Preface

> The challenge for non-profit scholars is to ensure that research that has relevance for policy, practice, and/or management translates those findings into usable knowledge. In other words, scholars should invest a portion of their writing to address the "so what" question for both research and practice contributions.
>
> —Brenda K. Bushouse and Jessica E. Sowa[1]

I have kept these words in mind while writing this book. The field of study that we analyse as non-profit scholars is a breeding ground for gathering insights and developing new theories to increase our knowledge. But the give-and-take process between theory and practice should be two-way and continuous. I wanted my work to be relevant for practitioners, for whom the issue of assessing the impact of their activities on society is becoming a pressing need.

Several biases have emerged in the discussion of how to measure social impact. Why should organizations spend time and resources measuring what they can see with their own eyes? What benefits can be derived from it? And is it really possible to quantify and/or monetize qualitative data? These are pertinent questions that have often been asked by scholars, but it is difficult to answer them with theoretical contributions. This book is an attempt to find answers to these questions, and to move forward the practice of social impact assessment, most of all within social enterprises.

The reason why I chose to address this topic is the opportunity I have had to study both the theory and practice of the social impact assessment process, which has enabled me to see a wide gap between the former and the latter. Social impact assessment is widely addressed in the literature as an emerging issue and several contributions stress its key role in unlocking new value, especially for social enterprises. The benefits that come from the implementation of this practice have been pointed out by numerous voices. However, it seems that very little of this

[1] Bushouse, B. K., & Sowa, J. E. (2012). Producing Knowledge For Practice Assessing NVSQ 2000–2010. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *41*(3), 497–513.

knowledge is actually perceived and shared by social entrepreneurs in practice. Everyone is now aware of the importance of assessing social impact in improving the activities of organizations, but is everyone aware of the range of tools available for social entrepreneurs in implementing this practice?

This book should be seen as a link that helps readers to "mind the gap" and leads social entrepreneurs into social impact assessment through a better knowledge of models that could support them in driving the process. It addresses entrepreneurs, managers and practitioners who might face this issue in their everyday work, but also scholars and academics, who can further develop and improve the existing body of knowledge through their contributions.

I could not have written this book without the incentives and suggestions of my supervisor, the patience of my colleagues, and the full support of my family and my husband.

A loving thought for you all, and for what is going to come.

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