

## Article

# Is Psychological Value a Missing Building Block in Societal Sustainability?

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**Abstract:** Value creation is a constitutive and defining aspect in organizational ventures. This is unsurprising, as it is required for organizational survival and sustainability. Approaches based on the creation of economic, social and ecological value draw attention to the multiple and multiplicative nature of value creation. While academia still acknowledges the conceptual value of such approaches, a framework that add a psychological dimension to the established Elkington's triple-bottom line model seems particularly refreshing and inspiring. Relying on the concepts of psychological value and sustainability, this paper presents the outcomes of an exploratory empirical study involving managers and users/customers of four organizations in the social sector in Portugal. This study discusses how managers and users/customers of these organizations make sense of and value psychological value. The outcomes of the interviews with both managers and users/customers shed light into the unexplored, hazy and neglected analytical links that may exist between psychological value and broader perspectives on sustainability. We conclude that this novel approach enhances our understanding about the impact that a social product can have in societal sustainability.

**Keywords:** psychological value; tetrad-value theory; societal sustainability; social product; social entrepreneurship

## 1. Introduction

An economic, social and ecological perspective on value—the so called ‘triple-bottom line’—is needed if we are to have a better understanding of value creation in modern societies [1]. While academics still acknowledge the conceptual value of such approaches, a particularly refreshing and inspiring framework has been proposed which adds an underestimated yet critical psychological dimension to the triple-bottom line approach to value creation. Because it includes a distinctive yet interrelated set of four values, this model has been dubbed ‘Tetrad-value theory’ [2]. Intangibles such as confidence, trust, affiliation, attachment, identification, or commitment, exemplify psychological-laden concepts that have now become generally accepted in organizational and management studies. For instance, entrepreneurship scholars, who have been investigating the contextual, political, economic, cognitive and dispositional antecedents of entrepreneurial behaviour, have included psychological value in their approaches, e.g., [3–5]. It is now well beyond dispute that tangible variables such as economic and financial aspects are crucial to organizational survival and sustainability. However, organizational activity affects many other walks of life, viz. social, ecological and psychological spheres. And some of these intangible features are particularly sensitive in public and social sectors [6]. In this context, this study aims to shed light into the fact that many products (goods, services or ideas) have a psychological impact in their users/customers (hereinafter ‘users’), affecting their behaviours and/or transforming their lives. This is rather important in today's developed societies where many people are looking for emotional counselling; where most sold medicines are

related with anxiety, depression and other central nervous system illnesses, with negative psychological implications; where so many vulnerable populations need social and psychological support; where the need for enhanced competencies are crucial for people's survival; and, where happiness became the ultimate social and personal goal mainly in developed countries.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of sustainability has gained particular political, economic and social attention after the Brundtland Commission Report—'Our Common Future' (1987)—which laid down the four building blocks of organizational sustainability [7]: Lean (conservation of non-environmental resources), Green (conservation of non-renewable natural resources), Ethical (commitment to and practice of social equity and justice, community involvement and contribution and positive regard for treatment of the enterprise's human capital) and Real (implying lean, green and ethical practices and their financial, societal and environmental results). The surges and sediments of such a Report are enormous. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to see Sustainability Policy statements of large firms included in their business reports, with explicit references to financial, environmental and social assessment practices [8]. This suggests that sustainability has grown to permeate not only organizational practice but also organizational discourse and, as such, organizational life [9]. This is not irrelevant for organizations and all their stakeholders, as practice infuses discourse and discourse is likely to influence practice. Notwithstanding their different sources of inspiration, information and motivation and either explicitly or implicitly, many organizations are adopting a triple-bottom line approach, that is, accommodating Elkington's three P's (People, Planet and Profit) in their policies and practices [1].

The concept of sustainability is illuminating and powerful in that it is more intrinsically appealing and less threatening or disputed than competing and pressing themes, such as efficacy, flexibility or cost reduction. It is probably hard to find anyone who is against the idea of sustainability, while cost reduction evokes fears of displacement, unemployment and threats to the financial sustainability of national social security systems, or social order. Sustainability can probably be best seen as a powerful discursive device bound to stimulate and accommodate a myriad of public and private policies and interventions, mostly aimed at improving objective and subjective well-being, as suggested in the European Union (EU) Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in 2006. In fact, such EU strategy indicates that "[...] policies should aim at creating and implementing plans to help women and men achieve and maintain positive emotional states and thus improve their well-being, their subjective perception of the quality of their life and their physical and mental health" [10] (p. 7). From a policy-making standpoint, this suggests that the promotion of human capital as well as individuals' physical and mental well-being should not only be aligned with but is also needed to achieve economic, social and environmental objectives.

Psychological sustainability can be seen as the external and intra-psychic conditions that may enhance mental and physical well-being with benevolent consequences for everyday life and the environment [11]. This condition strikes a chord with the World Health Organization (1948) definition of Health, as being "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (our emphasis). In this paper, we argue that if the concept of sustainability is to be taken seriously, then it should accommodate mental or psychological elements and concerns. Our concept of psychological sustainability acknowledges established concepts of mental and subjective well-being [12,13], as well as that of psychological sustainability in globalized workplaces [14]. Besides, it includes all other aspects that may contribute to individual satisfaction, self-esteem, emotional balance and fulfilment (e.g., new knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with health or working life; attitude and behaviour changes; awareness of all kind of social discriminations; openness to new ideas), as well as a feeling of self-efficacy [15]. Psychological sustainability hardly qualifies as an organizational end. Consequently, while psychological sustainability is warranted, it is not always attainable. Although social products are designed to target social problems (e.g.,

programs to help vulnerable people, to promote healthy lifestyles, or to fight addictive behaviours), these problems remain relatively unchanged across time [16]. This suggests that while social products may affect individuals positively, their broader societal impact may be limited and unpredictable.

The tetra-value theory [2] includes economic value, which is related to the satisfaction of the user's needs; ecological value that is about preserving natural environment; social value that is concerned with the impact of general well-being, nutrition, shelter, health, education, quality of life, or equal opportunities in the communities; and psychological value, which is related to changing individual attitudes and behaviours. All four analytical categories of values are intertwined. Therefore, considering this theory, we believe that any product, irrespective of being a good, a service, or an idea, should not only seek to ensure economic viability (i.e., economic sustainability) but also—and desirably—to contribute to social equity (i.e., social sustainability), environmental stewardship (i.e., ecological sustainability) and psychological balance (i.e., psychological sustainability). Thus, each different type of product value has an impact on its bracketed sustainability dimension. Therefore, we argue that tetrad-value theory accounts for the concept of societal sustainability [6], which includes the four types of sustainability mentioned. Societal sustainability can also be seen as reflecting “formal institutional conditions of human, economic and environmental wellbeing [ . . . ]” [17] (pp. 4–5) in a context related to the emergence of social entrepreneurship. These authors used the social sustainability index from the Sustainable Society Foundation to measure sustainability related to those three interrelated dimensions of wellbeing. Most of the indicators of the human dimension comprise items of what we present as social sustainability (e.g., basic needs, health, etc.). However, variables such as mental and subjective well-being, individual satisfaction, self-esteem, emotional balance, self-efficacy, fulfilment and so forth, are not part of that index. Therefore, we believe that such index downplays psychological values, which we suggest contributing to psychological sustainability.

### 3. Materials and Methods

Relying on the concepts of psychological value and sustainability, this paper presents the outcomes of an empirical-based exploratory research involving managers and users of four innovative organizations in the social sector in Portugal: (1) ‘Socialis,’ which deals with teenage mothers; (2) ‘CrescerSer’ that supports children and young people at risk; (3) ‘SAOM,’ which provides training in hospitality domains to homeless and other vulnerable people; and (4) ‘Mundos de Vida’ that seeks to improve foster care practices and approaches. In all these cases, we investigated how psychological value is perceived by managers and users alike. The findings are used to explore possible conceptual links between psychological value (individual level) and a broader idea of sustainability (societal level), which includes psychological sustainability.

The data collection was based on open in-depth interviews with managers and users from October 2017 to March 2018. All participants gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the researchers' affiliation institution. Interviews lasted for about one hour and were all tape-recorded, fully-transcribed and subject to a content-analysis made independently by the authors. We used the definitions of the different values as themes for the content analysis. Then, we performed a cross validation that shows 95% of agreement between the authors. In the semi-structured interviews with the four managers, we sought to understand the what, when and why of their social innovation models, as well as their perceptions about its underlying set of values.

The interviews with 52 users sought to come to grips with the idea of psychological value hinted previously by the four managers. As such, we sought to investigate (1) what kind of impact these users experienced with the service provided; (2) the degree of satisfaction they have had with it; (3) what had changed in their lives, if at all; and, also, (4) if they believed they could be able to maintain their new behaviours or approaches to life in the long-run.

## 4. Results

In these sections, we first present the organizations addressed in this paper, before outlining the outcomes of the interviews with the managers and users of social organizations.

### 4.1. Interviews with Managers

#### 4.1.1. Socialis

Located in the outskirts of Oporto, Portugal, Socialis has been developing an innovative social activity since 2006. It targets economically vulnerable, often poorly-educated and psychologically fragile individuals, viz., teenage mothers. The general manager (i.e., the President), who is an experienced social worker familiar with this sort of social need, realized that there was no adequate and organized response for such a pressing need. In this social organization, innovation lies in working both with pregnant teens and mostly single teenage mothers and in supporting their integration into Portuguese society when they are immigrants. This organization also created a 'Life Support Centre,' where female teenagers have access to personalized interventions, aimed at both improving their household and maternal skills and fostering their social and professional inclusion via professional orientation. Socialis also works with teenagers' families, enabling a close and sensible assessment of the outcomes of their activity with all stakeholders in the process. Despite partnerships with the City Hall and other local authorities, Socialis' budgetary needs are supported by State Social Security (SSS), fundraising, product donations and organization of charity events with the participation of all users of social services. As such, the activities of Socialis deliver not only economic but also social and psychological value, as they seek to transform the lives of their users by providing them with social, emotional and practical skills, likely to facilitate their employability. As the general manager pointed out:

"Socialis has always created structures and activities to ensure economic sustainability through fundraising, sale of homemade products, or Christmas sale, solidarity parties, concerts and so forth. I felt that there was a very serious gap in the community of Maia, which is the support to adolescence with school failure, school absenteeism and dropout, or pregnancy, among others."

#### 4.1.2. CrescerSer

CrescerSer, which aims at providing temporary shelter for children and youngsters, is headquartered in Lisbon, Portugal. From a total of seven shelters spread nationwide, two of these are in Oporto. Since 1996, 'Home 1' hosts boys from 12 up to 18 years; since 2004 'Home 2' accommodates girls and boys from early infancy and up to 10 years old. The strongly innovative character of these shelters is that care is temporarily provided in small units, home-like, with a resident population ranging from 10 to 14 children. This represents a totally different approach to children-care when compared to the traditional approaches, which involve hosting dozens of children in larger institutions for many years. These shelters are meant to provide families with time to be able to restructure themselves so that they can get their children back home. Direct relationships with the local community, personal connections with the families and the emotional and personal bonds that are created with the hosts families can all be distinctive aspects of this organization. There are young people who are institutionalized that want to leave the institution at the age of 18 years old and to live on their own. Thus, the organization promotes a support network, allowing these users to volunteer informally in homes in return for meals, clothing, medical and psychological support, as well as counselling. Often, these young people have experienced significant social-emotional gaps or disorders in their childhood. These homes can fulfil their 'maternal support' needs, as they deliberately employ only women. This gendered approach is seen as valuable for users' emotional development and psychological stability. Notwithstanding its acknowledged social value and distinctive approach, CrescerSer is concerned with its economic

sustainability, which depends on SSS and community financial support only. All the food and drinks these shelters have available to provide their users with is donated by a chain of suppliers through an innovative method. For instance, while a local baker provides the bread, this supplier only supports part of the costs; the grain producers and the small-sized milling companies support theirs. CrescerSer contributes to ecological sustainability by separating garbage for recycling, by involving their young users in this activity for educational purposes and by carrying out energy saving programs. In terms of social and psychological sustainability, this organization tries to prevent institutionalization of children, avoiding emotional burden and costs for both their users and their families. It also contributes to raising social awareness and the socio-educational level of the community, ensuring that children at-risk are not maltreated, uncared for, or removed from their families. However, the older the children are, the trickier their social inclusion processes becomes, given accumulated traumatic damages, often including substance-abuse (e.g., alcohol and drugs) and even delinquency life trajectories. Hence, CrescerSer also plays a therapeutic role. Thus, the psychological value proposition it offers is linked to its explicit and tacit influence on new life projects for children and youngsters. This brings positive impacts to society, as social value, by promoting social inclusion, as well as influencing both families and community positive behaviours by providing parental training, organizing technical meetings with families, workshops, seminars, conferences, where the rights of children, young people and good practices are addressed. This organization shows a good track record in terms of children's care and support. Most of the 180 children they've supported so far, have returned to their families or to adoptive ones. As the manager argued:

"Our first concern is organizational survival and therefore economic sustainability. Regarding other forms of sustainability and in particular to the ecological one, we have tried to reduce the energy costs, namely through several programs agreed with the main national power company. We perform waste sorting and we teach children how to separate, segregate and recycle. To improve the social stature of our users is our major goal. We seek to act at the level of prevention, avoiding bringing children in an institutional home because it represents a huge emotional cost for children, young people and their families. We also try to contribute to the training of the people of the community in order to prevent children from being abused and removed from their families of origin. [ . . . ] If children and young people are able to rebuild their lives in a timely and sustainable manner, they will become more confident, more self-sufficient and more useful individuals to society. If these young people, after leaving us, can get a job, society at large will benefit from it. Reversely, if they had not such a structured social answer, they would probably remain in disruptive and delinquent spiral pathways, which would have societal costs (e.g., increasing of crime rates, decreasing of available human resources). To put it very bluntly, our work delivers great value not only for children and young people whom we support directly but also for their families and the local community at large. Besides, we also organize technical meetings, workshops, colloquiums and conferences with families and the community, in which we address the legal rights of children and young people and inform about effective parenting skills."

#### 4.1.3. SAOM

SAOM was founded in Oporto, in 1976, targeting two major different activities: support for seniors (a Day Centre and Home Care Service) and for children and young people. Since 2005, the latter social response ceased to exist, facing a major reduction of users in this group cohort and increasing competing responses in the historical centre. A novel and innovative social response was then created in 2006: the social reintegration of adults in situations of extreme vulnerability, including the homeless—the 'Give Way to Life' project. This project consists of providing training in hospitality domains and its uniqueness was awarded with a State program for four years. There are many complex challenges to be faced when working with homeless and other vulnerable people living with a minimum income, in order to prepare them to become hospitality employees, in particular

their personal image (teeth, hair, nails, etc.), especially when the National Health System doesn't provide support in a timely and effective manner. Thus, this project continues offering the users an initial training supported by public funds and then they work in paid catering services, which allow them for paying for their personal care treatments. Then, in order to seek financial sustainability, SAOM opened a social enterprise: a restaurant near the old wall of Oporto. This social economy project is still in a developmental stage and it seeks to invest all the profits in enabling people to be part of 'normal' society. The training coordinator argues that the autonomous financial sustainability is the most important characteristic in this type of business model. SAOM trades with the main national power company (EDP Foundation), providing catering services in exchange for financial support, social visibility, publicity and experience to trainees. SAOM created a new social response to help social inclusion of homeless, prostitutes, drug-addicted and people living with minimum income from the State. This organization also generates ecological value through recycling materials and sensitizing trainees for its relevance; psychological value through the fundamental change they promote in trainees' self-concept and lifestyle; social value by contributing to solving severe social problems; and economic value, by producing and selling services, satisfying clients' needs. All these values are systematically monitored by a team in weekly meetings. Together with psychologists and social workers, the team tracks how trainees are evolving, so that adjustments can be devised and introduced in a timely fashion. By providing all these values to society, SAOM delivers a positive impact in all types of sustainability. As the manager of this social organization argued:

"We have always strived to raise the level of professionals in the hospitality industry, to meet the strictest standards of food hygiene and safety at work and to use first quality products. Therefore, we believed that if we were to offer profitable services, we should act accordingly. As we want our trainees to have early contact with the clients, the training we provide is very practical. We offer our services for free in specific social events that require catering services. After some time, these services start being paid, contributing to our economic sustainability and to provide jobs to vulnerable people. [...] We have invested a lot in dental and oral care of these persons. [...] Now, we have decided to open a restaurant, which is allowed by the State in social economy. The staff will consist of our former trainees and the profits will be initially used to keep them in the social reintegration processes. There is a lot of poverty in this area, a lot of homeless, of drug addiction, of sex workers, that is, too many situations where middle-aged adults need support, as young adults are being helped by other institutions. [...] We do not generate waste because we reuse everything. Recycle and reuse is also part of the training curriculum of the trainees and, therefore, environmental issues are mandatory. [...] We care about the personal hygiene and the presentation of the trainees, teaching them how to behave in society."

#### 4.1.4. Mundos de Vida

Mundos de Vida, located 25 km northeast of Oporto, Portugal, is organized around three major services: childhood, older adults and families. All services are based on quality assurance models (the institution is certified by ISO 9001–2008). The family service promotes foster care for children since 2006. This service rests on an alternative model of intervention, as it seeks to raise social awareness to a whole new generation of raising families. This requires strong partnerships with civil society, so that changes in perspective occur both at the level of the protection system and of ordinary citizens. And social marketing tools are believed to play a key role here. In Portugal, only 3.2% of children that need alternative ways to grow up in a healthy environment will be granted a foster family [18]. Therefore, as this regard, there is a significant gap between demand and supply, which is explained by a combination of budgetary with political motives: financial limitations of SSS vis-à-vis SSS prevailing preference for child institutionalization. This organization enables its users—children at risk and their families—to better fulfil their healthcare, education and safety needs, when compared with institutional care. This novel approach also facilitates finding highly intrinsically motivated families in



the community. This new model involves three dimensions of sustainability. Firstly, a psychological dimension, which results from changes in affection and rearing styles of children who move into a new family (foster family), while maintaining relationships with the biological family and so with different parenting styles. Emotional stability of children within the new family becomes both a stressful goal and a complex challenge. Eventually, children will return to their biological family, that is, reunification, which will involve careful planning, mutual adjustment, excitement, uncertainty and stress resulting from differences in rules, schedules, or even food. Secondly, an economic dimension, as the cost of the foster care service is not supported by the biological family. SSS financial support is required, yet limited, which implies that complementary resources must be found and fundraised. Lastly, a social dimension, in that Mundos de Vida creates a pool of host families, with different profiles, to identify the right family for each child that needs protection. In order to be selected, these families need to meet complex qualifying criteria, viz. in terms of both intrinsic motivation and social network, as it takes more than a nuclear family to rear a child. Mundos de Vida has close relationships with Oviedo University and Fundación Meniños (Spain), as well as with Portuguese SSS, Courts of Law and Children and Youth Protection Committees. This organization has also created the ‘Procuram-se Abraços’ (Seeking for Hugs) network, involving dozens of entities such as Children and Youth Protection Committees, Municipalities, schools, health centres and companies, aiming at increasing its reach and fundraising opportunities through the communication networks of partners. The president stresses that this business model has produced excellent results in terms of recruiting new families, reducing institutional care rates and extending their offer to other municipalities:

“Our business model requires a great attention to sustainability, namely as regards restructuring children raising styles between foster and biological families. We hope to instil sustainable change and a balance between these two different spheres of influence, or parenting styles, as children will eventually return to their biological family. [ . . . ] As the biological family doesn’t pay for the foster care service, we need to rely on limited financial support from the State (SSS) and that needs to be supplemented by other fundraising activities in civil society. [ . . . ] We select and recruit foster families with different profiles, allowing the identification of the right family for the right child that needs protection, after a decision by the Protection Commission or the Court. Thus, our activity generates value for society, as it seeks out unused resources (potential foster families), develops a mindset of sharing and social responsibility and reduces the burden of public budget, since foster care cost is about half the cost of residential care.”

Interviews show that the managers of these social organizations are aware of the positive impact of their social products in the society at different yet intertwined levels, which can be systematized in the economic, ecological, social and psychological domains as societal sustainability.

In Table 1, we summarize the outcomes of this section.

**Table 1.** Relation between managers’ responses and tetrad-value theory.

Quotes	Economic Value	Ecological Value	Social Value	Psychological Value
“ . . . ensure economic sustainability through fundraising, sale of homemade products, . . . ”	X			
“ . . . the support to adolescence with school failure, school absenteeism and dropout, or pregnancy, among others.”			X	X
“Our first concern is organizational survival and therefore economic sustainability.”	X			
“ . . . we have tried to reduce the energy costs, namely through several programs agreed with the main national power company. We perform waste sorting and we teach children how to separate, segregate and recycle.”		X	X	X

Table 1. Cont.

Quotes	Economic Value	Ecological Value	Social Value	Psychological Value
"We seek to act at the level of prevention, avoiding bringing children in an institutional home because it represents a huge emotional cost for children, young people and their families. We also try to contribute to the training of the people of the community in order to prevent children from being abused and removed from their families of origin."			X	X
"If children and young people are able to rebuild their lives in a timely and sustainable manner, they will become more confident, more self-sufficient and more useful individuals to society."			X	X
"We have always strived to raise the level of professionals in the hotel industry, to meet the strictest standards of food hygiene and safety at work and to use first quality products."			X	
"... these services start being paid, contributing to our economic sustainability and to provide jobs to vulnerable people."	X		X	
"As we want our trainees to have early contact with the clients, the training we provide is very practical."				X
"We do not generate waste because we reuse everything. Recycle and reuse is also part of the training curriculum of the trainees and, therefore, environmental issues are mandatory. [...]"		X		
"We care about the personal hygiene and the presentation of the trainees, teaching them how to behave in society."				X
"As the biological family doesn't pay for the foster care service, we need to resort to limited financial support from the State (SSS) and that so needs to be supplemented by other funds we identify and raise from civil society. [...]"	X			
"Thus, our activity generates value for society, as it seeks out unused resources (potential foster families), ..."			X	
"... develops a mindset of sharing and social responsibility, ..."				X

## 4.2. Interviews with Users

### 4.2.1. Socialis

We interviewed 10 users of this organization, which targets teenage mothers. Overall, the interviewees, inexperienced mothers, feel grateful for this organization, for two major reasons. At this organization, they could not only learn basic maternal competences for rearing their infants but could also feel protected from resource scarcity or deprivation. Their inexperience, combined with family, social and even financial pressures, is bound to involve anxiety, sadness, uncertainty and stress. For instance, one of the young mothers explained that she had learnt the fundamentals of parenting skills. C.C. (18 years old), argued:

"They taught me how to cook and to clean a house, both of which are important when one has a baby. I hadn't learnt or practiced any of these tasks before. Now, I look at the fridge, I do shopping lists, I plan what to cook beforehand and I also know what babies should eat. Previously, I would hate to do the dishes, to make the bed, to vacuum clean my room, or iron my or my baby's clothes. It is not that I started liking these activities but I know that they are important for the baby wellbeing."

This teenage mother also stressed that she had become eager to conclude her 'Hairdresser' course at a vocational school and to start working afterwards, so that she could afford to be able to raise her child adequately.

However, the perceived benefits of users with the service provided were not limited to practical tips, or attitudinal change. B.T. (21 years old), for instance, considered the infrastructure provided was more important than the maternal skills, as she could not afford to have a proper place to look after and raise her 9 months old baby. As B.T. explained:

"When I was 9 years old, my mother, who was single, had a baby boy. As she was working in the outskirts of Lisbon, an aunt of mine who lived close by was taking care of both of us."



Soon after, I started changing dippers, dressing and bottle-feeding my little brother. Because I learnt how to care for my little brother and my aunt trusted me, she started coming over less frequently. At the age of 16, I moved to Porto, to stay at another aunt's house. I then had my first part-time job in a restaurant kitchen. As this aunt of mine had a daughter, I was able to look after her. Now that I have my baby too, it would not be possible to have any part-time job, such as the one I have. If I weren't here [at the shelter house], I could not afford to pay for a nanny."

Overall, these accounts and quotes illustrate two major social needs that Socialis meets: emotional and physical support. The emotional support results from providing users with basic maternity skills and counselling, so that their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy increases in the process. The physical support is also relevant, as users are mostly coming from underprivileged and poor backgrounds. Therefore, this specific tangible support creates a complementary layer for users' protection, which seems relevant to be able to reinforce their psychological wellbeing.

#### 4.2.2. CrescerSer

We interviewed 13 users of CrescerSer, an organization that provides temporary shelter for children and youngsters. We only had access to teens and young adults, instead of children. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the notion of psychological value—whether explicitly or tacitly—pervaded the accounts of all the interviewees, most of which had been previously institutionalized. It was not just the nature and the small-scale size of the new shelter that seems to provide respondents with a refreshing sense of community but the fact that its nature and size, relying on innovative care approaches, appear to promote distinctive patterns of users' social relations. As J.A. (21 years) explained:

"I'm very happy at this place, because in the previous removal from my family I was placed with other 310 boys and girls and now I have only 13 housemates and this helped to feel more focused and thus to finish a vocational gardening course."

The sense of purpose conveyed in this account is revealing, in that it suggests that structure and context can facilitate individual focus and direction. Unlike his previous experience, this participant argued that he was here able to set and achieve an important personal goal. As he stressed:

"Here, I was able to meet good friends, who are like brothers to me. Here, I could learn a profession and I felt loved . . ." (J.A., 21 years)

In other words, psychological drive and value, surfaced when this young adult was brought into a supportive and caring context. Recognition, friendship and affection appeared to stimulate self-efficacy and long-term goals. Likewise, B.R. (16 years), stressed the following:

"The good things I've learned here can be applied to all aspects of my life and when I go out of here, I would take friends, love, tenderness and I would have learned how to be respectful towards other people."

This quote suggests that these users acknowledge that, in specific circumstances, they are able to learn social skills and that these are so important for at least two interwoven reasons. On the one hand, learning social skills can improve their experience and wellbeing at the temporary shelters. On the other hand, interviewees also stress that these competences can contribute to make them better individuals and citizens in the long run. Another user, R.L. (13 years), argued:

"We learn how to play, how to set a table and how to cook meals, thus I feel more autonomous."

This quote, seems to illustrate the idea that autonomy, which entails emotional and behavioural components, is not only recognized as a side-effect of specific and trivial practices and routines but that it is also valued as something intrinsically good.

Overall, these quotes suggest that the lives of these users were deeply and positively transformed at the shelter. In fact, they recognize to have developed valuable emotional resources, which have amounted to increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy. The subtle combination of emotional and behaviour change that affects how individuals see themselves in positive terms and how they relate to others in meaningful ways, is defined in this paper as psychological value.

#### 4.2.3. SAOM

At SAOM, focused on the social reintegration of adults in extreme vulnerable situations (viz. homeless), we interviewed 15 users. Unsurprisingly, users acknowledge the economic value of being part of an institution that provides them with limited resources but that were once hard to reach, or even unavailable. However, their satisfaction with the institution is not limited to the financial sphere. As AP. (32 years), argued:

“SAOM has been fantastic with me. They know how to say yes, or no, at the right time and support me.”

The quote suggests that learning and adhering to situated social norms, which is critical for social interaction and reintegration, is perceived as something valuable. For users, the enabling infrastructure might be as important for developing a sense of belonging as well as learning how to adjust behaviour, expectations and even self-image. For instance, F.A. (48 years) stressed the following:

“I am pleased and grateful to SAOM, because it allows me to be able to show a bit of me, the little I know, of my abilities.”

And V.M. (26 years) stated that:

“It is more than training. It is a family, as it has nothing to do with the training courses in the job centre. In these courses no one wants to know about our life, if we are doing ok, if we eat, how we are emotionally. At SAOM they seek to know it all.”

These quotes suggest that SAOM provides more than just vocational training on tourism and hospitality. While SAOM users were initially looking for developing skills and competencies for work, eventually they got them for life too. Aspects of psychological change, such as improvements in self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-regulation surfaced across most interviews, as also illustrated in the following quote:

“I am much more confident now. I reorganized my life here and I’ve also learned how to control my emotions. When I arrived here, I wanted to be a first-class waiter. But, after two months I decided I want to become a head waiter. My life, as I see it now, is like that of a staircase, it has only steps up and I will be climbing one at a time.” (A.T., 26 years)

This suggests that, at SAOM, technical training is inextricable from social mentoring. After erratic or misfortunate lives, users’ ability to fully grasp and apply new skills and competencies to specific contexts, may require alternative training approaches.

“I started to believe in myself and seeing others believe in me was an amazing hope. Moreover, the return to live, schedules, discipline, to aspire to anything more that I had had in life.” (P.L., 41 years)

Users also referred that this life transformation is for real and that they don’t want to get back to their previous lives.

#### 4.2.4. Mundos de Vida

We interviewed 14 young people placed in foster care families provided by Mundos de Vida. They all agreed that this new life projects are the better for them and made them changed their behaviours and ways of thinking, as can be noticed in these quotes:

“I have been in a residence but I prefer to be with a foster family because I can have everything to myself. I learned many things with my foster family. I changed the bad habits I had in my family. Now I know what respect for the rules is. I no longer think of going back to my family.” (J.L., 13 years)

“I’d rather be in a foster family because we have more freedom and affection, although in a residence we also learn hygiene habits and other things. The new situation allowed us to build a new life and gain new skills. Everything changed: hygiene, meals at time, hours of sleep and to study and so forth. I became more disciplined but also more autonomous. I think I’ll be able to maintain this new lifestyle in the future.” (L.S., 13 years)

“I prefer a foster family, because we have more love and friendship. They say that when I’ll be older I will remember the guidelines that they provide me with now. I am satisfied with this solution and I will not go back to my family. Much has changed in my life and people are more concerned about me. (M.T., 13 years)

“I have been institutionalized and have had two other foster families previously. I prefer a foster family because there is more concern and monitoring. The foster family gave direction to my life, education. Before, I used to do everything I wanted to and to run away from home was frequent. A lot has changed ever since in my life and I don’t want to go back. The foster family and Mundos de Vida meant nothing to us but now they are all, they are our family.” (D.O., 18 years)

“I prefer a foster family because we have a home and a family. We have more confidence and security while being with them. I used to be a troubled person with no rules. Now I’m better, I stick to rules in this foster family. Most importantly, in addition to rules I developed good connections to the foster family. I would not go back.” (J.V., 16 years)

All these opinions show that the services provided by Mundos de Vida have an impact at individual level. While we acknowledge that not all cases are successful as these, the transformational capacity of these social products contributes to the effective change of behaviour and so, they carry an important psychological value.

In Table 2, we summarize the outcomes of this section.

**Table 2.** Relation between users' responses and psychological value.

Quotes
"They thought me how to cook and to clean a house, both of which are important when we have a baby. [...] Now, I look at the fridge, I do shopping lists, I plan what to cook beforehand and I also know what babies should eat."
"Now that I have my baby too, it would not be possible to have any part-time job, as I've one, if I weren't here, as I could not afford to pay for a nanny."
"I'm very happy at this place, because in the previous removal from my family I was placed with other 310 boys and girls and now I have only 13 housemates and this helped to feel more focused and thus to finish a vocational gardening course."
"[...] Here, I could learn a profession and I felt loved ... "
"The good things I've learned here can be applied to all aspects of my life and when I go out of here, I would take friends, love, tenderness and I would have learned how to be respectful towards other people."
"We learn how to play, how to set a table and how to cook meals, thus I feel more autonomous."
"[...] They know how to say yes, or no, at the right time and support me."
"I am pleased and grateful to SAOM, because it allows me to be able to show a bit of me, the little I know, of my abilities."
"It is more than training. It is a family, as it has nothing to do with the training courses in the job centre. In these courses no one wants to know about our life, if we are doing ok, if we eat, how we are emotionally. At SAOM they seek to know it all."
"I am much more confident now. I reorganized my life here and I've also learned how to control my emotions. When I arrived here, I wanted to be a first-class waiter. But, after two months I decided I want to become a head waiter. My life, as I see it now, is like that of a staircase, it has only steps up and I will be climbing one at a time."
"I started to believe in myself and seeing others believe in me was an amazing hope. Moreover, the return to live, schedules, discipline, to aspire to anything more that I had had in life."

**Table 2.** Cont.

Quotes
"I have been in a residence, but I prefer to be with a foster family because I can have anything to myself. I learned many things with my foster family. I changed the bad habits I had in my family. Now I know what respect for the rules is. I no longer think of going back to my family."
"I'd rather be in a foster family because we have more freedom and affection, although in a residence we also learn hygiene habits and other things. The new situation allowed us to build a new life and gain new skills. Everything changed: hygiene, meals at time, hours of sleep and to study and so forth. I became more disciplined but also more autonomous. I think I'll be able to maintain this new lifestyle in the future."
"[...] They say that when I'll be older I will remember the guidelines that they provide me with now. I am satisfied with this solution and I will not go back to my family. Much has changed in my life and people are more concerned about me."
"[...] The foster family gave direction to my life, education. Before, I used to do everything I wanted to and to run away from home was frequent. A lot has changed ever since in my life and I don't want to go back."
"[...] We have more confidence and security while being with them. I used to be a troubled person with no rules. Now I'm better, I stick to rules in this foster family. Most importantly, in addition to rules I developed good connections to the foster family. I would not go back."

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Data suggests that managers have similar concerns about economic and social sustainability as crucial factors for organizational survival and *raison d'être*. Nonetheless, these participants were also concerned with the ecological and psychological impacts of their activity. This suggests that the intertwined combination of all these four values (tetrad-value theory: economic, social, ecological and psychological) through their respective types of sustainability may result in a broader concept of societal sustainability.

The characteristics of the cases addressed clearly strike a chord with the literature [1,19], viz. that a new product value proposition must have four intentions: economic, to enable the offer, the transaction and the satisfaction of the needs; social, related to the impact on the community; environmental, related to ecological issues; and psychological, related to the emergence of an alternative state of mind that contributes to fight illness and poverty, as well as to enhance new worldviews (increased self-awareness, attitudinal change, knowledge creation, learning new skills and self-efficacy).

While we inferred the existence of psychological value via interviews with managers and users, we also realized that the social problems that triggered such social products remain stable, or at least

latent in modern societies. In other words, while social products are designed to have a social impact, the transformational (psychological) one occurs at the individual level only [2,6].

Even though values impact each other, our data show that the transformation of users' life is significant but that the determinants of these social problems remain, suggesting that the social impact is just marginal (e.g., addictive problems and poverty).

The ecological value only surfaced across two institutions (CrescerSer and SAOM), because they have activities of recycling and education for ecology. This new approach to a complex value proposition (tetrad-value theory) is conceptually related to a wider concept of sustainability. All the leaders of the organizations and projects interviewed mentioned, in different ways, the importance of being economic (financially) sustainable and to have a positive impact on what we call psychological sustainability, which emerged in users' interviews. Some of them have ecological sustainability in mind but all seem to believe in their contribution to social sustainability.

This investigation enabled us to develop new insights about the atomistic and life transformational impact of several products, resulting in the idea of psychological value. In addition, it allowed us to understand that the connections between values and sustainability cannot be neglected.

Products (goods, services, ideas) with psychological value are needed to fight all kind of discriminations in the domains of gender, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation and ethnics. Social and individual problems related with ageing, urban life, education accessibility, multi-ethnic societies, chronic diseases, addictive behaviours, non-healthy alimentation, adulthood transition, criminal behaviours, rehabilitation of prisoners, compatibility between work and personal lives, quality of life, happiness, climate influence and so forth, are still hot on today's agenda.

Europe 2020 agenda boils down to a strategy that aims at a building a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. Thus, we believe that a significant bulk of theoretical and applied research is needed in order to access all the means used to achieve those goals and to evaluate the outcomes of Europe's policies and programs, in particular those related with social innovation against poverty.

The analysis of the interviews shows that there is a transformational value provided by these organizations and the perception of that value by the users. This conclusion reinforces the idea of the importance of the psychological value within these social products and its contribution to users' psychological sustainability as a part of what we call societal sustainability.

We consider that there are two major limitations. First, the way questions were asked by the interviewers. And second, there are limitations regarding to the capacity of generalization using case studies. However, it is possible to use case studies to achieve theoretical generalization, contributing to the creation of new theories or confirmation of existing ones [20].

This article may stimulate further research on the dimensions of all constructs in order to create new indexes to evaluate societal sustainability. In-depth research is needed at different levels of analysis (individual, organizational, societal) to broaden knowledge in this domain. New methodological approaches and experimental designs can be useful to conceptualize and theorize what is happening in society. Eventually, this may help decision-makers and social entrepreneurs to develop better policies to enhance societal sustainability.

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