

Assessing the Social Impacts of Regional Services: The Case of a Portuguese Municipality

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Abstract—In recent years, the social economy is increasingly seen as a viable means to address social problems. Social enterprises, as well as public projects and initiatives targeted to meet social purposes, offer organizational models that assume heterogeneity, flexibility and adaptability to the 'real world and real problems'. Despite the growing popularity of social initiatives, decision makers still face a paucity in what concerns the available models and tools to adequately assess its sustainability, and its impacts, notably the nature of its contribution to economic growth. This study was carried out at the local level, by analyzing the social impact initiatives and projects promoted by the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha (Câmara Municipal de Albergaria-a-Velha -CMA), a municipality of 25,000 inhabitants in the central region of Portugal. This work focuses on the challenges related to the qualifications and employability of citizens, which stands out as one of the key concerns in the Portuguese economy, particularly expressive in the context of small-scale cities and inland territories. The study offers a characterization of the Municipality, its socio-economic structure and challenges, followed by an exploratory analysis of multiple sourced data, collected from the CMA's documental sources as well as from privileged informants. The purpose is to conduct detailed analysis of the CMA's social projects, aimed at characterizing its potential impact for the model of qualifications and employability of the citizens of the Municipality. The study encompasses a discussion of the socio-economic profile of the municipality, notably its asymmetries, the analysis of the social projects and initiatives, as well as of data derived from inquiry actors involved in the implementation of the social projects and its beneficiaries. Finally, the results obtained with the Better Life Index will be included. This study makes it possible to ascertain if what is implicit in the literature goes to the encounter of what one experiences in reality.

Keywords—Measurement, municipalities, social economy, social impact.

I. INTRODUCTION

AT present, it is noticeable through the media, in particular, informal documents and debates, a greater emphasis under the themes related to crisis, restructuring, authority, reduction of public expenditures that are prominent in reducing social benefits, unemployment and wage cuts at the level Governmental, private and public-private enterprises [1]. All these concepts are direct consequences of the economic crisis that Portugal has gone through in recent years. This crisis has manifested itself both economically and socially. As a result of the crisis, Portugal and the rest of Europe started to develop companies that are committed to social well-being and are aimed at solving the remaining problems of the crisis. These companies of social nature can

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be of private or public tutoring.

When analyzing the problem of the emergence of social enterprises, the growth of poverty in Europe is notorious and, initially, the countries did not have the means and tools to give an efficient response to the various problems that the crisis brought about, to promote and guarantee the sustainability of the community [2].

Currently, the social economy is seen as a promoter of improvement in the areas of education, unemployment and/ or social exclusion. The idea of social enterprises prevails in relation to the other typologies of companies, by the concept of heterogeneity and flexibility in adapting to the "real world and real problems", being seen as a point of reference in solving problems of the society [3]. As government institutions are no longer able to respond to social problems, research in the field of social enterprises is becoming increasingly important and how they have become competitive elements in economic growth and maintain social impact. There are a number of organizational characteristics and activities of public interest, previously stipulated [4].

This paper intends to analyze this issue and outline a panorama/trend of social enterprises in services for economic growth, that is, to measure their impact and whether it is significant in the markets; in particular, the study of the impact of these companies/projects on the economic level of municipalities. The municipalities are the governmental structures closest to their community.

The study aims to understand how the projects developed by the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha can be seen as "houses of the social economy" [5]; in other words, how social action projects are denominated companies social policies.

Each social action project has its own management, its own budgets and tools to be implemented in the field, having as main objective the satisfaction of a need of the society, namely of the community of Albergaria-a-Velha.

This study is characterized by three distinct moments of evaluation. The first part is the interviews for the analysis of social action projects; the second part is the realization and applicability of a questionnaire to the beneficiaries and their respective project teams and, finally, the adaptation of Index Better Life to the context of the municipalities. It should be noted that due to the diversification of contexts, this study had the need to delimit the study in the areas of employability, education and social welfare.

In view of the above, we intend to answer the following question: How can we measure the social impact of regional services, namely, in the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha. Next, the sub-questions inherent in solving the problem

question will be presented.

- How the SAP (Social Action Project) came about and how it is being implemented on the ground;
- How the techniques responsible for SAP feel and see the sustainability of it;
- How do beneficiaries evaluate the SAP that they enjoy in their quality of life;
- How to frame the SAP with the tools defended in the literature review.

As mentioned, methodologically, the study is divided into three parts, in which the first focuses on the analysis of SAP through interviews, the second part on the applicability of questionnaires to two distinct publics and the third part on the adaptation of the Better Life Index.

II. THEORETICAL GROUNDING

In recent years, the concept of social economy has been the subject of intense debate, in order to achieve an objective and clear definition.

The concept of social economy is often related to social intervention activities, such as the "third sector" or solidarity economy. There is currently no exact definition for each element and it is preferable not to differentiate them. What often prevails is the social reality in which the social economy or the third sector is inserted.

The concept of social enterprise has been generating some controversy, so no conceptual definition has yet been reached. Some authors such as Mort; Weerawardena and Carnegie "point to the fact that there is no precise and consistent definition of the term social enterprise" [6].

The terminology of social enterprise emerged in Italy in the late 1980s and began to be used throughout Europe in the 1990s [7]. In a first moment, social enterprises aimed to respond to environmental problems and the challenges and obstacles that non-profit organizations faced [7].

Social impact is a national and international concern, and increasingly, it is an object of study in debates in schools, universities, and communities, in order to determine measures and to define it in a clear and objective way.

The idea of social impact is strictly related to the social value produced by organizations [8], as a result from an activity that can have a negative or positive value.

The social economy begins to have some weight in the economy. According to a recent article in the national press, in Social Economy [9], there is already an awareness about the weight that the social economy can have in Portuguese GDP. "Although the value of the social economy can't be evaluated only by economic - financial criteria, other indicators such as well-being, sustainable development may be appropriate to measure the social economy, which has a dual-purpose operating in the market to achieve social objectives."

The social economy in Portugal in 2013 reflected around 2.8% of national gross value added (GVA), about 5.2% of total employment and about 6.0% of paid employment [10].

The most recent report of the [11], "the remuneration paid by the Social Economy constituted 5.2% of total remuneration, while the average remuneration in the sector

corresponded to 86.4% of the average remuneration in the economy as a whole".

In Portugal, there are already a diversified number of organizations that compose the social economy sector. Currently, there are a group of activities such as sports, culture and recreation that represent about 50% of activities in the social economy. Social security, cults, and congregations also play a significant role in the set of social economic activities [11].

The social economy aims to respond to its community and involve it in its projects. The municipalities aim for a sustainable development at the community level, finding ideas, capacities, and experiences appropriate to the surrounding community [12].

The municipalities have to take into account the migration of people, especially from small-scale territories. It is necessary to create an involvement with these people in order to see prospects of continuing in that region [12].

The municipalities have to go beyond their old rural traditions, but meet these new needs imposed by society and the technological development. In this way, municipalities must have infrastructures that support the internet, cultural activities, cable TV installations, drinking water, waste system, public transport, school transport, revitalization of degraded spaces, creation of tourist routes within the municipality, access to doctors, and nurses [12].

In 2013, the European Parliament's Social Economy Framework Law proposes that social economy can be seen as an asset for local initiatives, being seen as an alternative to capitalism in the traditional profit oriented economy, by offering the opportunity to develop innovative initiatives [12].

There is now a need to create synergies between municipalities and its industrial assets and services in order to create "social economy houses" that will provide and offer services and products to their community [12]. Commonly cited examples include the provision of better services at lower prices, and the engagement in local entrepreneurship initiatives, job training centers, incubators, and shelters for the most vulnerable community. In this way, they will help the population to reorganize their lives, providing an increase of their well-being.

The "houses of the social economy" would be an old vision of what the people's home was, providing permanent monitoring of the community, revitalizing the areas lacking employability and economic sustainability [12].

The social economy is one of the essential tools in the aid of new solutions for the municipalities that increasingly face more cases of economic vulnerability of the community [12].

Measuring social impact is an added value to all stakeholders in the organization in order to understand how the organization is and what strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. According to Nicholls (2009), social impact measurement can help social enterprises establish realistic goals, monitor and improve performance, prioritize decisions and the most competitive access capital markets [13].

But measuring social impact may not be an easy task, an

organization's performance can be difficult as it may be related to various activities other than social [14]. States that "As it can't be effectively measured using traditional indicators"; in this way, the instrument used in for-profit enterprises cannot be applied to social ones.

III. METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the present study is divided into three parts, the first part being interviews and the second part the questionnaire's applicability to the beneficiaries and the respective SAP staff, and the third part the adaptation of Better Life Index. It should be noted that due to the diversification of contexts, this study had the need to delimit the study in the specific areas: employability, education and social welfare.

In view of the above, we intend to answer the following question: How can we measure the social impact of regional services, namely, in the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha. Next, the sub-questions inherent in solving the problem question will be presented.

1. How SAPs have emerged and how they are being implemented;
2. How the SAP techniques feel and see the sustainability of it;
3. How do beneficiaries evaluate their quality of life satisfaction?
4. How to frame SAP with the tools defended in the literature review.

As mentioned, the study is divided into three parts.

In order to answer the central question, it is necessary to understand the reason for the appearance of social action projects within the City Hall. Today, the Chambers are close to their community and are the first to feel the difficulties that their community is expressing. Faced with this proximity, the City Councils are the first institution to respond or to direct their community during a process of socio-economic vulnerability.

The town councils are seen as social economy houses, in other words, these may have small social economy companies [14].

In the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha there are already several initiatives at a social level to address the failures provided by the crisis and the vulnerability of its surrounding community.

As the literature indicates, there are already some tools to measure social impact; however there is still some resilience in adopting them. Measuring quantitatively the social impact that SAP can have is difficult, although techniques such as certification that allow a more quantifiable assessment through audits and financial accounting already exist.

In terms of well-being and quality of life measurement tools such as Index Better Life already exist. At the literature level there are still not many measurements made at the regional level through social projects. Thus, for the present study, care was taken to study in detail the best way to measure the social impact of SAP.

As social action projects still do not have much information about the measurement theme, it is essential to define the best

techniques that allow a more complete and interesting response from the scientific point of view.

A. Interview

The interview was prepared in advance. Before the interviews, each of the SAP that were analyzed was analyzed in order to have a greater knowledge and question the interviewee in a more assertive way, always giving space for it to express itself on their SBP.

In the first phase of the research process that aims to analyze the role of CM - Albergaria-a-Velha in solving problems in the areas of employability, education and social, we used the interview to promote debate and analysis of SAP of the municipality with the various constituent elements of the teams and the direction. Each interview had as its main objective the understanding and analysis of the rationale, the applicability and the opinion of its beneficiaries of the SAP. An analysis grid of SAP was elaborated with the intention of being the basic script of the interview process, in order to direct the key issues for the perception of the theme and its due response. However, during the interview, the various stakeholders have the possibility to encourage new issues in the subject under study.

The selection of the interviewees was based on the fact that they were the coordinators of each SAP and thus had greater knowledge of each project.

During the interviews, care was taken in the conduct of the interviews, providing uniformity and equity during the three interviews. The duration of each interview was approximately 1 hour and each individual meeting was held in each meeting room.

It is noted that the answers given and their opinions were recorded in the SAP analysis grid.

Before conducting the interviews, the "Project Analysis Grid" was sent to each T by e-mail so that they prepared for the type of questions that would be asked.

B. Questionnaire

In order to have a better perception of the reality among the beneficiaries of the social action projects and what the advantages and warnings that the SAP will have with the beneficiary community, a questionnaire, divided by eight sections, was administered in order to evaluate their satisfaction and their level of importance/agreement.

The questionnaire has two different audiences, the beneficiaries of the SAP and the elements of each SAP team. Thus, the initial questionnaire that would only be applied to the beneficiaries was adapted to the coordination teams of each SAP, with the aim of having two different perspectives of who benefits from the social action project and who coordinates it.

The questionnaire is based on de Sousa, being duly adapted to the theme under study and directed to the social economy [15].

It should be noted that the adoption of this method of analysis of customer satisfaction through the SERVQUAL method of the 5 Gaps, from the point of view of research in

Economics, is not used. The SERVQUAL model is used in Management Studies to Evaluate Customer Satisfaction, perhaps the purpose of the study is the social impact assessment and in this case, it can be seen, as the evaluation of its satisfaction in the project(s) social benefit. Measuring your satisfaction through this method allows you to have more reliable results and greater sustainability by checking the impact of SAP on the community that used it.

The questionnaire implemented contains questions that allow the identification of facts, attitudes, satisfaction, opinion and values of the respondents [16].

The types of question that the questionnaire refers to are open and closed questions. The open answer question allows you to get more information and the respondent has complete freedom to express their opinion. However, this type of question has the disadvantage in the subsequent analysis of the questionnaires by the researcher [16]. However, the closed-ended questions are easy to analyze, but the individual is limited to the options [16].

The questionnaire is composed of eight sections, three of which are common in both questionnaires, grouped by criteria to evaluate gaps between importance and satisfaction [17].

To elaborate the questionnaire, we resorted to an adaptation of the SERVQUAL model in order to evaluate the difference that the projects of social action can have.

The SERVQUAL model is based on the dimensions defined by Parasuraman et al.: "tangibility - associated with the appearance of physical and human elements; reliability - ability to provide the service in a dignified and cared manner; responsiveness - availability to help the customer and provide fast service; trust-knowledge of employees, provision of the service without errors and meets the defined dates; empathy - care and attention given to the client" [18].

According to Parasuraman et al., this model, SERVQUAL, based on the 5 Gaps, that is to say, "in the discrepancy between the expectations of the beneficiary of the service, the service that will receive and the perceptions about the service actually rendered" [19].

Given the objective of the research to analyze the impact that SBP beneficiaries have on them, they will present four of the five dimensions model throughout the questionnaire [20].

C. Index Better Life

The index created by the OECD Better Life Index makes it possible to evaluate the welfare of the society of the various OECD countries, in order to create policies for the various actions (education, income, housing, environment, social satisfaction, among others).

This study intends to contribute to the development of the adaptation of the index created by the OECD, at the municipal level, to create policies more directed to the needs of its community.

With the results obtained in the questionnaires, it is possible to create a municipal index, based on the objectives of the Better Life Index. To restrict this index, only the personal satisfaction of the beneficiaries will be analyzed, that is, how much the beneficiaries consider themselves happy, through the

criterion "Feel happier".

The index is based on the mean of the criterion responses for each SAP. The adoption of this measure, serves as reference value for the creation of personal satisfaction ranking. Although this tool, in measurable terms, being subjective is, however, an advantageous tool for comparing how SAP contributes to the beneficiary's personal satisfaction.

IV. RESULTS

In general, and as the results obtained are positive through, it can be concluded that the questions were answered as follows:

Through the interviews it was evidenced that SAP came about through governmental regulations that the Chamber accepted and developed, such as the PS-01, others emerged through synergies, such as the Padre António Vieira-Montepio Foundation and the IEFP, namely SAP, PED-01 And PED-02. Other projects have arisen within the scope of the needs of the municipality, with the objective to fill or minimize some problems, such as projects directed to well-being and education.

In view of the second question, the SAP techniques agree that they are sustainable and evidenced both in the interviews and in their questionnaires and the importance they give in the search for improvements in relation to the service rendered.

One of the techniques confirms that there is a desire to grow in social economy and there is already a project under development - "Social housing" - this project involves the restoration of buildings with the purpose of creating social neighborhoods for the economically vulnerable community, where these neighborhoods belong to the Chamber.

In the third question, the beneficiaries are mostly satisfied and confirm that their quality of life has increased, all SAP are an aid to their development and to their economic organization. However, a minority do not agree that their quality of life has increased, either because they have not yet found employment or because they are voluntary and in economic terms their quality of life is stagnant and improved only on a personal level.

To fit the empirical study with the literature it was decided to adapt the Index Better life, instead of being at the country level, to the municipalities and to use it as a development management tool. As evidenced by the literature, this index evaluates several areas allowing the creation of an index and policies to improve them.

In my opinion and as Leite refers, "municipalities are houses of social commendation" and yes, each project can be seen as a social enterprise, there is a need of the population, goals are designed to mitigate or reduce the effects of the problem, specific regulations are drawn up for each project and then the service that meets the needs of the population is elaborated [21].

The impact of regional services can be measured by adopting the questionnaires presented: with the adaptation of the SERVQUAL model and with the dimensions of the quality of the service provided for customer satisfaction. Through the transversally of a management tool it is possible to adapt to

the scope of an economic study.

V. CONCLUSION

Increasingly, partner companies have emerged within the framework of traditional third sector organizations, in order to respond to the needs of the population and the social repression experienced [22].

Currently, municipalities are looking for sustainable development with concern for socio-economic problems. They are privileged because of the proximity they have in their community, are the main agent of local development, strengthen strategies appropriate to their municipality and surrounding community, creating "a set of local actions taking into account the interests of their community" [23].

The municipality should offer jobs, education and services that meet the needs of its community, finding ideas, capacities and experiences to its community [23].

Social enterprises are essential in helping new solutions for municipalities that are increasingly faced with cases of community economic vulnerability [23]. In this way, it can be concluded that social action projects can be considered as social enterprises within the Chamber.

The growing importance in these new projects of social initiative is an asset, not only for the community that benefits from these projects and initiatives, but also for global and national economic growth.

These social action projects are a "trend", both in the acceptance of society and in the market itself. Nowadays, this new ideology of social projects provided by the City Council is indispensable, as it is the Municipal Councils that are closer to their community and feel their needs the most.

The social action projects in the Municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha are having a positive impact on their community, not only by the citizens who benefit from them, but also the other community that values these types of initiatives.

The City Council goes beyond education and qualifications, safeguarding the well-being of its community mainly from the most economically vulnerable population, assisting in the lease support by providing a monetary fund and contributing to the financing of monthly billing of domestic consumption of water, sanitation and urban waste.

In terms of educational projects, employability and qualifications, the City Council and the IIEFP have created a job exchange that directs the citizen to a job more directed to his qualifications and taking advantage of and enhancing his professional and personal qualities, power the community to the entrepreneurship and to create their own employment by providing the business incubator.

At the educational level, the Chamber works together with schools in order to be closer to the younger community, encouraging higher education by offering scholarships, volunteering in the Municipality and for young people who prefer a more the professional, to choose a course with a high level of employability in the companies of the Municipality.

All these actions and social projects are having a high positive impact in the Municipality, reflecting in this way on the well-being and quality of life of the community.

Increasingly, there is a greater importance and awareness of what the social economy is and the benefits it offers to society.

The present study entitled "Measuring Social Impact in Regional Services - the case of a Municipality" aims to answer four questions: How did SAP arise and how is it being applied on the ground? How do the techniques responsible for SAP feel and see the sustainability of it? How do beneficiaries evaluate the SAP that they enjoy in their quality of life? And, how to frame the SAP with the tools defended in the literature review. To answer these questions the research was based on three distinct moments: the interviews with SAP techniques, the application of questionnaires to the beneficiaries and the technical team and adaptation of Better Life Index.

Social action projects can be considered social economy enterprises, although they are being developed by the City Council, these projects aim to respond to the needs of their community such as social exclusion, education, employment and poverty. All CM-Albergaria-a-Velha projects aim to reduce or mitigate the problems of your community. SAP are developed in partnership with other entities, either defined by the Government or created by the Chamber itself, in which it creates its project for that specific need of its population.

The three moments of research were essential to answer the questions; however, it is noteworthy that the questionnaires were the tool that could measure the impact through the eight sections that it contained.

The primary results obtained from the beneficiary community are that together, SAP have a positive impact. They are mostly satisfied and claim that their quality of life has improved. The beneficiaries feel more confident and the involvement with the municipality is very important for their reintegration into the community.

The beneficiaries emphasize the importance of the beneficiary-employee relationship throughout the SAP process, as well as the knowledge of the employees according to each project. However, they make some complaints such as: excessive documentation, poor management of SAP delivery and frequent visits to the immediate surroundings of the Chamber. Suggest greater dissemination of the projects.

In the municipality of Albergaria-a-Velha, there are already several social action projects and it is expected to create new projects such as "Social Housing" (creating social neighborhoods for the most vulnerable population) and increasing vacancies for other projects such as the PED-01, and with the increase of the donation of school books, it is possible that higher numbers of the population benefit from these same books- PED-02.

The creation and enrichment of the industrial fabric will be possible with the restructuring of the professional courses and qualification of the unemployed in the areas most enriching the industrial fabric.

It is concluded that social enterprises and social action projects are already a concern for investors and entrepreneurs, but it is important that there is a greater promotion of social projects, with society, demystifying what this new ideology to society, such as increasing their quality of life.

For the development of the Social Economy, and especially

of social enterprises/ projects, it is necessary to resort to the management tools used in the traditional market in order to reduce the fears that researchers and entrepreneurs may have with this new concept.

This study is an example of how a social management tool can be adapted and consolidated with a tool for measuring social impact, in this case, the Better Life Index.

VI. FUTURE STUDY

As future research work, the continuation of the application of questionnaires is suggested in order to evaluate the impact to other municipalities and in order to prove that the SAP is important for the development of the beneficiary, for the quality of life of the same and for the surrounding community. Adaptation of the Better Life Index is possible, in order to continue with the development and to evaluate other areas such as education and employability of the municipality and the creation of policies for improvement.

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