson, C. (2013). Social impact bonds. A wolf in sheep's clothing? *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 21(3), 247–257.

Mertens, S., & Marée, M. (2015). So, what does a social economy enterprise produce? In M. J. Bouchard & D. Rousselière (Eds.), *The weight of the social economy, an international perspective* (pp. 141–160). PIE Peter Lang, CIRIEC Collection, Social Economy and Public Economy.

Mertens, S., Xhauflair, V., & Marée, M. (2015). *Questioning the social return on investment (SROI)*, Liège, SOCENT Publication No. 2015-1. https://iap-socent.be/sites/default/files/SOCENT%20Pub%202015-01%20Mertens%20et%20al%20NEW.pdf

Mook, L. (2020). Performance management, impact measurement, and the sustainable development goals: Fourth wave of integrated social accounting. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 11(2), 20–34.

Mook, L., Richmond, B. J., & Quarter, J. (2003). Integrated social accounting for nonprofits: A case from Canada. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14(3), 283–297.

Nicholls, A. (2018). A general theory of social impact accounting: Materiality, uncertainty and empowerment. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 9(2), 132–153.

Noya, A., & Clarence, E. (2007). *The social economy: building inclusive economies*. Paris, OECD.
Ogien, A. (2013). *Désacraliser le chiffre dans l'évaluation du secteur public*. Paris, Edition Quae.
OECD (2021). *Social impact measurement for the social and solidarity economy: OECD global action promoting social & solidarity economy ecosystems*. OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Working Papers.
Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (5th edition 2021). Sage.
Perret, B. (2014). *L'évaluation des politiques publiques*. Paris, La Découverte.
Perret, B. (2012). La construction d'un jugement. In V. Ridde & C. Dagenais, *Approches et pratiques en évaluation de programmes* (pp. 51–67). Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
Rijpens, J., Bouchard, M. J., Gruet, E., & Salathé-Beaulieu, G. (2020). *Social impact bonds: Promises verus facts. What does the recent scientific literature tell us?* CIRIEC International Working Paper No. 2020/15.
Salathé-Beaulieu, G., Bouchard, M. J., & Mendell, M. (2019). *sustainable development impact indicators for social and solidarity economy. State of the art*. Geneva, UNRISD.
Small, M. L. (2011). How to conduct a mixed methods study: Recent trends in a rapidly growing literature. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 57–86.
Seyfang, G., & Smith, A. (2007). Grassroots innovations for sustainable development: Towards a new research and policy agenda. *Environmental Politics*, 16/4, 584–603.
TIESS (2019). Déclaration de Montréal sur l'évaluation et la mesure d'impact social. Territoires innovants en économie sociale et solidaire, http://www.tiess.ca/declaration/
Vézina, M., Malo, M.-C., & Ben Selma, M. (2017). Mature social economy enteprise and social innovation : the case of Dejardins environmental fund. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 88(2), 257–278.
Vo, A. T., & Christie, C. A. (2018). Where impact measurement meets evaluation: Tensions, challenges, and opportunities. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 39(3), 383–388.
White, D. (2012). Interest representation and organisation in civil society: Ontario and Quebec compared. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 25(2), 199–229.

How to cite this article: Bouchard, M. J., & Rousselière, D. (2022). Recent advances on impact measurement for the social and solidarity economy: Empirical and methodological challenges. *Ann Public Coop Econ*, 93, 253–266. https://doi.org/10.1111/apce.12380