

KEEPING COMPANIES AT THE HEART OF THEIR OWN EVALUATION

Joint declaration

In France, Belgium and Quebec, social impact evaluations are playing a greater role than ever before. There are a number of factors behind this, including the development of an evaluation culture (all too often focused solely on profitability) in the allocation of public budgets, the development of « impact financing » and a growing move towards quantification as evaluation. This has led to the emergence of standardised and normalised methods, designed to meet the demands of these evaluations.

VISES AND TIESS, WORKING TOGETHER

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We believe that social impact evaluations should focus on documenting the qualitative and/or quantitative effects of a company's actions.

For companies in the Social Economy (SE), owning their evaluation allows them to promote and highlight what they do and how they are different.

In the [VISES project](#), a collective of networks, federations, university research centres and 68 companies in the social economy in France and Belgium came together to address this issue. This highly local multi-partner approach considered evaluation as a way to promote and value the unique nature of the social economy and enhance its social impact.

Across the Atlantic, the [TIESS](#) brought together the biggest social economy networks in Quebec, community finance partners, philanthropists, companies and a range of evaluation experts to investigate how to properly evaluate a social impact, working alongside a team of specialist researchers.

These two projects were parallel yet independent of each other, looking at different contexts and different countries but using the same co-development strategy with their own partners and participants, and arrived **at similar conclusions**.



A joint declaration was the logical conclusion.

Together, we have demonstrated just how essential it is **to keep companies at the heart of their own evaluation process.**

WE CAN ALSO ILLUSTRATE THE KEY FEATURES OF A RELEVANT SOCIAL IMPACT EVALUATION STRATEGY:

- Social impact evaluations allow social companies to check and demonstrate that, beyond meeting their own **objectives**, their **practices** (how they run their actions and activities) **are in line with their values** (community, people-oriented, low-profit, etc.) and **their principles** (participation-based management and democratic governance, etc.).
- An impact evaluation is a way to document, analyse, study, inform **and verify exactly how the social company is working to fulfil its social objectives.**
- A social impact evaluation must be designed and implemented **collectively, with a focus on co-development and participation**, and must involve as many of the relevant participants as possible.
- This evaluation shines a spotlight on how and why a company in the social economy has an impact. To achieve this, it must be **based on both qualitative and quantitative criteria**, allowing it to demonstrate impacts and effects which may be difficult to measure using traditional techniques.
- The social impact evaluation must be **adapted to each company**. It is essential to incorporate the company's context, unique attributes, needs, aspirations, objectives and activities into the process.
- The social impact evaluation must be **integrated into what the company actually does, so it can be used as a basis for long-term improvement**. This will help develop an internal culture of evaluation in the company, ensuring the process is not seen as a one-off audit.
- The social impact evaluation helps build constructive relationships **between companies in the social economy and their partners**. The needs and interests of a social company's financial backers must not dominate their activities and objectives.
- The social impact evaluation **must not be used** to set mandatory results and **provide a return for investors.**
- **The cost** of the social impact evaluation **must be borne by the financial backers** if it is one of their requirements.

By conducting a social impact evaluation in this way, both the company and its partners can enhance their contribution to the community by:

- mutually understanding the strategy and issues at stake,
- involving the various people involved (employees, beneficiaries, backers, etc.) in the development of the company's social objectives,
- developing a culture which encourages learning (acquiring new skills together, creating new knowledge, etc.).



Let's work together and amplify the IMPACT OF SOCIAL entrepreneurship



THE FRANCO-BELGIAN PROJECT: VISES

The VISES project was headed by a consortium of 21 French and Belgian (both French and Flemish speaking) partners. Its aim was to address the issues of social impact evaluation. With 21 federations and networks, various academic partners, 68 participating companies and a number of local authorities on board, VISES was large-scale and wholly legitimate project which provided results for the companies in the social economy, research teams, financial backers, private companies and public authorities. The project developed a uniquely co-developed approach to social impact evaluation, designed to take into account the specific needs and attributes of the social economy (its actions and activities). The process was built from the ground up, using the companies themselves as the foundation. It allowed companies and the people involved with them to reclaim the issues surrounding evaluation, and the promotion of their own social impact. It was tested, adapted and rolled out within the companies in order to meet their needs and expectations, and to form a constructive dialogue with their target audience (clients, suppliers, financial backers, workers, etc.).

THE TIESS

The TIESS works to promote local development by providing companies and organisations in the social economy with the tools they need to innovate, confront changing social issues and transform their practices. Between 2016 and 2019, the TIESS and a team of researchers and networks in the social economy conducted a skills transfer project based on published research, experiments and an assessment of the current methods and tools available. We wanted to provide the participants in the social economy with the best practices, methods, tools and knowledge in order to assess their own social impact, and address the key issues surrounding their activities. The aim was to use the theme of evaluation (and the questions it raises) as an opportunity for companies in the social economy to reflect, rethink or reaffirm their objectives, their priorities, their identity and their political strategy. In other words, we wanted them to define themselves before someone else did it for them. By giving these companies the tools they needed to assess their impact, we also wanted them to think about the direction they're going - both as an independent entity and as part of something much bigger.



VISES

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