

Evaluation of the social impact of public and private interventions — methodological questions around knowledge management

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The context of the knowledge economy represents a multitude of influences and of conditioning factors, which affect all spheres of social life, including business and public policy decision-making processes. The programmed society was already pinpointed by Alain Touraine, in 1970. The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new visions and strategies related to such public and private interactions, focusing on innovation and collaboration, giving rise to new academic areas such as knowledge management and organizational learning. This evolution implies an effort to respond to the challenges posed by the globalization of markets and the impact of information and communication technologies. Central to this process has been the growing awareness related to the issue of sustainability, addressing the increased need to respond to complexity in transdisciplinary ways. The core idea of sustainability is the holistic perspective, which integrates environmental, economic and social dimensions in a single model. This represents a crucial move forward that has been pressing both public and private decision-making. Also, this model has been gradually influencing public opinion and consumer behavior towards a higher level of sensitiveness and awareness related to the links between ecological production and consumption that is also inclusive and promotes social cohesion, both within and between different nations and economic regions. Critical to this process is the need to further develop the practical and methodological processes that enable the evaluation of the social impact of public and private decision-making. Benefit-cost methodologies have been used for decades yet there is room for further intensification of such evaluation strategies. These methodologies are relevant both for institutions and institutional settings and for economic regions because they enable, on one side, the evaluation of the potential for winwin, collaborative options and, on the other side, they also help to design and to implement authentic and evidence based sustainable strategies.