

## The 'Social Impact Storyboard' or 'iSIS' methodology for stakeholder-led social impact capture, assessment, evaluation, and dissemination - Burge Surtees Associates Ltd

In the contexts of the Labour government's 'Our Towns and Cities - the Future' - The Urban White Paper published in 2000<sup>1</sup>; the early years of New Labour's government; and with a career history in theatre and broadcast documentary production, Matthew Burge found himself working in the community and voluntary sector in South Tyneside in the North East of England for the STRIDE 'Community Empowerment' network rising to some 500 voluntary groups over a five year period. It was a time of renewal and rethinking in response to urban decay, mounting social challenges, the contraction of the 'public' sector, the economic dominance of the private 'for profit' sector supported by bank loans, EU and government subsidy, and the growing reliance at ground level of local social, human welfare, and cultural initiatives upon the work of user-led unincorporated associations, virtuous companies limited by guarantee organising the work of volunteers, and registered charities. A gap in the governance of UK organisations delivering creative and social impact was recognised with the introduction of 'Community Interest Companies' or 'CICs' in 2005<sup>2</sup>, bridging a frustrating divide between necessarily 'charitable' and 'for profit' organisations delivering public good, usually in social or cultural terms, outside the established NGO and public sectors.

Matthew had been facilitating the management of charitable, 'Single Regeneration Budget', and LSP projects for the STRIDE CEN<sup>3</sup>, including a number of high value National Lottery funded projects via its 'Reaching Communities' and 'New Opportunities' programmes. His work involved supporting user-led voluntary groups to monitor the progress, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of their projects for monitoring and evaluation reports required under the terms and conditions of their funders.

---

<sup>1</sup> Towards an Urban Renaissance - The Urban Task Force, 1999 - proposing urban renaissance 'from the ground'.

<sup>2</sup> A community interest company is a type of company introduced by the United Kingdom government in 2005 under the Companies Act 2004, designed for social enterprises that want to use their profits and assets for the public good.

<sup>3</sup> STRIDE 'Community Empowerment Network': As a crucial part of the Government's drive to reduce the gap between England's poorest communities and the country as a whole, the 'National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal' published in 2001, sought to influence change at a local level.

To 2009, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund provided a grant to 88 of the most deprived local authority areas to fund the work of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in improving services and targeting resources more effectively. Between 2001 and 2009, £43 million a year was invested in developing community empowerment networks through the Single Community Programme in order to foster community involvement in neighbourhood renewal initiatives. These networks, in turn, funded 25,000 community projects, provided the LSPs with access to a wider community network and led community development work.

The usual practice for these kinds of evaluations was to monitor progress against planned milestones and outputs, and predicted outcomes and impacts as set out in the original funding application.

*Matthew noticed four things: 1) an unambitious culture within the sector seeming to emanate from local authorities of under-estimating project results in plans and funding applications to ensure that targets were reached without risk of failure; 2) that there was an apparent failure across all sectors to report social impact in appropriate terms using relevant methodologies; 3) that evaluation reports were often obscurely written and rarely shared to the people reported upon themselves, let alone any wider sector audience or the public; and 4) that evaluation methodologies tended to ignore the unplanned, the unexpected, and the surprises in outcomes and impacts which inevitably accompany social and cultural projects and which can add value, opportunities for learning and important changes of course in real time project management.*

With his background in storytelling in theatre, research skills in documentary filmmaking, and with the emergence of new and more widely accessible digital media technologies Matthew recognised the possibility and practicalities of broadcasting accessible stories of social impact recorded from stakeholders themselves for wider public benefit and learning. He saw the value, indeed the necessity of storytelling in the reporting of the qualitative characteristics of creative and social impact across all fields of activity for public good, where forms of estimated measurement were not only very difficult but essentially and philosophically inappropriate and redundant. Like the comics and cartoons we loved as children, giving us enough detail to spark our interest but not so much as to tire, bore us, or impede our imagination, storyboards for planning have been used for all time as useful tools for those wanting to communicate a quick overview of a project without too much detail. Storyboards in films are used in this way, to help a team to work out the delivery of the detail of the script (itself a long way from being a completed film) and to share with relevant members of the production crew and artists, crucially sparking their imagination to fill gaps between the dramatic moments depicted, and to elicit their essential creative input to the continuing design and delivery process of the project.

*Matthew identified a structural parallel between storytelling and the evaluation of social impact in a particular and crucial way: he knew that effective storyboarding for films involved the sketching of moments of change and transformation as a sequence of articulated images constructing the narrative from its essential, often pivotal, dramatic building blocks. He identified the sketched still images of transformation and change in a film's*

*storyboard with the conceptual moments of transformation and change understood in the developing social enterprise sector as the 'indicators' of social impact.*

So the 'kiss', the 'joke', the 'getaway', the 'jailbreak', the 'wedding', the 'car crash', the decision to run for President, the appearance to Hamlet of the ghost of his father, the dramatic moments where and when conflict is synthesised into a transformative decision, action, or change of direction can be seen in structural affinity with, for example, the epiphany of an addict in successful therapy, the relief and changed actions towards her patients of a nurse receiving effective PPE, the mirth of a young carer able to find employment when her mother's health improves, the unexpected mental health benefits experienced by community gardeners, a teacher identifying the surprising benefits of a designed playground - the pivotal 'indicators' of transformative social impact in the 'story' of a social project or programme. The social impact of a project is the difference it makes to the lives and experiences of its stakeholders or 'characters', less, of course, what might have happened to them anyway.

*The social impact of a project can be 'told' through the qualitative articulation of its social impact indicators, the collective 'difference made' to / by / for stakeholders as conveyed in brief depictions, testimonials, interviews, quotations, or other recorded and displayed stakeholder expressions or creations conveying pivotal moments of transformation and change experienced or enacted as function or consequence of the project.*

And because the methodology is based on 'open' techniques 'from the horse's mouth', eliciting stakeholders' own choice of social impact indicators expressed in their own ways and for themselves, it is far better than desk-based evaluations at following up previously unknown secondary and tertiary impacts, and recording unexpected outcomes and surprises from which lessons can be quickly learned and publicised, and necessary adaptations in the management of the project quickly made.

With his audio-visual media skills and the emerging accessible digital recording and internet broadcast technology of the time, Matthew saw the increasingly practical possibility of constructing an evaluation and dissemination methodology from feasible resources to capture from project stakeholders sufficient data to present and broadcast conceptual 'storyboards' of social impact indicators articulating the social impact of a project in authoritative qualitative terms.

*Adding statistical and quantitative research and analysis to this targeted, qualitative approach, an all-round quantitative and qualitative evaluation methodology could be achieved carrying the authority of the stakeholders themselves.*

Working in accordance with ESRC's Ethical Research Framework and with stakeholder consent properly agreed, offering the option of GDPR and Copyright clearance, social impact evaluations could be shared with all stakeholders and even broadcast to the public in highly accessible forms.

In 2006, Matthew developed his 'Social Impact Storyboard', or 'iSIS' approach and methodology for social impact evaluation studies at the time of his establishing an associate model company, Burge Surtees Associates Ltd, for the delivery of project management and impact evaluation in the cultural, arts, heritage, and social health and wellbeing sectors in particular.

Fundamentally, this qualitative social impact methodology emerged from the premise that 'measurement' of social impact was not only difficult and imprecise, but actually philosophically inappropriate in something like the same sense that passion cannot be quantified:

*"Cecil Graham: What is a cynic?"*

*Lord Darlington: A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing."*

*Lady Windermere's Fan, Oscar Wilde, 1892*

Measures and dates can be applied to outputs usually referred to as project Milestones like miles of road built, or numbers of 'workshops held', 'participants', 'attendees', 'clients visited' 'fruit picked' or 'houses built'; but cultural impact, artistic or creative value, heritage, social welfare, and improvements, for example, in 'self-esteem', 'mental' or even 'physical health' are often very hard to quantify by number. Even the 'distance travelled' analogy frequently used in social impact evaluation, although very helpful, does not equate to numbers on a metric scale, or indeed to any standardised market price tag.

*"Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count;  
everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted"*

*- Albert Einstein*

Pressure from politicians and the investment sector to put a financial 'price' on the impact of social actions had been growing steadily in the public sector from at least the late 'seventies onwards. Matthew had worked in BBC Television from 1980, when Alasdair Milne was Director General, returning briefly in 1995 to witness changes to the corporation made by D.G.s Michael Checkland and John Birt. Between them, under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, these D.G.s

20.6.2020

had devised an internal market system encouraging producers to choose between internal BBC assets, stock and suppliers, and the outside market for their facilities. In the time Matthew had been away from the BBC making social and industrial documentaries for Channel Four, the changes had been dramatic. Where BBC resources had been generally provided, booked, and collected for internal use they now had to be itemised and costed down to the last plastic bin liner for each production. It had become at least as easy to use external resources as to deal with the accountancy and bureaucracy involved in using the internal alternatives. Where once governments generally allocated budgets and public sector organisation managers spent what they had as effectively as they could, now resources needed to be deployed in accountancy for competitive advantage - even internally and between departments of the same organisation. Whether this resulted in better value for the stakeholder / consumer of public services is a highly contentious issue.

*As the new CICs entered the social market after 2004 for projects delivering public good, the same monitoring and evaluation requirements from funders and financiers remained, but with a greater emphasis on commerce and trade in the evaluation of social impact.*

The issue of 'best value' that had been burning holes in public sector provision across all departments was now applied to the 'third' sector of voluntary, service user-led, charitable groups and organisations, co-operatives, and social enterprises (these increasingly under the new 'CIC' governance), some working with local authorities, and many supported financially by National Lottery programmes.

The UK's post-war legacy had been a large public sector characterised by the NHS or the BBC, for example. In many cases, unlike in the USA, there were few established financial markets for projects delivering public good in the public or third sectors. From the difficulty of monitoring, measuring, and evaluating social impact, let alone putting a price tag on it, emerged a financial approach to social impact evaluation led by the banking and venture capital sectors needing a 'market price' for public good social impact 'products' of social enterprises in particular.

*Initially, this approach compared outputs, outcomes and impacts of public or third sector social programmes in the UK, where there wasn't necessarily an established commercial market for these services, to places like the USA where, arguably, there was.*

So fixing a broken leg in the NHS could in theory be priced in accordance with the market cost of doing so in a private hospital in New York. This approach adapted the banking terminology of 'return on investment' (i.e. profit) to 'Social Return on Investment', or 'SROI' for short to describe this way of tagging a price to social impact. Thus, the social impact of a project which kept a person with enduring mental ill health out of hospital could be 'valued' at the added cost of his or her hospitalisation - not in the NHS where the commercial market for this was hard to determine

or assess, but in a hospital in the private sector and possibly abroad where commercial financial markets for treating schizophrenia, for example, might be said to exist. Secondary and tertiary impacts could also be priced, the deadweight of what might have happened anyway, and impacts falling beyond the scope of the project having been subtracted, and a total social return on investment calculated. For bankers and governments, these figures can be very impressive, with projects evaluated through SROI methodologies frequently quoting very high financial returns.<sup>4</sup> As this methodology developed, public sector accounts were investigated for potentially transferrable 'unit costs' of services, such as the cost to the public purse of keeping a prisoner in prison for one year. A secondary use of this research into the Treasury's 'Green Book' provided private and social enterprise sector operators with cost equivalents which could be used to put pressure on policy makers to open public services to external competition, just as the Directors General had done in microcosm at the BBC. For likeminded politicians too, those wishing to 'outsource' public services, this 'price index' provided the evidence required to open a new market for social enterprise and private concerns seeking to profit from winning contracts for public service delivery away from the public sector.

Although Matthew wasn't particularly impressed with the credibility of this 'SROI' approach to social impact evaluation because of its focus on the estimated financial price of an approximated equivalent service rather than the actual social impact as described by project stakeholders themselves, he does acknowledge that for some investors a market price for projects delivering public good was becoming increasingly necessary as a comparative yard stick with which to measure best value in financial terms at least.

*For this reason 'social impact storyboarding' supports SROI where the instance of the project service and cost benefit analysis methodology can carry credibility. However, and although considerable efforts have been made in this field<sup>5</sup>, the difficulty of researching equivalent cost examples for relevant instances of service across public service sectors is certainly daunting, and there is an inevitable credibility problem in providing these complex equivalency estimates for particular project impacts.*

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, the 'Survivors' 'Break the Silence' project in Manchester, supported by the Zurich Community Trust quotes "177:1 - Every £1 invested in Survivors Manchester generated £177 of value for its stakeholders".

<sup>5</sup> Cost Benefit Analysis - The GMCA Research Team (formerly New Economy) has pioneered the development of a cost benefit analysis (CBA) methodology that has become nationally leading in its approach to articulating the fiscal, economic and social value of interventions. The methodology has been subject to an ongoing process of development since it was initially developed in 2011, and was adopted as supplementary guidance to HM Treasury's Green Book in 2014. Representatives from a range of central government departments have supported the development process, and remain engaged in further refinement of the model and accompanying resources... The CBA approach can be used to consider the value for money offered by different interventions that may otherwise not be easily compared. It provides valuable intelligence on the equitability of funding – by demonstrating the money flows between organisations that invest in an intervention and those that derive the benefits, it can inform development of new investment models characterised by a partnership approach to resourcing activity and sharing the benefits from that activity.

20.6.2020

Matthew Burge has been delivering successful evaluations of social impact facilitating improved planning and project management for third and public sector clients across cultural and health and wellbeing sectors over the last fifteen years. Recent clients have included: Sunderland Symphony Orchestra (Development Manager, 2018 - 2020); Ushaw (Oral History Project Co-ordinator, 2017 - 2019); Customs House Arts Centre and South Tyneside Council (Public Health Schools Project External Evaluator, 2017 - 2018); West End Refugee Service (Independent External Evaluator, 2016); STC / Hebburn Library Service ("The Story of Hebburn", inclusive participatory heritage commission, 2015); AHEAD - European Commission (EC Grundtvig) transnational project with six European partners developing storytelling in digital media for senior travellers engaged in lifelong learning (Independent External Evaluator and Critical Friend commission, 2014 - 2016); Millin Centre - RBS Women Into Enterprise (External Evaluator for Social Impact Storyboard commission), 2015; The Studio @ CIC for The Customs House Arts Centre (successful ACE Strategic Touring bid, ACE "best practice" Business and Activity Planning commission, 2013-14); Mental Health Matters / Sunderland University (ESF-funded Social Enterprise Report: 'Flying Into Our Futures? - Enterprise For All in the Third Age?', 2012); Families Talking, family mediation service, Middlesbrough (Communications, Social Impact Evaluation, Transition commission, 2010 - 2012); Friendship, Arts, Creativity & Expression (FACE), a service user led association supporting adults with enduring mental ill health (Digital Communications and Organisational Planning commission, 2011); Le Mat social franchise, international sustainable tourism (social impact communications and branding commission, 2010); Humanah CIC, asylum seeker and refugee service, Middlesbrough (Communications, Business Planning, Social Impact Capture commission, 2010); Voluntary Arts England, for Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) - Learning Revolution Festival - (National Arts Facilitator - nine cities of England, promoting Labour's adult lifelong learning strategy in participatory formats, 2009).

The Independent External Evaluator and Critical Friend commission for the EC Grundtvig commission was valued 9/10, "very good - addresses the criterion with all aspects of high quality" by the EC Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency at sign off in February 2016.

Matthew Burge was an R&D partner for project evaluation in the development of the cultural / heritage Techformance project for high tech children's theatre development with Kulturivast (Sweden) and six other european partner organisations for the EC's Creative Europe programme (2017/18). The prospect of Brexit caused two UK (including BSA Ltd) and one Northern Ireland partner to drop out from the project. Other European partners continued to develop the project.

Matthew Burge, 20.6.2020

M: 0785 235 1506

E: matthewburge1@me.com

Link: [www.burgesurteesassociates.com](http://www.burgesurteesassociates.com)