

THE THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS OF EVALUATING A PUBLIC POLICY

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Abstract: Public policy assessment is a suite of operations that relate to the quantification of expected outcomes, based on efforts made to achieve results in an area under the responsibility of public authorities. Public policy assessment should not be confused with administrative control, audit, management or monitoring.

The assessment of public policy can not be confused with management control, which analyzes the evolution of means and achievements, towards evaluation, which analyzes the relation between the public achievements and their impact on the social and natural environment. Public policy assessment is also an aid to decision-making for subsequent action programs.

Keywords: public policy, prospective evaluation, formative evaluation, governmental actions, political science.

It must be mentioned that the term of „public policy” entered the specialized studies and the current language in Romania late enough (at the end of the '90s) and not even today can we talk about a definition of it, but rather we have a series of features and characteristics emerged in the attempt of approaching the term as completely as possible.¹

Regarding the origin of the term „public policy”, a possible explanation might be that the term was borrowed from English by translating the term „policy”, but by translating it, a confusion might be created linked to the influence of any political party.

Otherwise said, traditionally speaking, policy means mainly the activity of political parties, of the institution regulated through democratic mechanisms (Parliament, Government and their own work mechanisms), political declarations, electoral campaigns, etc and therefore the tendency of contamination at the terminology level.² Romania preferred to use the term taken from the French litterature (politiques publiques).

Whichever the origin of the term „public policy” was, what needs to be remembered is that the public policy represents, in fact, a network of decisions regarding the concrete mechanisms to find the resources in order to reach the proposed targets.

The analysis of the definitions met in the specialized litterature shows that the notion of policy, essential for the definition of „public policy” is used in several ways, either to define a domain of activity with a public character, a group of objectives or programs enforced by the Government, a package of norms or a law adopted in a certain domain, the product of the governmental actions or even the impact of the governmental activities on the society.

In a common way of defining it, the term „policy” can only be approached as a medium-placed concept, which does not have the dimensions of a private decision, but also does not represent a macro-social domain.

¹ Marius Constantin Profiroiu, Elena Iorga, *Public Policies Manual*, Editura Economica, Bucharest, 2009, p.11.

² Adrian Miroiu, *Introduction in the analysis of public policies*, Editura Paideia, Bucharest, 2011, p.9.

In order to better understand the dimensions of the notion of public policy, a series of key-concepts are necessary in order to help build the concept³:

- public policy is an action implemented by the structures of power, structures that have the legal, political and financial authority to act;
- a reaction to the issues of the society („real world”), through the public policy, it is attempted to meet a necessity or answer the concrete problems of the society;
- orientation of the policy towards a well defined purpose: the public policy is oriented towards reaching a set of well delimited objectives in the attempt to resolve a particular need/problem of the community it addresses to;
- the public policy must not be treated as a singular decision, but as a part of an integrated strategy;
- the public policy is implemented following the notice of a problem that needs to be resolved;
- the policy is generally implemented by an implementation structure made out of several and in more rare cases, of a single structure (for instance, governmental agency);
- the public policy will always have in view the justification for which it is going to be applied, will have to motivate its application;
- the public policy is an assumed decision, not a promise or an intention.

The public policies analysis is an „applied discipline of social sciences that uses multiple research and argumentation methods in order to produce and convert the relevant information for public policy, which may be used in political environments in order to resolve public policies issues”⁴.

Unlike the academic research, which aims to develop those theories that contribute to a better understanding of the society, by following the relationships from a larger circle of behavioral variables, the research of public policies⁵ focuses on the relationships between the variables which reflect the social problems and other variables which may be controlled through public policies. The desired product of the research conducted in public policies is a hypothesis more or less verified, in the shape of: if the Government takes a certain action, then a certain result will emerge.⁶

In his work, *The Policy Orientation*, Lasswell identified three fundamental characteristics of the research in public policies⁷:

- *It is interdisciplinary*, in the sense that it applies methods and knowledge from different domains, such as law, sociology, psychology, economic sciences;
- It has a *predilect orientation towards the social problems resolution* as it does not have an exclusively academic character, but it tries to identify solutions for the real problems of the society;
- *Normativity*, in the sense that it explicitly assumes the fact that it cannot be absolutely objective.⁸

From the point of view of the analysis, a policy presents itself under the shape of an assembly of practices and norms issues by one or more public actors.

³ Marius Constantin Profiroiu, Elena Iorga, *Public Policies Manual*, Editura Economică, Bucharest, 2009, pp.16-17.

⁴ Weimer, L. David si Vinning, R. Aidan, *Analysis of the public policies – concepts and practice*, 3rd edition, Editura Arc, Bucharest, 2004, p.31.

⁵ The research of the public policies, extended in order to include the study of the public policies process is sometimes called science of public policies (see, Lasswell, D. Harold, *The Emerging Conception of the Policy Sciences*, in Weimer, David and Vinning, Aidan, *Analysis of the public policies*, *op. cit.*, p.35). The distinction between the analysis of the public policies and the research of the public policies is given by the force of the orientation towards the customer: the researchers of the public policies are not that linked to the decision makers at the public level.

⁶ Marius Constantin Profiroiu, Elena Iorga, *Public Policies Manual*, Editura Economică, Bucharest, 2009, p.22.

⁷ H.D. Lasswell, *The Policy Orientation*, 1951, *apud* Miroiu Adrian., *op.cit.*, p.14, *apud* Marius Constantin Profiroiu, Elena Iorga, *Public Policies Manual*, Editura Economică, Bucharest, 2009, p.22.

⁸ H.D. Lasswell, *The Policy Orientation*, 1951, p. 15, în Adrian Miroiu, *op. cit.*, p.14.

The idea that dominated is that the analysis of policies is not meant to replace the political decisions, but to facilitate their implementation.

Also, the public policy does not have the role of proposing resolutions, but to offer complete information about the issues identified, to perform specific analysis in well determined moments of the process of enforcement of the policies too, even if issuing recommendations, which the decision makers are free to accept or not, remains an important objective.⁹

We must also remind the fact that next to the state and other public institutions, among the active subjects of public policies we may also find private agencies (non-governmental organizations, associations, groups of interests) which, in their turn, define and follow a certain sector of public policies.

Taken into account the criterion of the inclusion capacity around the issues identified as needing resolution, it has been concluded that there are both authorities, institutions which use their organizations to actively participate in finding those public policies that may offer viable solutions to the real problems that appear and public groups, the ones who are just getting informed but are not actively participating in the elaboration and assessment process of the public policy.¹⁰

Public administration, irrespective of the level it is organized at, aims to apply these public policies with a view to realize the public services and satisfy the citizens' general needs.¹¹

However, before implementing a public policy, it needs to be analyzed by means of two characteristics: namely, if it has achieved its proposed goals and as a result of its implementation, what are its effects in the subject matter. This analysis of the two dimensions represents a stage in the process of developing a public policy and is in fact *the evaluation of a public policy*.

This complex process of policy assessment is in fact objective and systematic analysis, with the help of social research methods, of public policies, in terms of the objectives proposed.¹²

Evaluation is an indispensable tool for public authorities. To the extent that the actors of the economy receive clear and immediate signals from the market, they can adapt their supply of goods and services to its requirements.¹³

The public policy assessment process is a suite of operations that relate to the quantification of expected results, based on efforts made to achieve results in an area under the responsibility of public authorities.

Public policy assessment should not be confused with administrative control, audit, management control or monitoring. Thus, while administrative control is carried out by specialized institutions and aims at the regularity and legality of acts developed in public service delivery, public policy assessment, seeks the efficiency and effectiveness of this action. Also, with regard to audit aimed at direct financial control, with regard to accounting compliance analysis, with recommendations only for the budgetary domain, the public policy assessment adopts recommendations on the effectiveness of policies.¹⁴

As we have seen, evaluating a public policy can not be confused with the monitoring process, which is a process by which policy makers, financiers and interest groups are pursuing a program, according to the predefined schedule.

The whole process of a public policy, from the emergence of the problem to the acquisition of sufficient experience and understanding of the public policy process to make a meaningful assessment of the impact of the policy, may extend over several years and, in the case of Of complex policies over several decades. Several recent studies suggest that a timeframe between 20

⁹Adrian Miroiu, *Introduction in the analysis of public policies*, Bucharest, 2001, p.18.

¹⁰Nicoleta Miulescu, *Public policies*, Editura Universul Juridic, Bucharest, 2009, p.4.

¹¹*Ibidem*.

¹² Adrian Miroiu, Mireille Rădoi, Marian Zulean, *The analyze of the,Public policies*,the courses , Bucharest, 2002, p.130.

¹³ Marius Constantin Profiroiu, Elena Iorga, *Public Policies Manual*, Editura Economica, Bucharest,2009, p.76.

¹⁴Nicoleta Miulescu, *Politici publice*, Editura Universul Juridic, Bucharest, 2009, pp.19-20.

and 40 years is necessary for a sufficient understanding of the impact of different socio-economic conditions and the acquisition of scientific knowledge about a problem.¹⁵

The factors that contributed to the development of the public policy area were: firstly, the need to reduce the spending allocated from the budget imposed the demand for identifying best-selection programs in the decision-making process on how Which public institutions allocate public money. Secondly, it was found that the beneficiaries of public services are no longer just beneficiaries of these services but are active participants in decision-making, so they want to be informed about how public institutions have agreed to spend public money.

All this can be based on just credible statistics so that policies and programs reach their predicted effect.

Thus, all these requirements that are required to be observed in order for a public policy to be implemented in good conditions and the effect envisaged at the time of its elaboration can be achieved, must undergo a certain structure of the evaluation process:

- An ex-ante analysis that involves quantitative and qualitative analysis of the problem, and we are talking here about setting the decision criteria, estimating the expected costs and results, and the necessary measures for implementation and evaluation;

- Evaluation during the course of a program will analyze public policy at the intermediate stage of its transition from the decision-making phase to the implementation phase, in which it is aimed at whether the program achieves the results achieved at each stage of implementation and can either The continuation of implementation, or the interruption or change of the conditions considered at the outset, as this process is at an early stage of implementation;

- Ex-post evaluation refers to analyzes aimed at identifying whether the objectives of a project have been achieved and making recommendations on the continuation, modification and / or completion of similar projects.ir predicted effect.

What is to be retained and to be followed is also the criteria for evaluating a public policy that must correspond to those established at the stage of formulating the public policy proposal. At European Union level, there are five criteria for evaluating a program, project, or public policy. These are: relevance, efficiency, efficiency, impact and sustainability.¹⁶

Relevance takes into account the real needs of the actors involved, and from this criterion a public policy assessment is made if the policy analyzed corresponds to the identified issues, the needs of the applicants.

Efficiency measures if the program has reached its goals set in the initiation phase. Efficiency targets whether the policy has achieved its objectives, but not at any cost but with the analysis of how the available resources have been translated into results.

The impact will take into account the results of implementing a policy on its beneficiaries, except for the direct, more exacted ones who have benefited from the effects of its implementation in a direct or indirect way.

Sustainability will take into account the positive effects that a public policy produces over a period of time after the completion of the implementation process.

It is noted that in Romania the public policy evaluation stage is still underdeveloped. Most of the evaluation and monitoring activities are carried out within the programs for the allocation of funds from the European Union.

Regarding programs financed from the state budget, a small number has been evaluated during or after the implementation. If the evaluation took place, it takes the form of reports on the achievement of the objectives, without giving importance to the impact of public policy or the efficiency with which the resources were managed.

¹⁵Public policies., course support, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, The University Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, 2013-2014.

¹⁶Public policies., course support, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, The University Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, 2013-2014.

The Government Decision no. 775/2005 on the approval of the Regulation on the elaboration, monitoring and evaluation of public policies at central level, which provides for the establishment of some public policy units within the ministries and the other central public administration institutions, obliges the inclusion of the criteria for evaluation in the public policy proposal Public policy and the timing of the evaluation. Some of the criteria for evaluating a proposed public policy are:

- a) the extent to which the results of the implementation of public policies correspond to those established at the policy formulation stage;
- b) the ratio between the costs of obtaining the results and those envisaged in the policy formulation phase and specified in the implementation strategy;
- c) compliance with the content of activities and deadlines set out in the action plan.¹⁷

We can notice that the public policy has a few concrete features which define it, namely: it contains a set of concrete measures; it includes decisions regarding the resources allocated; it describes a general action framework and this is why it is different from an individual measure and it has purposes and objectives which are formulated depending on certain norms and values.

Also, the public policy assessment process should take into account the extent to which the effects of public policy implementation correspond to those outlined in the drafting stage if the anticipated costs at the policy formulation stage were proportionate to the results obtained and whether completion and if the evaluation process was carried out according to the established schedule.

In conclusion, we may say that the phrase „public policies” targets on one hand the object of the public policies which translates in providing the goods and performing services to the society, generally speaking, in order to satisfy some of its requests, requests that took the shape of issues for whose resolution the active participants must find the resources and means necessary to issue and subsequently implement the public policies.

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¹⁷ Art.22 din Hotărârea de Guvern nr.775/2005 privind aprobarea Regulamentului privind elaborarea, monitorizarea și evaluarea politicilor publice la nivel central și care prevede înființarea unor unități de politici publice în cadrul ministerelor și al celorlalte instituții ale administrației publice centrale.

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