Putting evaluations to use: from measuring to endorsing social value

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of 'social value', emphasized in the recently implemented Social Value Act. It argues that evaluations can play an important role in advocating the status of social value. Evaluations highlight priorities and interests and can offer an important way of evidencing and promoting social value in order that it becomes an active ingredient in decision-making in the commissioning of public services. This is essential, since the implementation of the Social Value Act is made difficult by the fact that social value is hard to define and that commissioners are presented with goals and priorities that may compete with a focus on social values. This paper elaborates on a set of themes that can help us explore evaluation frameworks with a view to highlighting where and how evaluations can endorse social values, such as social inclusion, as a feature of how public services are delivered by third sector organisations. This, we argue, will be crucial for the Social Value Act to become a meaningful addition to the way public services are procured and commissioned, and for third sector organisations to secure continued public service contracts based on arguments and values that play on their presumed advantages over other service deliverers.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight where and how evaluations can endorse social value. Such a focus, we argue, is crucial for TSOs operating as service providers, both since it relates to purportedly distinctive features of these organisations, and since, through the inauguration of the Social Value Act in 2013, it has been declared a key aspect to be considered in the commissioning of public services. However, the implementation of the Social Value Act is made difficult by the fact that social value is hard to define and that commissioners are presented with goals and priorities that may compete with a focus on social value. By forwarding credible evidence that they generate social value TSOs will offer concrete support to commissioners seeking to implement the Social Value Act. This requires that we consider evaluations not just as instrumental procedures for collecting 'evidence of what works' but also as tools that actively promote certain values. By seeking evaluation frameworks that can capture social value, this aspect of human service delivery will be promoted as a meriting target alongside focus on value-for money and efficiency in service delivery.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first we present the policy context in which service delivering TSOs operate now. Here, we focus on describing the Social Value Act. Following this we discuss evaluations and TSOs in the UK. We argue for a values-engaged approach to understanding evaluations, i.e. evaluations as promoting values. This is a perspective that often goes unnoticed and is masked by focus on skills, resources, methodologies and intended use of evaluations, i.e. questions organisations grapple with when deciding what evaluation framework to use. The paper then takes a closer look at the concept of 'social values' in the context of the third sector and evaluations, before introducing the reader to a set of questions with ensuing discussions around where and how evaluations can capture and promote social values in the work of TSOs.

The Social Value Act

The policy context in which TSOs find themselves today appears to embrace TSOs as public service deliverers. The Social Value Act (HMG, 2012a) and the white paper on Open Public Services (HMG, 2012b) picture a diverse landscape of service providers in which TSOs of different types will contribute to the delivery of services that are user-responsive, cost-effective and of high quality. Although placing diversity and social value in focus, the current policy and financial context also presents commissioners and other stakeholders with competing goals, interests and priorities. It is likely that goals of equity, for example, will compete with financial goals of increasing efficiency in times of financial austerity.

The Social Value Act came into force on 31 January 2013. The intention with this law is to ensure that, when awarding contracts, commissioners should consider not just cost aspects of a proposed project or bid but its overall value to the community. The act will 'require public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts' (HMG, 2012a: 1), and should be applied to contracts awarded by central government departments and local authorities. By including aspects of 'social value' when commissioning for services, decision-makers should ask not just for the price of a service, but what added and collective benefits a service

may generate. For example, the primary benefit of a service using volunteers to distribute meals to elderly people in their homes may be improved nutrition and therefore better overall health for those elderly people, leading to a reduced burden on the National Health Service. But the social value of the service could include: greater social inclusion through reduced isolation for both the elderly people and the volunteers; increased employability for volunteers who may wish to move into paid employment; increased community cohesion as members of the community get to know each other; and so on.

The Cabinet Office has published alongside the Act a 'procurement policy note' (HMC, 2012c). This document offers advice for how and when commissioners should apply the Social Value Act, with particular consideration to the tight economic times that affect councils and decisions required to accommodate new policies with budgetary constraints. The document states that commissioners and procurers are required 'at the pre-procurement stage [to] consider how what is to be procured may improve social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the relevant area, and how they might secure any such improvement and to consider the need to consult' (ibid.: point 9). It is important to note that the Act does not express any formal steps that must be followed during procurement and commissioning, hence is not prescriptive in how social value is interpreted more specifically, or how the Act should be implemented in practice (e.g. through open hearings or consultations or similar). Instead it simply instructs commissioners and local government to 'consider' social value issues.

Although instructed to consider social value alongside purely economic aspects of service delivery in commissioning procedures, commissioners are faced with potentially contradictory or competing instructions. Policy-implementers such as local authorities and different commissioning groups are bound to experience tensions due to the need to prioritise efficiency (such as acquiring the most health services for a wide population) over equity and social justice (distributing health services to the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged). We can hence imagine a situation where the enforcement of social value is at risk of being ignored. The challenge with a concept such as social value is to find concrete and agreed ways to operationalise it in decisions regarding resource distribution. Our argument is that evaluations offer an important way of evidencing and promoting social value in order that it becomes an active ingredient in decision-making during the commissioning of public services.

Evaluations and values

Our general understanding of evaluations is that they should offer a systematic assessment of the results of an intervention, based on a logical collection of data. The attraction of evaluations is often based on a belief that they will provide objective evidence of what works. However, evaluation of all kinds are rarely purely instrumental and rational means of establishing what works, or not, but must be understood as procedures that involve contestation and negotiations around what is valued and how (Barman, 2007; Hall et al, 2012; Rossi et al, 2004). In the context of human service organisations the social problems that are being addressed constitute a complex combination of issues and this offers a real challenge to evaluations in theory and practice: how can we capture added value? How can we understand 'efficiency' in such contexts? How can we attribute achievements when multiple agencies are involved in interventions? There are a range of questions of both conceptual and methodological nature. Consequently we find that evaluations in the UK third sector are today 'cluttered with ideas,

novel approaches and the latest toolkit' (Hall, 2012: 5). Since impact evaluation presents organisations with challenges of managerial nature the choice of evaluation framework is often based on pragmatic considerations such as cost, skills and the availability of data (Ogáin et al., 2012). This, we argue, masks the inherent value-bases of evaluations related to both methodological preferences and more political aspects of what is seen as laudable achievements. Hall (2012), using examples of evaluations frameworks used by TSOs, illustrates how values related to what counts as credible evidence are hidden in different 'evaluation logics'. Evaluation frameworks reflect 'a normative belief in the superiority of particular approaches to performance measurement and evaluation' (Hall 2012: 5). Evaluations are also tailored to highlight different policy priorities, or political values. Hence, evaluations are political in that they are always set in contexts where we find 'the promotion of different values and political stances' (Greene, 1994: 531; see also Palfrey et al., 2012:122–3) and the choice of evaluation approach carry political or normative implications (Rossi et al., 2004). Evaluations can add value to those who are marginalised and likewise 'embed, ignore, reflect' underlying inequalities and power relations (Hay, 2012: 47). They can reflect a policy that prioritises value that falls to particular groups.

Based on this argument we can say that evaluations both assess achievements and *promote* values of both political and methodological kinds. An evaluation that is aimed at promoting equity in the distribution of health will have a different focus than one that prioritises efficiency in service delivery. The language of evaluation reports can advance the interest of the tax-payer (value for money) or that of the underprivileged (social inclusion). Greene (2012) forwards the idea of a 'values-engaged' approach to evaluation that 'both describes the plurality of values' and 'prescribes particular values' (Greene, 2012: 198, see also Hall et al., 2012). It embraces and reinforces the fact that evaluations are built on values, whether referring to ideas related to methodological preferences or political priorities. Similar to this values-engaged approach we argue that an evaluation that aims at promoting social values, such as social justice, equity, diversity, will need to describe and illustrate where in the process of intervention, how, and to what effect, social values are generated.

While economic value is relatively straightforward to define and measure, this cannot be said about social value. Nevertheless, social value is an established term that in the context of evaluations broadly refers to soft, intangible outcomes, and to results that are wider than outputs in that they include the effect an activity has on communities, the environment, and not only on individual participants. Social values are often the indirect impact of activities, such as services delivered by volunteers recruited from disadvantaged groups generating skills development, and social inclusion for those delivering a service as well as for those for whom a service is intended. For evaluations to capture social value we need to expand the focus beyond outputs and predefined goals, and also include 'ethical dimensions of how things are done' (Westall, 2009: 3). How are clients and other stakeholders engaged in services and organisational decision-making? What about recruitment of volunteers and paid staff? Is this based on values of equity, diversity and social inclusion, and if so, what social value could this generate?

Concepts such as 'economic regeneration' and 'local sustainable development' provide an example of how added financial *and* social value can be defined and captured in evaluations (Thatcher and

Sharp, 2008). The difference between engaging a local organisation or a national organisation in the procurement of services for public bodies can be illustrated by the former's impact on local economy: here, the social value can be defined as the effect of economic regeneration and local sustainable development that is achieved as a result of engaging a local non-profit organisation in the supply chain. It 'bring[s] benefits above and beyond cost savings' (ibid: 254). There are simple evaluation models, such as Local Multiplier 3 (Sacks, 2002) based on the idea of financial multiplier effects that can be used to clarify value chains and evidence this type of added value.

Social value can also be appreciated through a lens that highlights breadth, depth and length of outreach of a service (Woller, 2006). Rather than looking at economic contribution we focus on social value defined as social inclusion and diversity. In order to appreciate social value defined as 'social inclusion' we need to understand what characterises social exclusion in the context of a particular service provision. Social value defined as social inclusion and diversity can then be assessed based on who engages with the service (benchmarking socio-economic background), how (length of engagement with a service) and in what way (frequency) services are being used (Copestake, 2007; Schreiner, 2002; Woller, 2006).

Evaluations, social values and the third sector

The debate around evaluations in the third sector community today is characterised by a combination of urgency and trepidation. Urgency, since competition for grants and contracts is increasing and evaluations and evidence of what works is one important means of communicating added value and outstanding qualities of an organisation to commissioners and other funders. Trepidation since organisations are sometimes unclear of what evaluation and impact assessment mean to their organisation (Moxham, 2009), and since the context in which evaluations are to be used may be ruled by institutional logics (bureaucratic, for-profit) that do not coincide with those of the third sector (non-profit, idealism).

Research suggest that TSOs are engaged in evaluations more extensively now than just under a decade ago (Ellis and Gregory, 2009; Ogaìn et al, 2012). A recent study conducted by New Philanthropy Capital (Ogaìn et al, 2012) show that 75% of charities measure some or all of their work, and that 52% have increased their measurement efforts to meet demands from funders. A further 22% state that they have engaged in evaluations due to pressure from their board (ibid.). In short, the incentive to conduct evaluations comes from outside rather than from within organisations. However, cost-implications are largely placed on the organisation. Research also highlights that outsiders' expectations about what evaluations should include are often not aligned with the needs and interests of the organisation (Christensen and Ebrahim, 2006). This contributes to a view that evaluations are a burden to organisations.

There are some persistent concerns related to the use of impact evaluations in the context of charitable work. Some argue that a focus on evidence-based performance risks ignoring key aspects of third sector organisations and functioning (Gibbon and Dey, 2011). And while on the one hand an increase in evaluation is appreciated since it is believed to ensure greater transparency and accountability (Edwards and Hulme, 1995) others point out that the increased practice of impact

evaluation may have negative repercussions on the way staff behave (Hwang and Powell, 2009; Moxham and Boaden, 2007) and could lead to organisational mission drift (see Barman and MacIndoe, 2012). Ebrahim (2002) argues that evaluations and accountability must be understood based on power asymmetries between receiving organisations and resource providers. Consequently evaluations are seen as means of surveillance and control, subject to the norms of 'the audit society' (Power, 1999). But organisations also prove to be active in the way evaluations are used in order to promote both a cause and an organisation (Arvidson and Lyon, 2013). As organisations get engaged in the practice of evaluations their attitudes and skills related to how this is handled change: evaluations are used to promote and market the organisation in an environment that is seen as increasingly competitive and evidence-focused (ibid.).

Is the third sector at an advantage in generating social value?

Various arguments, forwarded by the sector as well as in academia, emphasise that TSOs are values-driven, based on solidarity and compassion (Macmillan, 2012). The assumption has hence been that the activities of TSOs build on social values (altruism, solidarity) and therefore also generate them (community cohesion, empowerment). However, claims about organisations' value-basis are contentious – where do values come from? How are they different from values found in private and statutory human service organisations? Furthermore, and of particular interest when discussing evaluations and outcomes, assumptions about the association between being a values-based organisation and the results generated from this values-basis are hard to verify. Some models lend themselves to more concrete discussions that clarify the association between organisational characteristics and the production of social value, such as that of Billis and Glennerster's model of third sector organisations' comparative advantage (1998).

Billis and Glennerster's argument is that TSOs have an advantage over private and state sector organisations in addressing the needs of disadvantaged clients. More specifically, TSOs are 'more effective suppliers' (1998: 87) of services to clients that are vulnerable and stigmatised. The comparative advantage derives from stakeholder ambiguity, an inherent structural characteristic that makes TSOs different from that of private and statutory sectors. Ambiguity is defined as 'a bewildering complexity of overlapping roles' (1998:81) between employer, employee, non-employee, provider recipient, chairperson, director and subordinate. This renders TSOs flexible and ready to respond to client needs, rather than being guided by profit motives of shareholders as in a private company or the reliance on 'concerns and prejudices of the median voter' (p. 96) as in the case of statutory services. For the user, the stakeholder ambiguity is the basis for informality, which reduces barriers between service providers and users based on prejudices, fear and stigma. The social value generated comes from structural characteristics that makes the organisation more approachable for groups that often are labelled hard to reach or hard to engage.

Arguments purporting that TSOs have a comparative advantage or inhabit particular values have come to be questioned as TSOs go through changes such as professionalisation (Hwang and Powell, 2009) and marketisation (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004). Concepts such as isomorphism and hybridisation are often used to describe the nature of changes that TSOs are undergoing, and many

argue that with this TSOs become less distinct in nature: values are diluted and the basis for their comparative advantage is lost. The point here, however, is not to venture into a discussion about how and whether TSOs have changed, whether and how they are different from public and private organisations. Instead we use this background to pose questions of relevance for evaluation frameworks used in the context of third sector work: how can the results of the structural characteristics described above translate into measurable social value? How can the social value generated through the way things are done (volunteer-led, community-based) be captured, described and assessed through evaluations? It is to this we turn next.

Describing and evaluating social values in TSOs

We have defined social value as an impact that stretches beyond outcomes related strictly to individuals engaged in an intervention: social value implies benefits for groups, communities and the environment. The social value of an intervention can also be defined according to the outreach of the intervention, i.e. based on the characteristics of the service-users. The social value of an organisation will then depend on to what extent similar services offered by other providers are inclusive/exclusive. An organisation that contributes social value, for example through being inclusive and able to engage the otherwise hard-to-reach, does not only add value for the individuals that happen to benefit from services, but adds value to society as a whole, through e.g. increased well-being, health, and productivity. Social values are indirect outcomes in the sense that they that occur as an effect of the nature of the organisation and the way a service is delivered, rather being strictly related to the intervention per se.

To explore how social values can be endorsed by evaluation frameworks we have examined six evaluation frameworks used by TSOs in the UK. This investigation has been based on an iterative process, using explanatory models and promotional material related to these frameworks, and with the definitions of social value discussed above as a guide. The aim has been to identify themes that allow us to explore how social values can be described, assessed and promoted. The four themes are:

1. **Language**: can words promote social value?
2. **Program implementation**: how are organisational structures and behaviour linked to the creation of social value?
3. **Indirect and unintended consequences**: what is required for evaluations to capture this?
4. **Fostering social values**: can evaluations encourage the creation of social value?

Before exploring these themes we offer a brief description of the six evaluation frameworks, all established and used by TSOs in the UK. The references to these tools are purely for descriptive purposes, and the intention is not to compare one against the other with the view to promote one above the other.

Six evaluation frameworks outlined

The material used for the review consists of promotional material obtained from designated web-sites; a body of grey literature that we define as discussions and comments on the tool by various actors using and/or promoting this and other tools. Where available and to a limited extent we used academic literature. Each of the frameworks is presented below, and the material used for our review is listed at the end of the paper.

Social Return on Investment, SROI (UK)[1]: SROI is based upon the principles of accountancy and cost-benefit analysis as it uses money as a unit of analysis to quantify and express social value creation. It measures the social benefits generated by an organisation (or intervention) in relation to the economic cost of achieving those benefits. SROI produces a quantitative monetary ratio of value, but it is also a framework that aims to communicate the story of change through case studies and qualitative data (Nicholls et al, 2012).

Logic modelling: this framework dates back to the 1960s/70s (Taylor-Powell and Henert, 2008). It is closely linked with theory of change and is designed to show the connections between a service and its outcomes (Axford et al, 2005). The results of a logic modelling exercise are often presented through a flow chart to visualise how inputs, outputs and outcomes are linked, as well as identifying different stakeholders.

Questant: Questant is an impact measurement tool used to assess services in terms of their value for money. Its principles are similar to SROI, although it differs in how the evaluation process is conducted. The data used is primarily existing data, and the evaluation process does require stakeholder consultation.

The Outcomes Star (OS): the Outcomes Star (OS) is a measurement tool designed to both support and measure change in vulnerable service users. The tool engages with staff and service users to support, track and analyse results of, an intervention. The Outcomes Star consists of a number of scales arranged in the shape of a star, where progress in behaviour and attitudes can be mapped over time.

Local multiplier 3 (LM3): the aim of LM3 is to make visible the link between social impact and economic benefits in the context of supply chains. It maps an organisation's source of income, how this is spent, and then re-spent within the local area. LM3 has been used to influence the public sector to consider the impact of its procurement decisions, and to highlight where an organisation can improve its impact.

Volunteering impact assessment toolkit (VIAT): this tool aims to enable the assessment of the impact of volunteering (volunteers being both service providers and service users) on organisations, service users, the wider community, and volunteers themselves (Doyle and Scott, 2009). It offers a matrix of five areas of capital: physical, economic, human, social and cultural. By combining the matrix with stakeholder groups the respective needs, costs, and added value associated with each group and

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[1] The SROI referred to here is the framework presented as SROI UK (www.sroi-uk.org). This is slightly different from SROI as developed by REDF in the US (www.redf.org).

type of capital can be assessed. It highlights different dimensions of impact that follow as a result of volunteer-based activities.

The descriptions above offer a brief introduction to these frameworks. As noted above the purpose of referring to the six evaluation frameworks is not to compare and contrast them with each other. This would prove difficult since each of them offer a level of flexibility as to what to emphasise and how to implement the evaluation. In the following we discuss the four questions outlined above.

1. Language: can words promote social value?

Rhetorical features play a role in directing the evaluation process and the interest of the intended audience of the evaluation. The language and concepts used signal 'whose knowledge and interests are considered more legitimate' (Hall, 2012: x). It directs the audience, the evaluated and the evaluator, as to what the criteria are used for judging success: value for money, efficiency, equity and inclusion are all normative in that they decide what is to be valued. With a focus on financial values the reader is separated from those for whom an intervention is intended – i.e. beneficiaries, clients, patients. Financial values of interest to outside stakeholders are put at the core: for every pound invested today we will save the taxpayer x-pounds in expenditure tomorrow.

SROI offers an interesting example in that it embraces what it assumes is of interest for funders (return on investment) and combines this with a language that is concerned with inequality. In the guidelines to SROI UK it specifically states that it 'seeks to reduce inequality' by incorporating social, environmental and economic costs and benefits' (Nicholls et al., 2012: 8). The concepts of 'social value' and 'inequality' are crucial in how the principles of SROI have been developed. The way the framework is presented suggests an ambitious approach: it aims to capture and demonstrate generated social value of individual organisations or programs. It also implies that, foreseeing the use of SROI on a broad scale by TSOs and commissioners alike, through conceptualising social value as a monetary value it will contribute to the reduction of inequality by placing the 'social' on a parity with cost-efficiency. Although built on similar methodological principles as SROI, Questant places the question 'Is our funding providing a positive return in financial terms?' in focus. Emphasis is on value for money and return on investment, while concepts such as equity and inclusion, although forming part of underlying factors used in determining the process outcomes, do not feature in the presentation of the tool.

2. Program implementation: how are organisational structures and behaviour linked to the creation of social value?

This theme directs focus to how an intervention is delivered, i.e. the nature of service delivery and how this can present barriers and invitations to engage with services to different client groups. This dimension can be described through the concept of 'space of access' (Kovandžić et al., 2012) and refers to the interaction between patient and service provider. It highlights how physical, relational and cognitive aspects create a 'space' in which disadvantaged clients feel welcome or not. The concept of 'comparative advantage' as used by Billis and Glennerster (1998) directs focus to exactly this aspect of TSOs, i.e. the relations and the interaction between clients and service providers. The 'advantage'

that TSOs hold over other providers is that they reduce distance (physical, cognitive, cultural) to clients through stakeholder ambiguity. In essence, this reduces stigma and creates an allowing and inviting 'space of access' for disadvantaged clients.

How can we translate 'space of access' to evaluations describing and assessing social value? First of all, how can the evaluation framework communicate what 'space of access' and comparative advantage looks like in relation to a particular service? This can be done in a relatively simple way that does not require an evaluation per se. Rather, it involves a narrative that recognises disadvantages in different groups of clients, what constitutes barriers to access to the service, and in what way the project or organisation has addressed these barriers in planning and delivering services. This should include considerations that recognise barriers which are both physical/external (costs, location) and cultural/personal (lack of knowledge, stigma, fear). Secondly, the evaluation can include an element where clients describe 'how the program is personally valued by participants' and how it is 'manifested in meaningful ways in their lives' (Hall et al, 2012: 199). The evaluation can prescribe values of social inclusion by documenting how disadvantaged and under-served people experience services offered (Greene, 2012). Can they access services in a satisfactory way? And are they offered the same opportunity as others to follow and benefit from an intervention? Through documenting this, the evaluation can expose strengths and weaknesses in strategies of how a service is offered to different groups, and support the development of e.g. more inclusive approaches. This may be particularly valuable when working with clients who have complex problems, involving multiple agencies offering various interventions.

The VIAT aims to enable the assessment of the impact of volunteering (volunteers being both service providers and service users) on organisations, service users, the wider community, and volunteers themselves (Doyle and Scott, 2009: 40). It offers a matrix of five areas of capital: physical, economic, human, social and cultural. By combining the matrix with stakeholder groups the needs, costs, and added value associated with each group and type of capital can be assessed. It highlights different dimensions of impact that follow as a result of volunteer-based activities to all four groups of stakeholders, such as increased understanding of e.g. mental health issues to the community, contributing to increased tolerance and understanding among both volunteers and the community; greater knowledge of where to seek support; and possibly larger social networks of the service users. The Outcomes Star is devised so the client can reflect on personal experiences related to needs, progress and engagement with several agencies. How, in the client's view, does a particular program fit with a multitude of interventions?

VIAT and the Outcomes Star invite reflection on who engages with services, how, and to what effect. But how can the evaluation go beyond reflection to evidencing achievements related to a particular implementation strategy? Arguing that a space of access is beneficial for social inclusions, similar to what is implied by TSOs' comparative advantage, would have to be evidenced. This can be evaluated based on knowing who engages with the service (benchmarking socio-economic background) and in what way (e.g. frequency, nature of engagement) services are being accessed and used (Copestake 2007; Schreiner 2002; Woller 2006). This would support an assessment of whether services do indeed reach the hard to reach / hard to engage, and outline how this client group

engages with the services over time. None of the tools reviewed for this paper provides a framework that looks into this. However, in the context of micro-finance services, offered by non-government organisations in the third world, this is a topic that has been widely discussed with ensuing evaluation frameworks developed that support assessment of how organisations manage to balance the dual goal of being socially inclusive as well as financially sound (Copestake 2007; Woller 2006).

3. Indirect and unintended consequences: How can evaluations capture this?

The pros and cons of 'goal free' and 'goal driven' evaluation have been long discussed (House, 2004). The implication of a 'goal free' evaluation is that the evaluation addresses pre-defined and unexpected outcomes with equal worth. It emphasises 'contextual meaningfulness' and the idea that 'social programs…should be evaluated according to the merit and worth of their actual effects, independent of their intended effects' (Greene, 1994: 534). Such an approach challenges evaluations based on the idea that methodological rigour requires that only pre-defined outcomes are assessed (Hall and Arvidson, 2013). As stated earlier, social value is understood as an unintended consequence of a program implementation. This type of impact can be captured through stakeholder involvement.

The underlying idea with stakeholder involvement is that stakeholders, i.e. people affected by a programme, 'hold critical, sometimes elusive, knowledge about the dynamics of the program and the needs that the program is intended to fulfil' (Brisolara 1998: 25). Therefore, by including stakeholders in the initial stage of impact mapping, several benefits (and any drawbacks) of the intervention can be recognised and included, rather than just those that the organisation itself has identified as goals.

Stakeholder involvement is a relatively well established concept in the evaluation of TSOs. The technique, intensity and intention behind it may vary though. Stakeholder involvement in SROI is at the core of the evaluation process, with the intention to 'value the things that matter'. Stakeholder involvement in the OS is seen as an interactive tool for user/provider collaboration, with the intent to illustrate and also motivate and induce change. We can label these intentions instrumental and transformative. Below we will explore the latter in some more detail.

4. Fostering social values: can evaluations encourage the creation of social values?

Transformative evaluation refers to an approach that sees evaluation as a 'social institution vital to the realisation of democratic societies' (House, 2004: 220). Evaluation should not only be seen as an exercise applied from outside, with the aim to retrieve information about the qualities of an intervention, but also as a tool aimed at contributing to deliberation and change. Values play a role in making judgements about – *valuing* – evidence of an intervention and the merits of an organisation. But apart from highlighting social values through describing values and value-creation in interventions, an evaluation can also actively practice and prescribe values (Greene, 2012; Hall et al., 2012) in the context within which the evaluation is carried out. The consequences in terms of quality of the evaluation have been debated, and the focus on richness and 'thick description' (that aims to capture context and intentionality of those involved) achieved through stakeholder involvement, is challenged by proponents of scientific rigour that relies on indicators, pre-defined outcomes and a focus on 'evidence' as a required result of evaluations (Hall, 2012).

The Outcomes Star offers an example of how this can be done. The OS is inspired by a participatory approach. It engages stakeholders, i.e. users of services, with the aim to empower users and to bring about change. The tool is used as an interactive map that fits in with, and ideally facilitates the interaction between, counsellor and client. It not only measures outcomes, but is instrumental in helping the desired outcomes to be achieved. In this way the Outcomes Star is practicing values underpinned by principles that emphasise the reversal of roles underlined by power and knowledge, usually represented in evaluations by the powerful funder, the mediating evaluator, and a less powerful service user. As with some stakeholder involvement this allows for facts, needs and values to be examined: the process is supported by inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation (House, 2004) rather than guided by priorities as set by a policy context (competition) and pre-determined priorities (efficiency and cost).

Concluding remarks

The Social Value Act and the open public services reform are invitations for TSOs to continue as important public service deliverers. However, for the concept of social value, endorsed through the Social Value Act, to become a meaningful ingredient in procurement and commissioning procedures, those involved in decision-making will need relevant definitions of what social value means and evidence that such value has/can be created. Evaluations, we argue, are both appropriate and powerful means of communication for TSOs that wish to describe values they advocate and evidence of what they achieve based on this.

This paper aims to highlight where and how evaluations can describe and capture social values. We can conclude that the focus on the creation of social value is not specifically articulated in any of the evaluation frameworks reviewed for this paper, with SROI as the exception. The evaluation frameworks all allow for some discretion in how results are reported. Hence, based on rhetorical techniques and through allowing narratives that directs focus to social value creation, each of the frameworks can be presented in such a way that they highlight social values and how they are linked to third sector activities. There is also discretion in how they are implemented, including to what degree stakeholders are involved and how an understanding of social value creation is guiding data collection. Discretion can also be used to outline an intervention per se (which in theory could be identical to that of other organisations) as well as the way this intervention is delivered. Some argue it is ethically imperative to capture as much as possible of this aspect (Kushner, 2012). Others, more pragmatically, suggest identifying relevant characteristics of this process to include in the evaluation (Greene, 2012).

Other implications of the discussion offered here relate to methodological requirements that would allow evaluations to assess achievements and the value of e.g. social inclusion as an aspect or effect of the nature of service delivery. Such methodological requirements could include benchmarking clients with a view to assessing characteristics of clients from a social outreach perspective. In the case of e.g. SROI and Questant we would need to relate difference in client characteristics to financial values. Existing research (Copestake, 2007) that aim to develop frameworks that can appreciate degree of social outreach also suggest focus on *how*, as in length of engagement with a service, and

in what way, as in frequency, services are being used. Although this may not be technically difficult to do, for a relatively small and resource-strapped organisation it may prove demanding.

The fourth point raised in the analysis also has methodological implications. To engage in transformative evaluation, the organisation will be required to outline an evaluation framework that places the experience and needs of the client at the core, and also to develop a theory of change where the evaluation is not only a tool that observes but also instigates change. The methodological implications are, again, requiring efforts, skills and resources. Taking such a direction with the evaluation, it could be argued, is ethically imperative (the right thing to do) as well as instrumentally sound since it will support the organisation's work towards achieving change for the client. However, as Hall (2012) suggests, different evaluation logics present underlying methodological preferences. A transformative evaluation may be challenged on the basis of such preferences with references to, for example, an increased risk of respondent courtesy causing data to be biased.

We may consider the implications of employing evaluations with the purpose of describing and valuing social value in service provision from a wider perspective than that of the individual organisation. By assigning evaluations the task of assessing not only the performance of individual organisations but also to outline distinctive organisational features we can see how evaluations focusing on capturing and describing social value can serve two purposes. Firstly, the evaluation relates to the achievements of one specific organisation. Secondly, by allowing for achievements as well as distinctiveness based on the nature of service delivery to feature in evaluations, results can also come to inform us about how different organisational types offer complementary inputs in a diverse landscape of service providers. In this way, evaluations can support commissioners and other decision-makers in ascertaining diversity in service delivery and thereby avoiding a gradual exclusion of vulnerable service users who do not easily engage with statutory or private sector services.

In the discussion offered here there are primarily two groups of decision-making stakeholders that have been referred to; organisations engaging in evaluations, and commissioners and the like who are encouraged to use evaluations as resources in implementing the Social Value Act. It is however also important to point out, as Palfrey et al (2012) argue, that evaluators who implement evaluations have a prominent position in that they can make values explicit and visible to an outside audience. They are potentially carriers of 'the value judgements of those with most power in the system' (Palfrey et al, 2012: 122). Hall et al (2012) too make a case for recognising the authority and power of evaluators. Consequently, it is important for all actors involved in choosing, implementing and using evaluations to consider how evaluations express values. In the context presented here, with new policies and the Social Value Act being implemented along with goals of efficiency and budgetary constraints, evaluations can play an important role in emphasizing the meaning of social value and the way third sector organisations can address inequalities in service provision.

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About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The Third Sector Research Centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

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Economic and Social Impact

Assessing the economic impact of third sector organisations is a key research priority for TSRC. It is linked to our mapping and measuring of the sector, and has a particular focus on the role that third sector organisations play in delivering public services and contributing to general community wellbeing. We are engaged in a review of the wide range of existing methods and tools for measuring impact within TSOs including Social Return on Investment (SROI), blended impact measures and other adaptations of cost/benefit analysis. We will also develop sector wide analysis of economic impact of third sector activity and its contribution to the wider economy, including analysis of workforce trends, volunteering and third sector value.

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