A new decade for social changes
The functions of social indicators in the elaboration of public policy proposals. Case study: Public health policies

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Abstract. The identification and measurement of social indicators are essential elements in defining the public issue, which represent a first important step for the elaboration of public policies proposals. In this respect, regarding COVID-19 Pandemic public policies strategists, both of National Governments and international organizations measured each social indicator that could be integrated in the program of measures to control SARS-COV-2 virus. Therefore, indicators such as total number or daily number of cases, number of active / closed cases, number of new cases, number of people in ICU, rate of cases per 1 mil. Inhabitants, incident at community, local, national, continental and global level, number of performed tests and so on, were used by public central and local administrations in order to apply the measurements for fighting the pandemic. In this paperwork we aim to measure social perception on the efficiency of public health policies elaborated and deployed by Romanian Government, as well as the degree of transparency in communication of the public institutions in relationship with citizens.

Keywords. functions, social indicators, public policies, health

1. The concept of Public Policies. Theoretical approach

Public policy may be described as a general frame that contains the governmental actions prepared to achieve public objectives, with a well-defined functional definition of public policies, for our purposes, being the study of governmental decisions and actions conceived to cope with a specific public matter.

The academic study of public policies emerged as a major subdomain of the public science discipline in the 1960. Political science people started to build the process of issuing policies (Charles, Malone, 2015, p.3).

Policies are “intentional courses of action designed in response to a perceived problem. Public policies are selected through a specific political process, adopted, implemented through laws, regulatory measures, government action courses and priorities for funding and implementation by a public agency” (Charles, Malone, 2015, p.4). Individuals and groups try to kraft public policy by mobilizing groups of interests, education for advocacy and political
lobby. Official politics offers guiding to Governments regarding a series of actions and offers also links of mutual responsibility between the Government and its citizens.

The political process involves several key aspects: a definition of the problem that needs to be addressed, the objectives that the policy is meant to achieve and the political instruments that are used to address the problem and achieve the objectives.

The analysis of the policies describes the investigations that produce precise and useful information for the decision factors. The importance of a solid analysis of public policies in the achievement of different objectives related to the growth and development of a nation and its citizens can never be excessively underlined. For example, the adoption and deployment of public policies helped the nation recover after the Great Depression and mobilized the country to react to aggression acts from the Second World War.

Public policies adopted the key legislation regarding social assistance, such as the Law of social security from 1935, the Law of civil rights from 1964 and the Law of voting rights from 1965, together with the legislation that created the medical programs Medicare and Medicaid, to cite just a few. In the broadest sense, the analysis of public policies dates since the beginning of civilization. The social sciences emerged as a separate set of disciplines in the late part of 19th century (Dobre, Coman, 2015, p. 124).

Because of this, studies of public policies are extremely important, because they help science people, politicians, political science people and a better-informed audience to deeply analyze each policy, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, in order to improve political choices, formulations and deployment model.

2. Public policies process and the importance of social indicators

The problem of public policy is a condition or a situation that creates needs or complaints, that can be corrected by governmental intervention (Rus, Tanase, Sandu, 2020, p. 5). Not every problem can be solved through a public policy measure, that is the reason why the process to establish the agenda is a selective one, involving different institutional actors that try to bring the problems to government attention. In this respect, public policies issues need to fulfill three conditions to remain on the institutional agenda: (1) to be significant enough - a significant number of persons or communities are affected; (2) have intensity – the impact magnitude is important; (3) have durability over time.

Starting with the 21st Century, social indicators and life quality research represented well established areas of social sciences in many countries in the world. Numerous book publications, encyclopedias, magazines and specialized newsletters, national and international professional organizations, conferences and congresses are just a few clues of the successful career of two rather new branches of social research. In this subchapter we will summarize to the context and objectives of the research related to the social indicators of life movement and quality, approaches and major applications and also to the objective and subjective indicators (Michalos, Land, 2011, p. 2-14).

As a domain of social science, the research of social indicators emerged in the United States in the middle of the 60’s. In reality, initially it was part of an attempt of the American space agency NASA to detect and anticipate the impact and the side effects of the American space program over American society. Therefore, the project reached the conclusion that they missed almost completely not only the data, but also the concepts and appropriate methodologies in this respect.

Social indicators mainly reflect the measurement and monitoring of wellbeing and life quality, while notions and theoretical foundations of this concept are extremely important. More
than that, the type of indicators selected for the empiric measurement depend, also, to a great extent by the underlying conceptualization. In particular, the differentiation between subjective and objective indicators and the so-called social deeds are strongly connected with the conceptual framework of reference.

While objective social indicators are statistics that represent social deeds independent of the personal estimations, the subjective social indicators are measurements of individual perceptions and evaluations of social circumstances (Poenaru, 2015, p. 58 – 70).

On one hand, objective indicators start from the assumption that sometimes life conditions may be considered favorable or unfavorable by comparing real conditions with normative criteria such as objective or subjective values. Even so, an important precondition is the fact that there is a social or even political consensus regarding three key aspects: first, related to the dimensions that are relevant for the wellbeing considerations, second, over the relevant circumstances and third, related to the direction that society should follow.

Probably there is a consensus that we can consider a low unemployment or criminality rate and a high medium income or educational level as improvement and progress.

We might be less certain, when we evaluate indicators such as retirement age and it could be really debatable whether reduced differences of incomes should, in general, be considered as a social progress, taking into consideration that there could be a compromise between equity and efficiency, or equity and economic growth.

In contrast to objective indicators, the usage of subjective social indicators is based on the premise that wellbeing, ultimately, should be perceived by the citizens and can be better evaluated by themselves. So, this vision is not undisputed and generated a profound controversy related to the principles of measuring wellbeing, especially Scandinavian science people from social services criticized this subjective approach over life quality and the usage of subjective indicators. Also, subjective indicators are vital in social policy both for the evaluation of the success of the policy, as for the selection of the objectives of the policy.

In this framework, both objective and subjective indicators are of particular interest, because opulence should be only partially determined by external circumstances.

Related to regular social monitoring and reporting, this is by far the most important and successful deployment of social indicators and research of life quality. Social reporting can be defined as a collection and exposure more or less institutionalized of data that reflect the evaluation of live conditions and wellbeing of the society and the changes through time. Therefore, social reporting is providing quantitative information and empiric knowledge to be used with the purpose of self-reflection of a unique society or group of societies such as European Union.

Being a specific model of production, dissemination and presentation of socially relevant knowledge, contemporary social reporting is very well established within informational systems of several national states and within international organizations, such as The Organization of Cooperation and Economic Development, European Union and United Nations. In Europe, there are only few countries that have no monitoring of complex and regulate social reporting at national level.

3. Social perception of health public policies during COVID 19 Pandemic

3.1. Measures taken by the Romanian government during Covid-19 Pandemic
   (State of emergency, State of Alert)

Following the establishment of the state of emergency in Romania, for a period of 30 days, the Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to implement an inter-institutional mechanism for
the implementation and reporting of measures related to the areas included in Decree no. 195/2020. The provisions included in the decrees that established and prolonged the state of emergency were implemented by 10 military ordinances and other normative acts issued by the Government¹.

According to https://www.ziarexclusiv.info, the measures adopted by the government during emergency state related to the health segment are the following:

- ” Reaching the number of testing facilities to 64 centers for the moment and testing capacity to over 16,000 tests per day;
- Constantly increasing the budgets of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the support of quarantine centers and for the efficient management of SARS-CoV-2 infections;
- Daily presentation by the I.N.S.P., through the National Center for Coordination and Management of Intervention, of the stage of SARS-CoV-2 infections at national level;
- Extending the number of dedicated Tel Verde telephone lines;
- Launching the production of nationally approved islets and advance the domestic production of masks for the population and medical clinics;
- Establish extreme prices for medicines for human usage and approve the Plan of Measures for the development of hospitals in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic with the lists of support hospitals for patients tested positive for this virus;
- Continuous procurement of sanitary equipment, medical equipment and protective materials;
- Assimilation of 43 specialized units in the program for the performing of RT – PCR tests, being allocated a budget of 26,833,000 lei for the production of 134,165 RT - PCR tests;
- Increasing the medical staff for the health units, by interrupting the training sessions of the residents and integrating them in the present activity of the sections of infectious diseases, intensive care or in the E.R., in relation to the needs recognized by the hospitals;
- Payment of a monthly incentive of 2,500 lei for approximately 75,000 medical personnel directly involved in the treatment of patients suspected or suffering from corona virus;
- Carrying out the ROL 2 medical training and a camp with a capacity of 500 seats for the instruction of selected and placed in isolation / quarantine staff, inside the National Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics "Ana Aslan" in Otopeni.

3.2. Research Objectives

General Objective
O.G. Measuring the social perception of the population regarding the Government's measures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specific Objectives
O.S.1. The impact of the effectiveness of the measures taken by the Government during the pandemic
O.S.2. The perception of public policies implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic
O.S.3. Perception of the communication strategy measures taken by the Government during the pandemic

O.S.4. The measurement of the population's perception of trust in local public administration institutions

3.3. Study participants
In this questionnaire participated 56 females (70%) and 24 males (30%) with an average age of 26.54; minimum age - 18 years old and maximum age - 52 years old. The majority of the respondents come from urban areas, reaching 56.25%, and the rest 43.75% come from the rural areas. Regarding the education level, 3.75% are high school graduates, the majority (78.75%) are attending the university, while 16.25% already graduated from university, and 1.25% are attending master's degree studies.

![Gender Distribution](image)

**Figure 1 – Gender**

3.4. Research tools
In order to perform the study, it was used a questionnaire made of 7 questions with 5 answer options. The scope of this questionnaire was to analyze through this report the social perception related to health public policies during COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was sent for completion to a large number of persons, and the response rate was a percentage of 80% from the total number of 100%.

4. Data analysis and processing
**Question no. 1** – Generally speaking, how efficient do you evaluate the measurements taken by the governmental authorities against Covid – 19?
In the opinion of the respondents of this sounding, the majority of them, respectively 32% declared that the measurements taken by the governmental authorities against Covid – 19 were both efficient and inefficient, while 22% declared that they were inefficient, 15% answered that the measurements were efficient, and the rest of 6% considered that they were completely inefficient.
In general, how efficient do you consider the measurements taken by the authorities against Covid-19 pandemic?

Evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 the next statements related to public policies implemented by the Romanian Government during Covid-19 pandemic (1 – strongly disagree; 5 – strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Average response</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The government used a clear communication to ensure that everyone has the information they need to protect themselves and others from COVID-19, regardless of socio-economic status, migrant status, ethnicity or language.</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The government has cooperated with other countries and international partners, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The government has ensured that health workers have the personal protective equipment they need to permanently protect themselves from COVID-19.</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The government had a strong pandemic training team, which included public health and medical experts, to manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The government has provided special protection to vulnerable groups at higher risk, such as the elderly, the poor, migrants, prisoners and the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The government made sure that we always had full access to the medical services we needed during the epidemic.</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The government has given everyone access to free and reliable COVID-19 tests in case they have symptoms.</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The government has helped me and my family meet our daily needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of income, food and shelter.</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The government has provided mental health services to help people suffering from loneliness, depression and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 1</th>
<th>The government used a clear communication to ensure that everyone has the information they need to protect themselves and others from COVID-19, regardless of socio-economic status, migrant status, ethnicity or language.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The majority of respondents considered as efficient the way of communication that the Government used to ensure that everyone had the necessary information to protect themselves and others from Covid-19. This statement received the highest score from respondents – 3.16 from 5. Therefore, the majority of respondents (40%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement the government used a clear communication to ensure that everyone has the information they need to protect themselves and others from COVID-19, regardless of socio-economic status, migrant status, ethnicity or language, 27.5% were neutral, while 32.50% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.91 1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 2</th>
<th>The government has cooperated with other countries and international partners, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Related to the statement - the government has cooperated with other countries and international partners, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), to combat the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of respondents 43.75% were neutral, 36.25% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 20% - agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, the statement was evaluated by the respondents 2.81 from 5, with a standard deviation of 1.17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.84 1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 – Question no. 2: Did the government used a clear communication to ensure that everyone had the information they need to protect themselves and others from COVID-19, regardless of socio-economic status, migrant status, ethnicity or language?

- 8.75% Not at all trustworthy
- 10.00% A little confidence
- 22.50% Neutral
- 23.75% Lots of confidence
- 35.00% Total confidence
Figure 4 – Question no. 3: Has the government cooperated with other countries and international partners, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), to combat the COVID-19 pandemic?

Item 3 - The government has ensured that health workers have the personal protective equipment they need to permanently protect themselves from COVID-19.

When asked whether the government has ensured that health workers have the personal protective equipment, they need to permanently protect themselves from COVID-19, the majority of the respondents – 50% disagreed, respectively strongly disagreed, 23.75% were neutral, while 26.25% - agreed or strongly agreed. In this situation the statement was evaluated by the respondents 2.68 from 5, with a standard deviation of 1.21.

Figure 5 – Question no. 4: Did the government ensured that health workers have the personal protective equipment they need to permanently protect themselves from COVID-19?

Item 4 - The government had a strong pandemic training team, which included public health and medical experts, to manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Related to the statement - The government had a strong pandemic training team, which included public health and medical experts, to manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the respondents 57.5% strongly disagreed or disagreed, 27.5% voted for a neutral position, while the rest of 15% agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, this statement was evaluated by the respondents that answered this question as 2.33 from 5, with a standard deviation of 1.22.
Figure 6 – Question no. 5: Did the government have a strong pandemic training team, which included public health and medical experts, to manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Item 5 - The government has provided special protection to vulnerable groups at higher risk, such as the elderly, the poor, migrants, prisoners and the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of the respondents declared themselves as unsatisfied by the fact that the government didn’t offer support to elder people and homeless people during Covid-19 pandemic. This statement was evaluated by the respondents with a score of 2.26 from 5, with a standard deviation of 1.28. therefore, the majority of 62.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement The government has provided special protection to vulnerable groups at higher risk, such as the elderly, the poor, migrants, prisoners and the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic, 18.75% were neutral, while 18.75% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Figure 7 – Question no. 6: Has the government provided special protection to vulnerable groups at higher risk, such as the elderly, the poor, migrants, prisoners and the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Item 6 - The government made sure that we always had full access to the medical services we needed during the epidemic.

When asked whether the government ensured that we had constant and full access to needed medical services during the epidemic, the majority of respondents – 66.25% disagreed, respectively strongly disagreed, 16.25% chose a neutral position, while 17.5% - agreed or
strongly agreed. In this situation the statement received a score of 2.19 out of 5, with a standard deviation of 1.24.

![Figure 8 - Question no. 7: Did the government made sure that we always had full access to the medical services we needed during the epidemic?](image_url)

**Item 7 - The government has given everyone access to free and reliable COVID-19 tests in case they have symptoms.**

Related to the statement - *The government has given everyone access to free and reliable COVID-19 tests in case they have symptoms,* the majority of the respondents 71.25% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 15% were neutral, while 13.75% - agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, the statement was evaluated by the respondents 2.05 out of 5, with a standard deviation of 1.3.

![Figure 9 - Question no. 8: Has the government given everyone access to free and reliable COVID-19 tests in case they have symptoms?](image_url)

**Item 8 - The government has helped me and my family meet our daily needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of income, food and shelter.**

When asked whether *the government has helped me and my family meet our daily needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of income, food and shelter,* the majority of the respondents 68.75%, as can be observed in the figure below, disagreed or strongly disagreed.
with this statement, 22.50% were neutral, while the rest of 8.75% agreed or strongly agreed. The average answers to this statement is 1.94 with a standard deviation of 1.09.

Figure 10 - Question no. 9: Has the government helped me and my family meet our daily needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of income, food and shelter?

**Item 9 - The government has provided mental health services to help people suffering from loneliness, depression and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Related to the statement *The government has provided mental health services to help people suffering from loneliness, depression and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic*, the majority of the respondents 76.25% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 16.25% had a neutral position, while 7.5% agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, this statement received a score of 1.91 from the respondents, with a standard deviation of 1.05.

Figure 11 - Question no. 10: Has the government provided mental health services to help people suffering from loneliness, depression and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Item 10 - I have had and still have trust in the Government's reports on the spread of the pandemic and the statistics on the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths.**

Related to this statement *I have had and still have trust in the Government's reports on the spread of the pandemic and the statistics on the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths*, the majority of the respondents 75% disagreed, respectively strongly disagreed, 12.5% were
neutral, while the rest of 12.5% agreed or strongly agreed. This statement was evaluated by the respondents with a score of 1.84, with a standard deviation of 1.17.

![Figure 12 - Question no. 11: Did I had and still have trust in the Government's reports on the spread of the pandemic and the statistics on the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths?](image)

**Question no. 3** – How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (1 – no trust; 5 – full trust) [Romanian Government / Ministries]

When asked what is the trust level in the way the Romanian Government and the Ministries managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the majority of the respondents 55% expressed that they have low or no trust, 33.75% chose to be neutral, while 11.25% - have a lot or full trust.

![Figure 13 - Question no. 12: How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (Romanian Government / Ministries)](image)

**Question no. 4** - How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (1 – no trust; 5 – full trust) [Romanian presidency]

The majority of the respondents 55% answered to the question *How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis?*
19 pandemic crisis? (Romanian presidency) that they have low or no trust, while 27.50% of them chose to be neutral, and 17.50% have high or full trust.

**Figure 14 - Question no. 13: How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (Romanian presidency)**

Question no. 5 - How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (Local administration / town hall)

When asked what is the trust level in the way the local administration managed the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the majority of the respondents 35% had a neutral position, 35% have no or decreased trust, while 30% have a lot of trust respectively full trust in this institution.

**Figure 15 - Question no. 14: How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (Local administration / town hall)**

Question no. 6 - How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (The Army / Police department / Gendarmerie)

The majority of the respondents declared to be pleased with the way the Army / Police and the Gendarmerie managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Therefore, an important part of them 41.25% answered that they have a lot of trust, even full trust in these authorities, 28.75% registered a neutral opinion, while 30% had low or no trust.
Question no. 7 - How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (Hospitals / doctors)

Related to the question How much do you trust in the way the following public administration institutions managed and will manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis? (Hospitals / doctors) the majority of the respondents – 58.75% have a lot of trust or full trust in the medical staff, 22.50% had a neutral position, while 18.75% - have low or no trust in the way the medical staff and hospitals managed this situation.

Conclusions

The issue of the public policies is a condition or a situation that generates needs or complaints, that need to be corrected through governmental intervention. Not all problems can be solved through public policies measurements, that is why the process of establishing the agenda is a selective one, that involves different institutional actors that are trying to bring the problems in the government attention. In this respect, the public policies problems must meet...
three conditions to remain on the institutional agenda: (1) to be significant enough – a significant number of people or communities to be affected; (2) to have impact – a great impact magnitude; (3) to have durability over time.

Through this paper, we aimed to measure citizens' perceptions over public health policies during the pandemic and general concepts on the given topic. In the opinion of those who responded to this survey, most of them stated that the measures taken by the authorities to combat the Covid-19 Pandemic were both effective and ineffective.

The general objective of this study is to measure the social perception of the population regarding the Government's measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the purpose of this questionnaire analyzed in this report the social perception of public health policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the most important measures adopted by the Government during the state of emergency in the field of health are: the purchase of more equipment for protection against the virus, increasing the number of medical staff in medical units at commune, city, town, and increasing the number of test centers, but also the start of the production of islets.

The participants in this study were 80 people, most of the respondents coming from urban areas, and pursuing undergraduate and master's degree studies.

Most respondents rated the Government's communication as effective in providing the information needed to protect themselves and others from Covid-19 as effective. Related to the trust the respondents have in medical staff and hospitals, they have been shown to be most satisfied, but there are also people who have little or no confidence in how this crisis has been handled by Government and Ministries, respectively. On the other hand, when asked if the government made sure that health workers had the personal protective equipment they needed to permanently protect them from COVID-19, most respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, and only a few agreed or strongly agreed.

Regarding the special protections of vulnerable groups at higher risk, such as the elderly, the poor, migrants, prisoners and the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic provided by the Government, most respondents said that they were dissatisfied because of the lack of support from the Government for the elderly and the homeless during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Respondents also said that they have more confidence in the medical staff, health units, army, police, gendarmerie and less confidence in the President of Romania and local administrations in how the following institutions have managed and will manage this crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

References