



## International Sociological Association RC33 Eleventh International Conference on Social Science Methodology

Track 45 - Social Impacts evaluation measurement:  
what opportunities for data aggregation and knowledge of the social economy and  
communities

**«Social impact assessment (SIA) in projects financed with the resources of art. 72 of the Third Sector  
Code: a potential vehicle for transforming institutional culture?»**

*Sabina Polidori (INAPP)\* - KSENIJA FONOVIĆ (CHARLES UNIVERSITY)*

Napoli, September 25, 2025



# Contents

Topic 01 Context

Topic 02 Research: methodology, phases, and tools

Topic 03 Results  
(in progress)

Topic 04  
Reflections/conclusions (In progress)

Topic 05 Bibliography  
And regulatory references



The full paper of this presentation is available on the INAPP website: <https://oa.inapp.gov.it/home>

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) 2013 on *'Measuring social impact'* and in other EU documents, the EC has addressed the issue of social impact measurement and evaluation, often in an *'interchangeable'* manner, as in the *Action Plan for the Social Economy (2021-2030)*, in which the Commission calls on EU Member States to support the development of measurement and evaluation of *'social impact and the management of learning from it'*.

Recommendation on the development of framework conditions for the social economy, the European Commission calls on *"Member States to support the adoption by social economy actors of processes for managing and measuring social impact, in order to measure and evaluate the social impact of specific projects or particular organizations"* (November, 2023).

In Europe



Law 106/2016 - Delegation to the Government for the reform of the Third Sector, social enterprises, and the regulation of universal civil service, defining VIS as: ***"qualitative and quantitative assessment, in the short, medium, and long term, of the effects of activities carried out on the reference community with respect to the identified objective."*** (Art. 7, paragraph 3 *'Supervision, monitoring and control'* of the *MLPS and MLPS VIS Guidelines*), based on social value and function *'as an expression of participation, solidarity and pluralism'* (Art. 2, paragraph 1, letter a).

In Italy\*



For the legislator, local public authorities must have the following objectives: a) ***to enhance the role and social function of ETS in the planning phase of activities of general interest*** (Art. 5 of the CTS); b) ***to identify 'criteria and procedures for the awarding of services of general interest, based on compliance with quality standards and the social impact of the service'***; c) ***identifying 'criteria and methods for verifying results in terms of quality and effectiveness of performance'***. This VIS is aimed at evaluating 'the activities and not the entire organisation of the ETS' (Venturi 2019), ***i.e. the change generated by activities of general interest in the communities and beneficiaries/recipients of those activities*** (see slides 3 and 4).



\* For background information on the evaluation of public social policies in Law 328/2000, please refer to the 'Introduction and regulatory references' section of the MLPS VIS Guidelines.

Assessment = ecological-integral and sustainable-integral framework\* (paradigm) is characterized by: - the transformative cultural change of ETS and public administrations; in accounting for this change\* (Taplin Clark 2012) and, at the same time, "**transformative learning of perspectives of meaning**" (Cappa, Del Nigro 2016) of the value generated/produced by ETS themselves in communities (Polidori, Bartoli 2020).

Within this scope, the MLPS 'Guidelines for the implementation of systems for assessing the social impact of activities carried out by ETS' (Ministerial Decree of July 23, 2019) should be put into operation. This is feasible because it is a 'soft law'\* instrument and the legislator indicates both its **experimental** nature and its 'promotional' function, as well as a '**facilitation** tool' for the development in ETSs and public administrations of a '**concrete implementation of VIS**', to be made operational in the transition from the 'accountability' phase to the 'accounting for transformative social value' phase (Fig. 1), **within the learning process**.

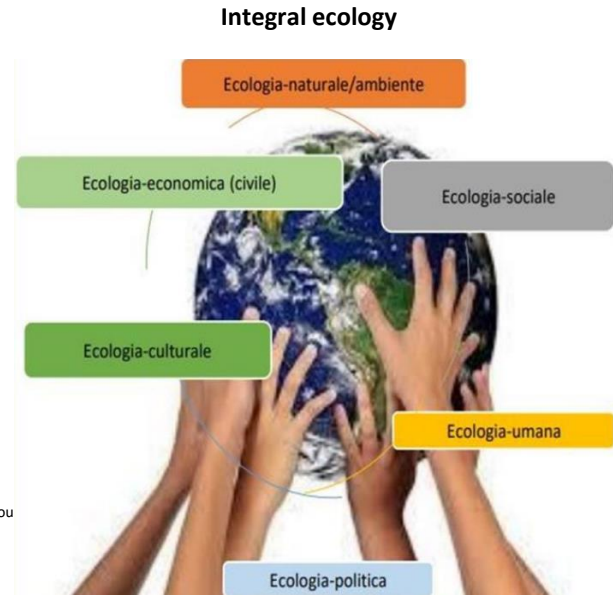


Fig. 1

Source: Venturi 2022



\*'Expected and unexpected change' (Stame AIV 2023), 'Change and its expected/desired and unintended/unexpected impact' (Saggiomo AIV 2023), Panel discussion 'The theory of change for dialogue between evaluator and client. Theories', Rome, 20 September 2023. \*\*Without direct binding effect, i.e., not mandatory for ETS.

PURPOSE	DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS/Process 1a	PROCESS ANALYSIS STAGES (1b)		
To define shared criteria and methodologies for ETSs so that they can carry out VIS with assessments that allow, on the basis of objective and verifiable data, to ascertain the results achieved in relation to the planned objectives and, at the same time, make systematic information on the effects of the activities carried out available to stakeholders.	Evidence of the process of stakeholder participation in defining the value dimensions of impact measurement.	1. Analysis of the context and needs involving stakeholders.		
VIS aims to highlight and raise awareness of the social added value generated; the social changes produced thanks to the project's activities; and the sustainability of social action.	Activities: processes aimed at responding to the needs of people in a specific area based on the social mission that the organization has decided to pursue.	2. Planning of impact objectives.		
Generate a conceptual process that is also measurable in the medium and long term.	Services: activities that have been codified/standardized in terms of both cost and regulation (accreditations, agreements).	3. Analysis of activities and choice of methodology, tools, and timing of measurement in relation to the set objectives and characteristics of the intervention.		
<b>PRINCIPLES</b>	Projects: processes that have a predetermined and non-continuous duration with the aim of identifying new solutions that allow any obstacles in services and activities to be removed thanks to the results of the project or to highlight the positive results achieved.	4. Evaluation understood as the attribution of a value, i.e., a meaning, to the results achieved by the measurement process.		
Intentionality (the evaluation system must be linked to the evaluation of the organization's strategic objectives).	Input: understood as production factors, human and financial resources employed, own and third-party factors.			
Relevance (inclusion of all information useful for demonstrating the general interest pursued and the community dimension of the activity carried out).	Output: understood as products, goods, and services resulting from the activities carried out.	5. Communication of the results of the evaluation, which will form the basis for the reformulation of strategies and consequent objectives that the organization will set for the future development of its initiatives.		
Reliability (accurate, truthful, and fair information, with specific indication of data sources).	Outcome: understood as the indirect results of one's actions, effects, and changes made to the lives of those involved and individuals in general with respect to the territories and the general context of the activities.			
<table border="1" data-bbox="35 882 1330 1096"> <tr> <td data-bbox="35 882 759 1096">Measurability (the activities being evaluated that can be traced back to quantitative parameters must be appropriately measured).</td> <td data-bbox="759 882 1330 1096">In this regard, ETSs in the evaluation system must provide for: a) the value dimensions that the activities pursue; b) indices and indicators consistent with the activities being evaluated.</td> </tr> </table>	Measurability (the activities being evaluated that can be traced back to quantitative parameters must be appropriately measured).	In this regard, ETSs in the evaluation system must provide for: a) the value dimensions that the activities pursue; b) indices and indicators consistent with the activities being evaluated.		
Measurability (the activities being evaluated that can be traced back to quantitative parameters must be appropriately measured).	In this regard, ETSs in the evaluation system must provide for: a) the value dimensions that the activities pursue; b) indices and indicators consistent with the activities being evaluated.			
Comparability (return of data that allows for comparability over time).				
Transparency and communication (public reporting of the impact assessment and the stakeholder participation process).				
<b>DATA COLLECTION/METHODS</b>				
Qualitative and quantitative, considering indices and indicators, both monetary and non-monetary, consistent and appropriate with the activities of general interest of the ETS.				

<b>VIS SUBJECTS</b>
Public administrations: procedures for awarding services of general interest to ETS for medium- and long-term interventions (at least 18 months) and with an economic value > €1 million. The costs must be proportionate to the value of the intervention and the financing costs.
ETS with economic value > €1 million (mandatory).
ETS with an economic value of less than €1 million (optional) [Editor's note].
<b>RECIPIENTS OF THE VIS</b>
Current or future financiers and donors who use measurement to understand the effectiveness of their intervention and assess whether to continue, discontinue, or revise their support.
Ultimate beneficiaries/recipients of an intervention and all other stakeholders interested in understanding, albeit to varying degrees, the social and economic impact generated by the organization (e.g., local community, workers, users, etc.).
Employees, collaborators, members, and volunteers of the organization who raise awareness of the value produced by the organization in which they operate.
Public entities interested in assessing the social benefits generated by an intervention in the territory and in the local communities to which they belong.
<b>COORDINATION WITH THE SOCIAL REPORT</b>
For social enterprises/social cooperatives, for ETS with a balance sheet > €1 million, and for other ETS that decide to implement it. For ETS operating in international contexts and required to adopt VIS systems recognized in those contexts, the same assessments made on the basis of those assessment systems are considered fully equivalent to the VIS Guidelines.
<b>PUBLICITY AND DISSEMINATION</b>
Source: VIS 2019 MLPS guidelines, (additions sp. 2023) In order to develop knowledge and the practice of evaluation, the documents produced will be made available through the digital communication channels of the ETS and/or their associated networks.
<b>ROLE OF EXTERNAL PARTIES</b>

2019 - VIS MLPS guidelines (b)



'Firstly, it should be noted that there are different approaches to measuring social impact, each of which promotes particular types of logic through different metrics and measurement techniques: it is up to the ETS to choose the impact assessment metrics most appropriate to the type of activities and projects carried out by the organisation.

The social impact assessment system to which ETSs must refer is structured in such a way as to guarantee a high degree of autonomy to entities, while complying with certain minimum principles and content.

The assessment system may vary in structure and complexity depending on the size of the entity and its legal form.



**October 26, 2018 MLPS policy document:** identification of general objectives, priority areas for intervention, and lines of activity eligible for funding and other financial resources (Articles 72 and 73 CTS)\*.

**November 9, 2018 Notice 1/2018:** procedures and deadlines for submitting project proposals of national importance, as well as the evaluation criteria and procedures for awarding and disbursing the funding provided for the implementation of the interventions.

Aimed at:

Voluntary organizations/OdV  
Social promotion associations/APS  
TS/FdTS foundations  
Registered with RUNTS\*\*\*

Inclusion of an "*ex-post impact assessment of initiatives or projects*" aimed at "*evaluating the results achieved at the end of the activities and the impact produced two years after the conclusion of the project.*" Assessment (not mandatory, but optional, with an ad hoc reward in the selection of project proposals), to be carried out - 24 months after the end of the project - by a third party with proven experience in VIS, delegated by the funded ETS.



There are no ex-post evaluation analyses or public data on the outcome of this Notice. This represents a privileged field of study for identifying incentives and barriers—formal, substantial, and cultural—for the prospects of VIS in ETS and also in public institutions.

This presentation is the first output of the research, in which we share the study project (in progress), the presentation of the work in progress and, consequently, the initial findings.

\*Registered by the Court of Auditors on October 30, 2018.

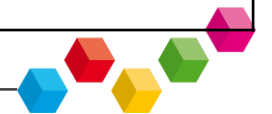
\*\*The national relevance of the projects is determined by the territorial criterion, i.e., the activities must take place in at least 10 regions (the autonomous provinces are treated as equivalent to regions). Public funding is €250,000.00 (minimum) and €900,000.00 (maximum). The remaining portion of the total cost of the project (co-financing) for ODVs and APSs is at least 20%, while for FTSs it is 50%.

\*\*\*Pending activation in 2018, registrations in the respective regional registers (ODV, APS) or in the register of non-profit organizations (FTS) were valid. RUNTS became operational on November 23, 2021 (Directorial Decree No. 561 of October 26, 2021).

Comparative Table – VIS Requirements (Notice 1/2018 vs Notice 2/2025)

VIS Profile	Notice 1/2018	Notice 2/2025
<b>Obligation</b>	Optional: VIS is required “where envisaged”, to be carried out ex post by a third party.	Mandatory: the ex-ante VIS Plan (Model F) must be included in the application.
<b>Digital tool</b>	No dedicated ministerial platform.	Mandatory use of the Impact Call platform (mlps.openimpact.it).
<b>Method required</b>	No prescribed method (ToC, SROI, etc. optional).	No imposed method, but a plan with indicators and theory of change is required.
<b>Weight in evaluation</b>	Does not directly affect the score, only as an optional bonus.	The VIS Plan is an integral part of the project proposal evaluation.

Source: Polidori elaboration, September 2025



**Update on Notice 2/2025 (MLPS)**  
 In September 2025, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies issued Notice No. 2/2025 (Art. 72 CTS), introducing the requirement for Third Sector entities to submit, at the application stage, an ex-ante Social Impact Monitoring and Assessment Plan (VIS), prepared via the digital platform Impact Call (mlps.openimpact.it).

This innovation marks a shift from the optional ex-post evaluation (Notice 1/2018) to standardized and comparable planning, with indicators and theory of change defined already at the design stage. The VIS Plan thus becomes an integral part of project proposal evaluation, strengthening transparency, comparability, and the evaluative capacity of both Third Sector organizations and public administrations.

## Exploratory-cognitive research

Unit of analysis: projects of national importance under Notice 1/2018 that have chosen/declared to carry out an ex-post impact assessment (VIS) two years after the end of the activities

Duration: July 2023-July 2026.

Hypothesis/research question: was the VIS in the Notice in question a public policy that produced and generated social and cultural innovation, or is it still a cultural process to be defined - in the types of ETS funded and, consequently, also in the PA itself (?)

Research objectives: 1) to learn about and understand in detail, limiting the scope of the investigation to the experimental action of the MLPS and using empirical evidence, the practices, experiences, and achievements of the evaluation in the ETS, verifying whether or not they follow the statements required in Notice 1/2018/MLPS Guidelines; 2) a perspective for studying cultural processes, consisting of identifying the main functions of VIS actors in ETSs, weighing their influence and the direction taken in the initiative under consideration.

## Research questions

*(in progress)*

- How is SIA defined by evaluators and ETSs in projects and more generally?
- Is it really social impact assessment/SIA or ex-post or final assessment?
- Was the client/ETS involved by the evaluator in the evaluation process? And when, at what stage of the project: during drafting, after approval, or?
- What effect has the 'public policy on VIS' had on ETSs?
- Did the evaluation have a learning/training function in ETSs or was it simply an administrative requirement?
- Did the VIS influence the subsequent activities of the ETS?
- Did the commissioned (ETS) and implemented (EVAL) VIS indicate both the expected and unexpected changes/impacts generated by the project?



1st phase

A1) Study of literature and reference documents. Development of tables defining evaluation and its phases, monitoring, etc., measurement and social impact, social innovation, as well as an initial theoretical framework on the *ex post* effects of public policies (desk analysis);

A2) Survey and acquisition of projects, followed by the creation and implementation of a reading grid (Table 1) for project proposals, aimed at systematizing the information provided in the "project sheet" by ETS (direct/evaluated clients) on both VIS and delegated third parties, the evaluators (evaluation bodies (EVAL)). Subsequently, the contents expressed therein were analyzed.

The MLPS (indirect client) was contacted by email in July. To date, no response has been received.

Tab.1


Ex-post/impact assessment (Yes/Only indicated/Not VIS)
Description of how it will be carried out (Yes/No)
Ex-post evaluation of project activities/services/recipients, etc.
Identification/indication of theory/methodology
Presence/absence of the word "change" (Yes/No)
Presence/absence of references: "value chain," "social value"
References to the involvement of the community/beneficiaries/stakeholders in the VIS
References to the creation of a model
Reference(s) to VIS as defined in Legislative Decree 106/2016 and in the MLPS VIS Guidelines
Identification of delegated third party/evaluator (Yes indicated/Yes but not identified/No)



1st phase

Table 2

Processing of information/content and preparation of two types of exploratory questionnaires for the client (ETS) and evaluators (EVAL) (Table 2).

Questionnaire content	Recipient: ETS	Recipient: EVAL
Method of selecting/identifying the third party delegated to carry out the ex post/impact evaluation (indicating the presence/absence of previous relationships, the type of these relationships, and any costs/expenses).		
Significant experience: in evaluation; in ex-post/impact evaluation in general. Use of VIS guidelines (taken into consideration).		
Significant experience in ex-post/impact evaluation in/with the third sector.		
Theory/methodology/tools identified/used for the ex-post/impact evaluation of the project; who indicated them and how they were agreed upon.		
Involvement of the client/ETS in identifying the methodological choice, indicating the methods of involvement and at what stage of the project cycle, including the drafting stage.		
Involvement of any partners and/or networks in the evaluation process, indicating the manner of involvement.		
Involvement of local areas in the ex-post/impact evaluation process, indicating the manner of involvement.		
Description of the relationship between the evaluator and the client/ETS and vice versa (indicating any critical issues, positive aspects, and suggestions for improvement).		
Description of any relationship with MLPS - indirect client (indicating any critical issues, positive aspects, and suggestions for improvement).		
Indicate whether the ex-post/impact evaluation has generated any of the following in the activities of the client/ETS (multiple answers possible with justification: social added value; social changes produced thanks to the activities of the funded project; social sustainability of the social action of the interventions/activities planned/carried out with the funded project).		
Experience of ex-post/impact evaluation in general in the project (indicating any critical issues, positive aspects, and suggestions for improvement).		
Experience of ex-post/impact evaluation in the activities of your ETS (indicating any critical issues, positive aspects, and suggestions for improvement).		
Use of the ex-post/impact assessment model in the final social impact report by the client/ETS (specifying the reasons for positive or negative use).		

**2nd phase**

Interviews: 1) with operational representatives, to clarify and supplement the questions in the questionnaires and any suggestions and/or other informative indications to be explored; 2) in-depth interviews with privileged witnesses, to record their views on the process as a whole.

The theoretical framework for this research perspective is expected to be finalized in 2024.

**Phase 3**

Participatory evaluation of VIS. Based on the results of phase 2 of the research, this will involve the actors involved and other stakeholders in reflection—critical, self-critical, etc.—on the cultural process underway with regard to the affirmation of VIS in ETS. This will take place through discussion seminars and/or focus groups (in person/online) with the aim of exposing the difficulties and barriers to developing the potential of VIS as a tool that promotes transformative learning (Engeström 2016).

This is in order to:

- better understand the potential of ETS as (potential) social innovators that draw on organizational and institutional learning based on the results of VIS.

On the other hand;

- formulate practical guidelines and policy considerations to promote and develop VIS in ETS and public policies.

The research report will be published in one of INAPP's editorial formats.



### VIS in funded projects and legal type of ETS

	<i>ODV</i>	<i>APS</i>	<i>TS Foundation</i>	<b>Totals</b>
	3	45	3	51
<b>VIS</b> (declaration of completion attached to Notice 1/2018)	3	36	2	<b>41</b>
<b>Projects</b> for which we do not have Annex D_Notice 1/2018	0	7	1	8
<b>They will not do the VIS</b>	0	2	0	2

Almost all of the funded projects include VIS "in declarative form," so is there interest among proponents in experimenting with it?

Or is it related to the rewards for which a score is assigned by the external commission of the MLPS?

51 projects of national importance were funded:

- 45 to APS
- 3 to voluntary organizations
- 3 to TS foundations.

In 41 projects—for which we have the project sheet and financial plan—field D of the project outline indicates that the VIS will be carried out two years after the end of the activities, of which:

- No. 36 are APS;
- 3 are ODV (voluntary organizations);
- 2 are TS foundations.



### Qualitative consistency of projects between what was declared and what was ascertained

Project proposals that take the form of ex post impact assessments/VIS	Reading grid codes	V.A.
	[Yes]	9
Project proposals that constitute a "simple," "non-VIS" assessment, i.e., only final or ex post	[non-VIS]	25
Project proposals of dubious/unclear configuration	[Yes, unclear] and [Yes, only indicated]:	7
Total		41

Final (at the end of the activities, at the same time as reporting). Its purpose is to ascertain, understand, and explain the validity and representativeness of the results, highlighting, with concise and relevant assessments, the positive aspects and limitations of the results achieved and/or not achieved.

Ex-post evaluation is the set of analytical and interpretative activities aimed at expressing a value judgment on the results achieved by an intervention based on a previous project, comparing them with the expected and pre-established results (specific objectives previously identified and declared).

Ex-post impact assesses 'the results achieved at the end of the activities and the impacts produced two years after the conclusion of the project' (Notice 1/2018 MLPS).

Social impact "is the qualitative and quantitative assessment, in the short, medium, and long term, of the effects of the activities carried out on the reference community with respect to the identified objective" and must be based on social value and function [...] as an expression of participation, solidarity, and pluralism" (Enabling Law 106/2016 and VIS 2019 Guidelines).

Based on the descriptions provided in the project proposals, only a small proportion of the projects (9 out of 41) appear to be ex-post impact assessments and therefore properly VIS (yes-VIS), while more than half of the projects seem to be limited to a simple final or ex-post assessment (non-VIS).

For the remaining projects (7), it is not possible to reach a clear conclusion, as the descriptions are unclear.



**METHODOLOGICAL  
ELEMENTS (a1)**

Type of evaluation of funded projects - Notice 1/2018 MLPS	V.A.				Subtotals
	Yes	With indication of T.M.	No	Unclear	
Ex post impact/VIS (No. 9)	9	9	0	0	9
Final or ex post (No. 25)	7	7	18	0	25
Uncertain configuration (no. 7)	2	6	4	1	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>

The nine VIS projects identify a reference theory and/or indicate methodologies.

Theories and methodologies are also expressed in 13 projects, of which:

- 7 with final or ex post evaluation;
- 6 with evaluations of dubious configuration.



**METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS (a2)**

Theory of Change (in 6 projects in various types of assessment) and the SROI - Social Return on Investment method (in 2 projects) = the theory and method currently "most used/known" in VIS.

\*\*\*\*

A brief description of the theory/methodology is also provided in the projects (5) that reserve the right to identify the evaluation body at a later date.

Type of evaluation of funded projects - Notice 1/2018 MLPS	Theories/methodologies indicated in the project sheet (field 3.5 Model D)	No. of projects
Ex post impact/VIS	Counterfactual approach	1
	<b>Theory of change</b>	<b>2</b>
	Factual and counterfactual method	1
	<b>Theory of change/RCT methodology - Randomized Control Trials</b>	1
	Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology-technique	1
	<b>Theory of change/Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) methods</b>	1
	<b>SROI methodology</b>	<b>1</b>
Final or ex post	<b>Theory of change/SROI methodology</b>	<b>1</b>
	MADIT/Dialogic Science	1
	Social Network Analysis-SNA	1
	Participatory ethnomethodological observation: Arnstein and Hart's circles of participation	1
	Participatory methodologies	2
Uncertain configuration	<b>Theory of change</b>	<b>2</b>
	GIA methodology - Generative Impact Assessment	1
	Evaluating Human Development (EHD) Methodology	1



Presence/absence of keywords  
related to social impact  
assessment

Type of assessment of funded projects - Notice 1/2018 MLPS	Presence/absence of the word			
	Change		Value chain/Social value	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ex post impact/VIS (No. 9)	6	3	3	6
Final or ex post (No. 25)	4	21	0	25
Uncertain classification (No. 7)	4	3	3	4
<b>Totals</b>	14	27	6	35

Presence of some of the "keywords" associated with VIS (theories, models, etc.), such as change and value chain/social value.

Only two refer to VIS as defined in Delegated Law 106/2016 and in the MLPS Guidelines, one of which is a "non-VIS" assessment.

More than two-thirds of the projects that include VIS (26 out of 41) provide a sufficient description of the implementation methods and expected results.

Few projects clarify whether and how the *ex-post* impact assessment/SIA will be carried out on the activities and/or services proposed by the project.

In half of the projects (22 out of 41), there is no description of the *ex-post* evaluation at all, and if we also add the projects with a 'dubious' evaluation configuration, we arrive at well over half of the projects that do not pay attention to planning the evaluation at the time of presentation of the project idea, i.e., it is NOT intended/considered as an integral part of the project itself (project cycle).



**Subject of the evaluation**

12 projects include evaluation for activities/services/recipients, of which 3 are VIS projects, while 4 projects include evaluation for recipients (3 final/ex post). The 3 ex post impact projects (yes/VIS) indicate the involvement of stakeholders, but without describing the methods and/or other useful information.

Type of evaluation of funded projects - Notice 1/2018 MLPS	Subtotals	Ex post/VIS impact	Final or ex post	Unclear configuration
	V.A.			
Target activities	1	1	0	0
Project activities/services/target audience	12	3	8	1
Target audience	4	1	2	1
Interventions	1	1	0	0
Not clear	2	0	1	1
Absent	21	3	14	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>

Type of evaluation of funded projects - Notice 1/2018 MLPS	References to the involvement of the community/beneficiaries/stakeholders in the VIS		
	Yes	No	Not clear
Ex post impact/VIS (no. 9)	3 stakeholders	6	0
Final or ex post (No. 25)	0	23	2
Doubtful configuration (No. 7)	0	6	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>

**Stakeholders involved**

3 ex post impact projects (yes-/VIS) explicitly mention the involvement of stakeholders in the assessment itself, without however describing the methods and/or other useful information.



**Evaluation bodies/  
EVAL**

Type EVAL	No. of projects	No. EVAL
University - Department	3	2
University - instrumental body	4	3
Third sector body	4	4
Private entity	4	4
Hybrid entity	4	2
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>
Not identified during project submission, will be identified at a later date	13	
They did not include a reference to the VIS delegate, and some of them did not indicate the cost/expense in the economic plan, while others did.	9	
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	

EVAL at the time of submission of the project proposal represent all types of evaluation bodies that have emerged in the field of VIS in Italy in recent years. EVALs that are present in more than one project (two) are of only two types: a university spin-off in the form of a cooperative/ETS and two bodies defined as 'hybrids': an international consulting firm operating in Italy as a benefit corporation (B-corp ETS) and a participatory foundation.

Nine projects that are configured – at this *ex ante* stage – as yes-VIS from the presentation of the project proposal indicate EVAL (of four institutional types, excluding university departments).

The remaining 10 projects will indicate EVAL at the time of submission of the project proposal (18 out of 41 projects analyzed that claim to implement VIS) are classified as non-VIS. Among these, the majority are evaluation bodies indicated on more than one project (3 out of 4) and private bodies (3 out of 4). On this basis, the potential for scientific contribution and educational-training investment in the cultural growth of ETS on the topic of VIS by the evaluation bodies involved appears – at this *ex ante* stage – to be rather limited.



**Phase 1:** division of our universe into two macro-subsets, with respect to the actual implementation of VIS in projects (yes-VIS and no-VIS).

1) Declared in the project proposal sheet of the 41 projects dealt with does not correspond to VIS for all of them (25 were judged non-VIS and 7 of dubious configuration) and 2) implemented.

Many assessments are presented as:

- *ex post: of the effects* of the results achieved by an intervention or activity, comparing them with the expected and pre-set results (specific objectives previously identified and declared);
- *of the achievements* of the recently completed project aimed at verifying - through the interventions and activities carried out - the internal efficiency and effectiveness of the ETS.
- *final*, aimed at understanding and explaining the validity and representativeness of the results, with the aim of highlighting in the report, with concise and relevant assessments, the positive aspects and limitations of the results achieved or not achieved.

HYPOTHESIS (*in progress*): in this first phase of the work, the VIS or presumed VIS were not included in a discussion between ETS and evaluators, and therefore in a reflective-constructive process *prior* to the project cycle.

This could lead to the conclusion that its inclusion in the project sheet was considered primarily a formal requirement, prompted by the possibility of obtaining rewards during the evaluation phase.

Deadline for submitting the project to the MLPS, as indicated in the Notice (published on the website on November 8, 2018): 1:00 p.m. on December 10, 2018.



This deadline is also linked to the rules and procedures of State Accounting, which stipulate that expenditure commitments must be made by the end of the calendar year.

In this short period of time, setting up a 'participatory and shared' ex-post impact assessment process by both evaluators and ETS would have been complex or at least cumbersome or incomplete (?).



MLPS, positive aspect: having proposed (only for 2018) to ODVs, APSs, and TS Foundations, with the Notice in question, the testing of VIS in projects of national importance.

Hence the aim of our research:

- to verify and, therefore, evaluate how much this may have stimulated (even unconsciously) a cultural process of transformative learning of meaning in the entities that have shown interest in VIS, in a 'civil perspective' characterized by *the 'emergentist vision of the Third Sector'* (De Benedictis et al. 2023)\*;
- to investigate what cultural resources, strategic visions of organizational development, and long-term perspectives have been put in place by the ETS that have taken up the VIS challenge and the evaluation bodies that have worked on it.

*Emergentist vision:* the Third Sector is 'complementary and, therefore, essential because it is able to overcome the opposition between the state and the market, thus giving full concrete implementation to circular subsidiarity' (Zamagni 2018, Inapp Report 2021) and, at the same time, is capable of modifying existing relationships between the upper echelons of society'.  
*Additive view:* ETSs are called upon by public bodies when needed/required. The Third Sector, therefore, plays a supplementary and supportive role in the tasks entrusted to public institutions (Zamagni 2011).

As far as evaluation professionals are concerned, we foresee from these initial results a possible polarization of the contribution of evaluation bodies: a small core of scientific partners for the structuring of the VIS with ETS on the one hand, and on the other hand, the concrete implementation of the VIS itself', to be made operational (as already indicated in slide 2) in the transition from the 'accountability' phase to the transformative 'social value accountability' phase, within the learning process (coexistence of the two phases).



\*The civil perspective of impact is characterized "as the set of long-term transformations that the actions of relational ecosystems, and the changes influenced by them, contribute to generating for the contexts of reference, i.e., at the same time at the level of people ('micro'), formalized and non-formalized organizations ('meso'), and systems ('macro')," in De Benedictis et al., 2023.

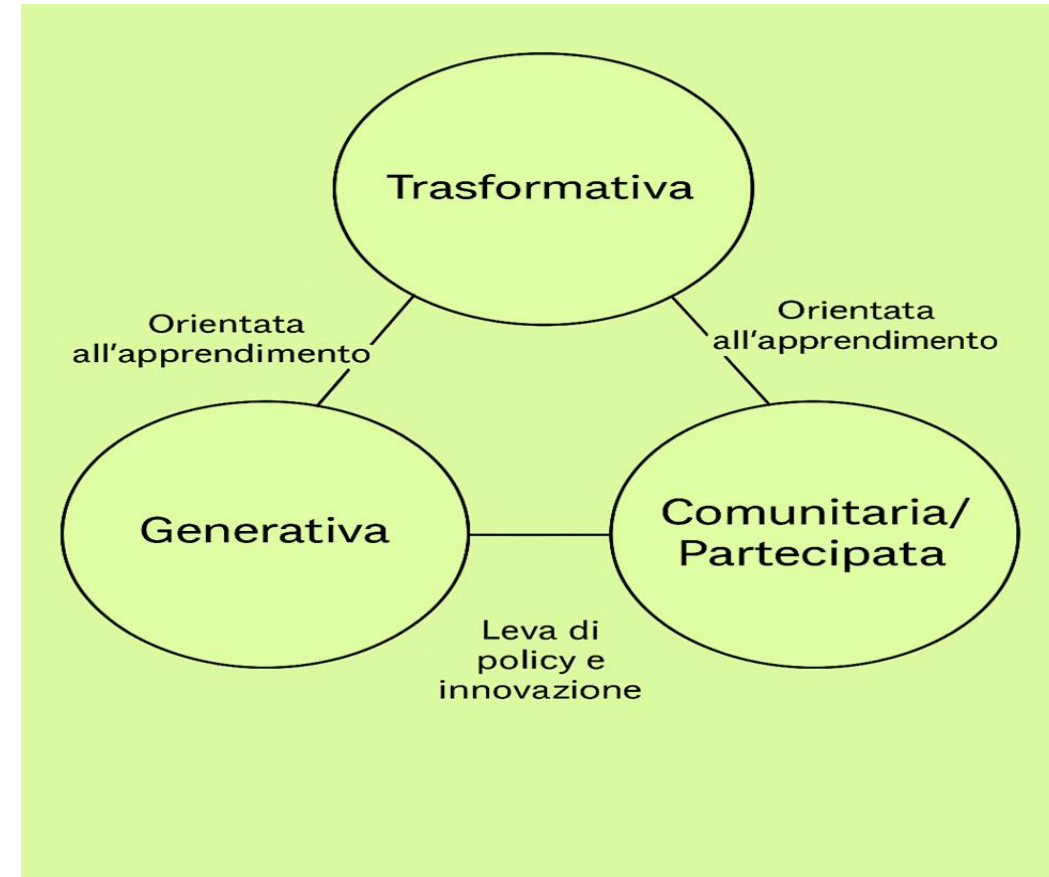
## Representation. Civil perspective of impact: transformative-generative-community

### Civic route and recommendations

In light of the critical issues identified (gap between declared and actual practice, policy discontinuity after 2018, weak stakeholder engagement), the paper proposes a 'civic route' to social impact assessment: a transformative, participatory, and learning-oriented process.

The 2019 MLPS Guidelines provide useful principles (intentionality, measurability, comparability, transparency, participation), but risk formalism if not accompanied by enabling rules and public feedback loops.

The institutionalization of ex-ante VIS (Notice 2/2025) can strengthen the evaluative capacity of third sector entities and transparency, but only if supported by peer review, co-production with users and communities, and institutional learning circuits.



Note: Transformative – Learning-oriented – Generative –  
Community/Participatory – Policy and innovation lever  
Source: De Benedictis, Zamagni, Venturi (2023);  
generative and community-based elaboration: Polidori, September, 2025



## Bibliography

- Cappa F., Del Negro G. (2016) (eds.), Jack Mezirow. The Theory of Transformative Learning, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milan
- De Benedictis L., Miccolis S., Venturi P., Zamagni S. (2023), The civil perspective of social impact, Position Paper, Aiccon, Forlì, University of Bologna
- Engeström Y. (2016), Studies in expansive learning: Learning what is not yet there, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Polidori S., Bartoli G. (2020), Change and social impact in third sector organizations, Administration on the move, Vittorio Bachelet Research Center on Public Administration, April 8, 2020
- Taplin D.H., Clark H. (2012), Theory of Change basics, 2012, ActKnowledge, New York
- Venturi P. (2019), Social impact assessment as a 'transformative' practice, Short Paper 19/2019, Forlì, AICCON
- Venturi P., (2022), Social Impact Policy (by design). Shared Administration and Social Impact. The dawn of a new 'asset class' of policies, May 24, 2022, Social Impact course, IFITEL
- Zamagni S. (2018), The philosophical basis of third sector reform, in UBI Comunità, Conference 09.10.2017: Third sector reform and financing instruments, Milan, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore - UBI Banca
- Zamagni S. (2011), White Paper on the Third Sector, Milan, Il Mulino

## Regulatory references

- Council Recommendation on developing the framework conditions for the social economy, C/2023/1344, 27 11 2023
- Legislative Decree No. 117 of July 3, 2017 - Third Sector Code, pursuant to Article 1, paragraph 2, letter b) of Law No. 106 of June 6, 2016, as amended
- Ministerial Decree of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies of July 23, 2019 - Guidelines for the implementation of systems for assessing the social impact of activities carried out by third sector entities
- Law No. 106 of June 6, 2016 - Delegation to the Government for the reform of the Third Sector, social enterprises, and the regulation of universal civil service
- EESC OPINION (2013) - Measuring social impact, INT/721, Brussels





*"[...] It is through discussion that programs and services can be managed by mobilizing the expert and tacit knowledge of organizations and social groups. In today's political-cognitive dynamics, evaluation can socialize and externalize practical-organizational knowledge to guide the democratic management of public affairs in a modern state [...]" (Marra, 2018)\* and in doing so, it is necessary to define and give meaning, that is, "call something by its [right] name" (De Benedictis et al. 2023)\*\**

\*See [https://www.bollettinoadapt.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/INAPP\\_Sinappsi\\_1\\_2018.pdf](https://www.bollettinoadapt.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/INAPP_Sinappsi_1_2018.pdf).

\*\*See <https://www.aiccon.it/la-prospettiva-civile-impatto-sociale/>.



**Thanks for sharing!**

Sabina Polidori (Inapp – Civil Economy) - [s.polidori@inapp.gov.it](mailto:s.polidori@inapp.gov.it)

Ksenija Fonović (Charles University – Faculty of Humanities) - [ksenija.fonovic@fhs.cuni.cz](mailto:ksenija.fonovic@fhs.cuni.cz)



[www.inapp.gov.it](http://www.inapp.gov.it)