

Towards an Evaluation Framework for the Social Economy: Typologies and Effects.

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How best can we evaluate the specific facets of the social economy (SE)²? Observing evaluation tools used by several social economy organizations and sectors in Quebec (Bouchard, Bourque and Lévesque, 2001), gives rise to two observations: (1) there are myriad evaluation practices, corresponding to the diversity of the sectors of activity and the types of public that these target; (2) very few evaluation criteria examine aspects specific to the social economy and, where they do, they also vary from sector to sector, and organization to organization. However, there is increasing demand for evaluations to be performed, both on the part of social economy stakeholders and public authorities. According to the Workgroup on Social Economy, the first challenge when it comes to evaluation of the social economy is to manage to distinguish the sector itself. There is little data on the social economy, and what there is is scattered amongst organizations and ministries, making it impossible to arrive at an overall assessment of the sector. The second challenge concerns the development of indicators that adequately reflect the truth of the special characteristics of the social economy (Neamtan, 2001). The fact is that the dual social and economic mission of the social economy is hard for conventional evaluation tools to register. Finally, the third challenge surrounds institutional recognition of the social economy, and evaluation may be an inevitable step along the path. It is therefore important to acknowledge that evaluation has a political dimension (Bouchard, Fontan, Fraisse, Lachance, 2003). It involves choices that impact variously the object of the evaluation, the viewpoint of the evaluator, the identity of the evaluator, and the stakeholders who receive the results of the evaluation. It also, from an academic standpoint, impacts the various evaluative studies (statistical, monographs, qualitative surveys, etc.) that provide an excellent tool for improving knowledge and understanding of the social economy. As a consequence, that which is not evaluated risks passing into the unknown and, thus, risks being ignored by public policies, financial partners, public opinion, etc.

In spite of the ground to be made up, various evaluation tools do exist, reflecting the differing priorities of the evaluation requesters: public administrations, organization managers, social movements (for example, women's' groups, ecology groups), etc. These different types of evaluation are the mirror of viewpoints that each reflect varying requirements. These requirements might be, for example: (1) conformity with widely held societal values that public

1 Names appear in alphabetical order to underline the collaborative nature of this paper, a work that each author made a significant contribution to.

2 The expression social economy is used here in its broadest sense, to include associations, cooperatives and mutual societies, as well as community-based economic development bodies, solidarity-based funds, etc.

authorities are required to ensure; (2) a quest for quality, efficiency, or mobilization within an organization; (3) the possibility of enlarging and gaining recognition for societal innovations that meet the needs of civil society.

In practice, evaluation tools may be imposed by a third party, produced by actors themselves, or negotiated between stakeholders. In this latter type of evaluation, known as “4 generation evaluation” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), importance is given to the individual context within which the programme or action takes place. This technique allows the development of specific criteria and of alternatives to established standards. However, even without limiting the validity to such tools and results to a case-by-case basis, it has to be recognized that they can only be extrapolated or applied to contexts whose similarities can be proved empirically (Bibeau, 1991). As much for political and operational reasons as methodological ones, notably the comparability of assessments, evaluations cannot always occur as part of a process examining only the unusual or experimental nature of a project on a one-by-one basis. We are therefore required to think about ways of enlarging the scope of evaluations, especially in the context of an expansion of the social economy.

Methodologies and indicators specific to the social economy do not yet enjoy widespread recognition, neither politically nor scientifically. This fact weakens the ability of the social economy to negotiate and to join forces with various other stakeholders and partners from the public or private sectors. Evaluation is even more important as partnerships between the social economy and the State and the market multiply, a process that leads to large increases in the diversity of stakeholders interested in evaluation. Can a response be found to the need to systematize social economy evaluation tools without first undergoing a process of negotiation, initially between social economy actors, and then with their partners? Under what conditions can a common social economy evaluation framework be created, and what risks does such a creation pose for the diversity of this large family of actors?

1- Presenting the research

Our approach is designed to discover if it is possible to imagine such a common evaluation framework, allowing the development of indicators which are generic but which organizations and sectors could refer to in differentiated ways, depending on their specific defining missions. In 2003, we therefore initiated a research project entitled *Towards a Framework for the Evaluation of the Performance and Social Impact of the Social Economy*. This project was designed as a partnership between universities and networks of social economy actors. From the universities, there was the Social Economy Research Chair of Canada (CRCÉS), the key project partner; the Social Economy University Community Research Alliance (ARUC-ÉS), where the idea originated, and the Social Innovations Research Centre (CRISES)th, a body that the Chair is

th This research was in part possible thanks to funding from the Quebecois Fund for Societal and Cultural Research (FQRSC), as well as from the Social Economy Research Chair of Canada of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (CRSH). The lead researcher was Marie J. Bouchard, tenured professor at the School of Management Sciences at UQÀM and holder of the Canada Research Chair on the Social Economy; Jean Carrière and Juan-Luis Klein, professors at the UQAM department of Geography; Carol Saucier, professor at the UQAR department of Humanities. Researchers were Valérie Michaud, doctoral candidate at the UQAM School of Management Sciences, who was the lead researcher; Jérôme Leblanc, masters candidate at the UQAM School of Political Sciences; Émilie Leroy, Master II candidate in Marketing at the Université

associated with. From the actor side, the project was joined by the Workgroup on Social Economy and the Quebec Regions Association³.

Before undertaking the research process in detail, we held focus groups with some 50-odd actors from various sectors and regions in Quebec. We presented them with a table showing all the effects that we had identified (in texts on the social economy and in existing social economy evaluation tools), and that we grouped in accordance with the principles of the social economy (see Section 2.1). Overall, this table was very well received. Amongst other factors, this allowed us to check the importance for the actors of creating an evaluation framework to assess the entirety of the contribution made by the social economy. We were also able to confirm that not all the effects noted were applicable in their entirety to all social economy organizations. We therefore needed to investigate the precise needs of the various sectors comprising the social economy, and for that reason we are now working to develop a survey about this topic. With this in mind, we categorized our targets as a function of the various areas of activity of the social economy⁴.

The survey that we are working on will take the form of a questionnaire for leaders and managers of social economy organizations in Quebec. We will ask them to identify, from their organization's perspective, the importance that should be accorded to 40-odd effects during an evaluation of their organization. We are currently finalizing the questionnaire design. The main body of the questionnaire consists of a listing of a series of effects potentially produced by social economy organizations as a whole. It contains numerous additional questions that are used to identify certain features and characteristics of the answering organization: sector of activity, region of Quebec, income and income sources, mission, evaluation practices, etc. The significance of surveying effects (instead of results) is that they represent what it is that the activities or missions hope to achieve, in line with the organization's mission, i.e. the "why" behind the action or intervention. It must be borne in mind that in the area of services to the person and local authorities, the social economy's contribution is often intangible. Merely counting the number of goods or services is neither sufficient nor satisfactory as a means for evaluating the activity that is being assessed. In such cases, it is more relevant to measure the quality of service (Gadrey 2001), and not only the direct effect, but also the indirect effect. For example, a socio-professional integration enterprise under evaluation will not only require account to be taken of the number of people hired. It will want assessments to be made of the integration process itself (direct effect) and then of the capacity of its clients to adapt over the long-term to the world of work once their integration period comes to an end (indirect effect).

We have decided to present the various typologies and effect dimensions that we have chosen, as they also form an integral part of our analysis. Several relate directly to the additional questions asked in the questionnaire. Furthermore, as the social economy produces a very wide range of effects, we felt exploring typologies to be of the utmost importance in order to perfect the manner in which the effects are interpreted. As is shown below, this allows various issues specific to the

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³ This body no longer exists, but at the local level there are still Regional Social Economy Committees (CRES) and Regional Representatives' Councils (CRE).

⁴ The target population for our survey is in excess of 7,000 organisations. We are in the process of completing an exhaustive database of social economy organizations in Quebec; this will, amongst other things, help us to construct a valid sample of our overall population.

social economy to be understood. We identified in documents on the social economy (in the broadest sense) a series of typologies that appeared relevant to the analysis of effects. All the effects we subjected to this grading process were identified from a range of sources: theoretical and empirical studies, reports, evaluation models and social economy manuals. We counted over 100 effects, itself an indication above all of the diversity of sectors of activity and missions as well as of the organizational forms of the social economy: associations (not-for-profit bodies), cooperatives, mutual societies.

2- The typologies and effect dimensions

Initially, the typologies and the dimension of effects were used to organize the categories we had identified. Systematic application of each to every effect allowed us to eliminate duplication and to group markedly similar effects together. This process showed that certain categories managed to incorporate all the effects whereas others did so only partially. This observation led us to structure all our effect to make them more mutually exclusive; this does not apply to all of them as the general nature of some effects renders this operation impossible. Initially, some of our categories were not designed to be applied to effects, however this does not render them irrelevant for the purposes of our analysis. Subsequently, the categories selected will be used as a basis for analyzing our results. The following sections deal with the trial application of cross-matching the effects identified with the typology or effect or organizations; they also express a fair number of our initial hypotheses.

2.1 Typology by social economy principles

As part of the focus group process, we referred to the principles of the social economy in order to group its objectives, and we then assigned the effects to these objectives. The social economy principles that we use are those set out by the Quebec Workgroup on Social Economy⁵ as well as the cooperative principles set out by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)⁶. This choice was guided by the fact that it is above all in the application of these principles that actors from the social economy recognize each other. Moreover, activities undertaken by social economy organizations generally have one of these principles as their objective.

Typology by social economy principles

Principles	Example effects
1- the purpose of an initiative must be of service to members of the community (Workgroup)/Commitment to the community (ACI)	Development of local resources

⁵ Themselves inspired by the Walloon Workgroup on Social Economy.

⁶ We decided to combine them, despite the fact that the Workgroup on Social Economy has formulated five and the ACI seven. In the principles of the Workgroup on the Social Economy, we split in two the principle of individual and collective responsibility.

2- Autonomous management (Workgroup)/Autonomy and independence (ACI)	Capacity to innovate
3-Democratic decision-making process (Workgroup)/Democratic control exercised by members and voluntary and open membership (ACI)	Democratization of power between producers and consumers
4- Redistribution of revenue and surplus must prioritize people and work (Workgroup)/ Member economic participation (ACI)	Development of workers' skills
5- Individuals must participate and take on responsibility. (...) (Workgroup). Member economic participation (ACI)	Empowerment, capacity building, inter-personal skills, know-how
6- Education, training and information (ACI)	Raising people's awareness of important social, environmental, economic and political issues
7- Communities must participate and take on responsibility(...). (Workgroup) Cooperation between cooperatives. (ACI)	Social mobilization

All the effects that we have identified are capable of being defined as the expression of one or other of these principles, and as they are not mutually exclusive the same effect can be found in more than one principle. As part of the process of analyzing responses to the questionnaire, this categorisation is especially helpful in identifying the principles that the organizations consider to be most important in terms of the evaluation. Other studies have been carried out using the principles and values of the social economy (Murruga-Elorriaga, 2001; Kurimoto, 2001; Novkovic, 2005). According to Novkovic's initial results from studies of cooperatives in eastern Canada, it would seem that the most important value for these cooperatives is democracy, followed by equality and individual responsibility, with solidarity coming last. This study is yet to be concluded and does not look at the whole of the social economy. Notwithstanding the preliminary nature of these results, Novkovic's study shows that it is very instructive to ask organizations questions concerning the relative importance of values and principles, and that values and principles are capable of being prioritized. The question that remains to be answered is whether or not such prioritization would be different depending on the type of organization (cooperative, mutual society, association), mission (primarily social or primarily economic), target (people, collectives, a community), etc.

Our analysis does not attempt to identify organizations' preferences in terms of values. Instead, we seek to assess the importance accorded in evaluations to the effects, mindful of the fact that they may be related to the principles and values of the social economy. However, the results in terms of the importance accorded to values and principles are liable to being influenced by the degree of organization within sectors. According to the theory of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), these values will be more or less homogeneous depending on the

manner in which the organizational sphere is structured (Stone and Cutcha-Gunsherfield, 2001). Thus, in a highly hierarchized sphere, dependent on a central funding source and whose agents are drawn from the same profession, there is likely to be a set of values that members subscribe to in a more homogeneous manner, and that they will find it easier to agree on evaluation criteria (for example, this is the case with Infant Centres in Quebec). Conversely, in a highly fragmented sphere in which there exists no single dominant coalition and few congruent professional standards, there are likely to be several sets of differing values, and the best performance criteria will be a matter of fierce debate amongst members (this would probably apply to Quebec's cultural sector).

In consequence, we hope to show how the importance accorded to different types of effects can vary depending on differing variables for differentiating effects and organizations. We provide here a few examples illustrative of the various dimensions espoused by organizations, their different roles, the nature of the effects, the types of resources committed, the types of interest promoted, and the conditions under which the organizations emerged.

2.2 Typology according to the dimensions that constitute the organizations

Effects can be characterized according to the dimensions embraced by the organizations. Three dimensions can be identified: organizational, social utility, institutional (Bouchard and Fontan, 1998; Bouchard, 2004). Evaluation of these three dimensions allows analysis to be made of the intervention system within which the organization under evaluation operates (Fontan, 2001).

The organizational dimension concerns all processes linked to the various stages in the organization's management and strategic orientation. For example, in social economy organizations, proximity between the governing element – often the main beneficiary, the users – and the management promotes a better adjustment between supply and demand (Eme and Laville, 1994). Enterprises from the social economy can also reach higher production levels per production factor thanks to the requirement for limited, or no, distribution of surpluses (Enjolras, 2002). Co-production of a service by producer and user (Bélanger and Lévesque, 1991), as well as the democratic control of the organization by users of the services ensures the organization's efficiency (Enjolras, 2000) and provides for a balance between revenue maximization and output maximization (Enjolras, 1999).

The social utility dimension concerns all effects produced that directly or indirectly impact the social condition of individuals, collectives or communities. Above all, they refer to the external effects of the organization's activities. Social economy enterprises contribute to the reduction and re-absorption of negative externalities, for example when they organize residual material recycling activities (the Quebecois *ressourceries*), when they re-skill a labour force following a manufacturing delocalisation (Community Economic Development Corporations), or when they produce non-industrial consumer goods (organic farmers' cooperatives). The social economy also creates societally beneficial collective benefits, such as contributing to the development of democracy, supporting citizen participation, improving quality of life, preserving the environment, employment and culture (Toupin, 2001; Patenaude, 2001; Saucier, Beaudry and Denis, 2002). It contributes to the development of communities, linking them to a more global process, as is the case with Quebec's forest villages, where social economy enterprises account

for a significant portion of total economic activity (Tessier, 2002).

The social economy's potential is not limited to the micro dimension of the enterprise, nor is it limited to effects and impacts on its environment, for there is also the institutional dimension represented by the way that it performs its economic activities. The transformation of the welfare state into the regulating state leads to the construction of mixed structures allying instruments of the public economy with other instruments from the private sector and the social economy (Monnier, 1999). In this regard the challenge is to evaluate social economy enterprises as being “delineators of solidarity” participating in an overall architecture of the general interest (Monnier and Thiry, 1997; Bernier, Bouchard, Lévesque, 2002). From this standpoint, evaluating processes should allow a better vision of the special characteristics of the social economy, notably rendering more visible its contribution to defining the general interest in terms of public interest, in terms of communities' collective interest and in terms of the common interests shared by those involved with social economy organizations (Bouchard, Bourque, Lévesque, 2001; Patenaude, 2001). These effects, which are little-evaluated by organizations on the ground, appear as part of the transformation of the institutions and public policies that regulate society.

Typology according to the dimensions that constitute the organization

Dimensions	Example of effects
⁷ Social utility dimension	Reduction in social and psychological distress
Organizational dimension	Cooperation, networking, sharing resources with other organizations
Institutional dimension	Public recognition of the social economy

This typology will, amongst other things, help us to discover whether organizations think it important for their institutional effects to be evaluated, despite the fact that because they are hard to assess they are therefore rarely considered. It will also allow us to discover whether they judge it more important to be evaluated on the basis of processes used in their activities (organizational dimension) or on the basis of the impact of these activities (social utility dimension).

2.3 Typology by role of organization

We classified the various effects according to the role to which they correspond, based on the table used as part of the international survey of not-for-profit organizations (Salamon, Hems, Chinnock, 2000). Note that this study did not consider cooperatives and appears to place less emphasis on the economic dimension. The roles, however, are a very good fit in terms of the social economy as a whole. Five positive social economy roles were thus pinpointed⁸. The first role, service, is to produce services of the highest quality, in the most equitable manner possible,

⁷ Jetté, Dumais Vaillancourt (2003)

⁸The study also identified negative roles. We do not examine these here as the organisations do not set themselves objectives that would result in their having a negative role in society. In our questionnaire we have also neutralised effects in such a way that we do not, for example, look at the reduction or increase in availability of public services, but rather at the effect of the supply, without preconceptions as to the meaning of the effect.

more efficiently and as suited as possible to specific needs. The second role, innovation, invests organizations with the ability to enjoy greater flexibility, a capacity for risk-taking and innovation. The third role, advocacy, concerns pressure exercised on governments to transform laws, programmes and institutions. This role also extends to bringing together citizens, and citizens and government, around certain challenges. The fourth role is expressive and leadership development. This arises from the fact that several organizations' role is to give expression to members, staff and beneficiaries. This role also encompasses the preservation of values and of pluralism within society. The final role is community building and democratization. This relates to social cohesion, development of social capital, social integration and education about democratic behaviour.

Typology by organization role

Dimensions	Example of effects
Service role	Influence on supply of public and private services
Innovation role	Capacity to find innovative solutions to new problems
Lobbying role	Influence on public policies
⁹ Expressive and leadership development role	Development of local leaders and entrepreneurs
Community building and democratization role	Development of social cohesion

Choosing the notion of the role allows account to be taken of an organization's specific missions. However, each role contains implicit values and principles, such as "the purpose of an initiative must be of service to members" contained in the service role. As this typology is based on significant empirical research (Salamon, Hems and Chinnock, 2000), we shall use it with our results for comparative purposes.

2.4 Typology by nature of the effect

We then divided the effects as a function of their nature: economic, social, environmental or political

Typology by nature of the effect

Dimension	Example of effects
Economic	Presence and scale of inalienable assets (re-investment, reserves)

⁹ Salamon, Hems and Chinnock, 2000; Gaiger, 2003.

Social	Strengthening belonging to and identification with a community
Environmental	Respect for the physical environment
¹⁰ Political	Building bridges between individuals and the broader political process

This typology permits a number of interesting analyses to be made, notably to see more exactly up to what point enterprises demand to be evaluated in terms of their social effects. Various organizations and groupings have expressed a desire to be evaluated on the basis of their social contributions, as the economic dimension is already often omnipresent in their evaluations. All in all, the dimensions used allow us to verify to what extent the propositions vary according to the particular social economy sector. This in turn leads us to ask a range of questions; for example, do cooperatives accord more importance than associations to evaluation of economic effects? This typology showed us that many effects are capable of being classified within several dimensions at the same time, especially the social and economic. The innovation effect can thus be applied equally to the social and the economic dimensions, or even to the environmental or political.

2.5 Typology by resource origin

Typology by resource origin permits, amongst other factors, effects to be differentiated according to whether they are produced by organizations whose resources are mostly commercial market based, non-market or non-monetary (Eme and Laville, 1994). Organizations can thus be categorized as mostly market (as are several cooperatives), mostly non-market (as are several associations), or mostly non-monetary (as are the voluntary services exchange groups and pressure groups). Organizations can also benefit from hybrid resources and combine several types of effects.

Typology by resource origin

Dimensions	Example of effects
Mostly market	Autonomous decision-making
Mostly social	Educating populations about social, economic and political challenges
Mostly voluntary	Mobilization of volunteers

It might be thought that mostly market enterprises would be least inclined to accord importance to the evaluation of social effects, and that mostly social organizations would accord less importance to evaluation of economic effects. Organizations benefiting from hybrid resources can

¹⁰ Salamon, Hems and Chinnock, 2000.

also show signs of greater autonomy vis-à-vis the choice of evaluation indicators as they are not reliant on a single evaluation system tied to a single revenue source.

2.6 Typology of organizations by interest

A typology based on the interest of a social economy organization's activity is used to differentiate effects according to whether the organizations seek to provide for the general interest (altruistic), or a mutual interest.

Table 4 – Typology by interest

Dimensions	Example of effects
Mutualist	Distribution of assets
Altruistic	Ethical supply

These different categories each have their own distinct logic, notably in terms of the redistribution of surpluses and decision-making control of the organization (Gui, 1993). Organizations acting in the name of the general interest, that can be termed altruistic, are those where the beneficiaries are not those looking after administration. Mutual interest organizations are generally controlled by their beneficiaries. In mutualist organizations, any surplus is usually redistributed to members, as it the case with a labour cooperative. In the case of altruistic organizations, any surplus is not usually returned to members directly but is reinvested in the activity or community. It is hard to categorize the effects in the same way as most of the effects identified are not specific to any single category. However, some are clearly identifiable and might be useful as mutuality/altruism indicators. This typology will be of more use in categorizing organizations and studying their incidence when analyzing the results.

2.7 Typology according to the conditions of the organization's emergence

It would appear that several effects are capable of being categorized according to the conditions of the organization's emergence. Some relate to aspiration, others to necessity (Lévesque, 2002). Organizations born of necessity meet major needs felt by populations, especially following a period of economic or social crisis. Those born of aspiration fulfill a desire to develop society in accordance with a vision or an ideal, generally subsequent to a new social movement (ecologist, feminist, cultural, etc.).

Typology according to the conditions of the organization's emergence

Dimensions	Example of effects
Aspiration	Democratic power sharing
Necessity	Inclusion and enhancement of the status of minorities and marginalized social groups

We are curious to discover if there exist any specific trends concerning evaluation practices that reflect this typology. However, as several effects are capable of being simultaneously identified with both types, this is a typology more meaningful for differentiating organizations. Despite this, certain effects are clearly identifiable, especially those driven by necessity. It should thus be possible to check the extent to which social economy sectors judge it important to be evaluated on the basis of the needs that they meet amongst their target populations.

Conclusion

The work looking at the different possible analyses of the effects of the social economy highlights certain challenges and characteristics of the social economy, be it the diversity or the benefits that it contributes to society. It is likely that not every typology will be equally useful as part of our analysis. Certain typologies comprise categories that principally concern effects, others are more concerned with differentiation of organizations. However, we are of the view that they are all essential to an understanding of the social economy and the problems of its evaluation, even if some of these derive from studies of the social economy that do not necessarily address problems of evaluation.

The survey of effects that we have carried out, as well as the results of the importance accorded to them as part of the evaluation process, have the potential to increase recognition of the social economy in Quebec. Simply illustrating their depth of variety is a means of showing the public, social economy organizations and the various tiers of government the true potential of the contribution made by the social economy to society in Quebec. Not only does this list of effects assist the development of evaluation practices and improved recognition of the positive contribution made by the social economy, it can also be used as a best practice reference for the public and private sector alike, notwithstanding the fact that they are not part of the social economy. In this way, be it through imitation or contamination, economic practices prevailing in society may be influenced by those of the social economy and its actors.

Our research is, of course, merely a step along the road towards the establishment of a common framework for evaluation within the social economy. One of the important steps in the future will be the choice by actors from the social economy of the dimensions and effects that they wish to see evaluated. This step will require negotiation between social economy actors themselves, and between them and the public authorities. We hope that our work will provide an opening basis for these discussions and that it will contribute to driving forwards recognition of the social economy in all its diversity.

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