**Summary of cultural organizations' SI practices in Estonia, based on country report**

**Introduction**

This research was carried out by the HEISE team of the Estonian Business School in spring 2018. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers of one arts organization and one arts funding body. The semi-structured interviews served three main aims: 1) to study the prevailing perceptions and (variation in) understandings of the concept of societal impact, 2) to map and study the current practices in evaluation/assessment of societal impact, 3) to study whether and how societal impact is used as a decision-making criterion in managerial decision-making processes in HEIs. A summary of the main findings and insights into different aspects of societal impact are provided in the following sections.

The interviews revealed that the terms "societal impact" and "social impact" are more often viewed as different terms rather than as synonyms. "Social impact" was considered to be a narrower term than "societal impact".

**Stakeholders' perceptions and understandings of the concept of societal impact**
The results of semi-structured interviews clearly reveal that defining "societal impact" turned out to be a rather challenging task for the interviewees. This can be illustrated by the diversity of definitions of "societal impact" offered by interviewees. According one of the respondents, SI is a way to influence directly the fields provided with financial support in order to achieve a (positive) change. The other respondent saw SI as influencing societal processes through culture and stressed the role of being "active" in this process. The following short summary illustrates what are the prevailing understandings and deviations from common (prevailing) understandings of different types of impacts.

**"Intended and unintended" and "direct and indirect impacts".** The unanimous understanding among the interviewees is that all types of impacts should be considered when assessing SI. However, one respondent admitted that their focus has so far been little concerned with unintended impacts. On the other hand, the same respondent revealed that sometimes it is the "accidental/sudden" impact that it it impossible to ignore.

**Material and non-material impacts.** According to interviewees' understanding, both material and non-material impacts should be taken into consideration in SI assessment. However, as one of the interviewees represented a funding body, it was noted that it is through monetary intervention that non-monetary impact is achieved – when an artist is funded, he/she is able to create art. Material impacts' reslations to state level arts funding were brought up, as well as a convincing strategy for adoption.

**Monetary and non-monetary impacts.** Both of the interviewees share the viewpoint that both monetary and non-monetary impacts should be addressed in the process of SI assessment. One respondent claimed that measuring based on market prices should be preferred as it contributes better to comparability.

**Mapping of stakeholders' current practices in measuring societal impact**
Electronic systems for the collection of data on performance results and, based on them, possible impact as well have been well established, as both organizations possess electronic registers. However, both art organizations confessed that as yet these systems are not being used optimally, even though each time during the planning process the results of previous performances are taken into consideration in order to make the process smoother. Both respondents admitted that they have very promising data (wide and detailed) in their hands but that it needs to be interpreted by

professionals and that these professionals cannot be found inside their organizations due to the organizations' size and focus.

It is difficult to conclude much regarding the methodologies and indicators used to analyze the data, as they were described in rather general terms. One way to interpret this is that established methodologies do not exist yet or that the respondents are just not properly aware of the terminology to describe them in detail.

The four-year planning process of a performance was defined by one interviewee as leading to an "explosion", leaving the organizers in the position of only "witnessing its outcomes as it is physically not possible to grasp it all". And, as can be imagined, after such an explosion everybody is far too tired from dealing with cleaning up to analyze the (positive) damage called cultural exposure.

**The role of societal impact in managerial decisions**
One art organization considered an understanding of the societal impact of their organization (and its activities) as very important, as for them (being a state-funded body) it is important to see if the choice of activities they fund is actually justified. Currently they are in the middle of the first outsourced assessment of SI. Outcomes of this SI assessment are expected to have an impact—activating individual sponsors to donate. The council is expected to take into account the SI assessment results when the next funding priorities are formulated. Both respondents stressed that analyzing SI assessment outcome results in better and more accountable managerial decisions. The interviewers felt strongly during the interviews that the need for SI assessment has been understood overall, and that the first steps to implement assessment a professional way have already been taken. However, what is still lacking is know-how—more efforts are needed to build capacity in this particular area. The shortage of qualified staff is a very pertinent issue that was brought up by both organizations interviewed.

**Conclusions**
The main reason why art organizations consider SI measurement important is because it helps to make better decisions in the future, but also to improve the image of the organizations. Both organizations interviewed can be called early adopters of SI measurement in the Estonian context. As there are very few local best practices available, their activities in the field of SI measurement can most probably be reported as current best practices – one organization assessing SI internally and the other outsourcing assessment. Both claimed that the need for SI measurement would be better acknowledged in society if there were more examples to follow. One interviewee brought up an important point – there seems to be lack of involvement of scientists in setting state-level priorities in Estonia.

Reference for quotation

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