

## EMPOWERING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH OF SOCIAL POLICIES

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**Abstract:** We start from the premise that the management office has a critical segment namely that of the valuation of policies and social programs. If the financial resources are mobilized by the state as the main provider of social welfare, it is absolutely natural to pursue the concern whether the benefits resulting from implementation of social policies and programs justify the costs. Contemporary society must perceive the evaluation as a priority, to prevent waste of resources, to promote effective social management, with significant implications at the societal, organizational, or personal level.

Key words: evaluation, social programs, social policies, empowering organizations, social management

Evaluating social programs is an area that falls increasingly into the area of interest to policy makers, researchers, practitioners and last but not least, the donors. We refer, of course at the cognitive assessment as a systematic approach. We must overcome the myth that assessment is an instrument of control, which will entail penalties. Most important is that the evaluation must be judged and seen as an intrinsic element of the program. Evaluating policies and social programs is a prerequisite for success in social work diagnosis and intervention. The companies that subscribe paradigm of social development, the concern to promote models of good practice in evaluation of social programs is a line of constant investment. Interest is so not only for theoretical evaluation as a discipline, but also for the practical exercise of assessment. We make some important clarifications on three concepts that must be addressed separately, even though, beyond their specific, they have common areas of action: research, analysis and evaluation of policies/social programs.

It is necessary to highlight differences between research, analysis and evaluation as phases of the knowledge of the social policies. We can talk about succession in time, given that research is the first step. It has well-defined scientific objectives, oriented thorough knowledge of policy and of social programs. Social policy research – allows us to obtain data on social reality which led to social policy. It is possible to "know, explain, understand the phenomenon, making diagnoses on the facts and identify relevant indicators"<sup>1</sup>.

Social policy analysis, is the second phase and it aims to build, starting from the results of research. It studies the relations between phenomena, the impact of certain actions and what characterizes the field of law enforcement.

Evaluation of social policies - a step that will build on results achieved in research, meaning social policy analysis, showing the extent to which standards have been met, their

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<sup>1</sup> Marginean I., 2004, apud Ana Maria Priestess, 2009, Social Policy Research. Methodological Aspects, p. 11

efficiency and effectiveness. Of course, the speech of many researchers has different placement of these phases, we define this study to review only those which are significant in relation to evaluative approach.

The "Dictionary of Social Policy" (p. 310-311) G. Mățăuan presents categories for definitions of evaluation compared to different criteria:

Assessment—a tool of decision and a management After Tripod, Felin and Epstein (1986), "evaluation of social programs is a management technique that provides informational feedback for the manager of the program providing its usefulness in relation to managerial decision making. The same idea is found in Thompson (1975), which argues that assessment is a process that provides information for decision making"<sup>2</sup>.

Evaluation-centered on usage and improvement "Assessment should be seen as an ongoing search for ways to improve the program" (Rutman and Mowbray, 1983) From this perspective, evaluation should always be directed towards identifying those solutions that enable the development of program, the increasing of its efficiency.

Evaluation focused on judging the value "To evaluate means to attach certain values for things or more simply, to determine whether they are good or bad " says Barry and Rae (1975). The key word "value" is one factor in making evaluative reporting. This reporting issue is embodied in a value judgment which expresses in what extent social program objectives were achieved and if they have been made in terms of efficiency.

Assessment-centered, objectives "Assessment is the process of determining the extent to which program objectives were met"<sup>3</sup>.

Evaluation focused on comparison "Evaluation can be defined as the process of determining the value or the measure of something which is relative to a given standard and purpose"<sup>4</sup> .

Evaluation focused on social scientific methods "Evaluation of programs is a new and very interesting applied science" <sup>5</sup>.

Descriptive, comprehensive, evaluation "Assessment is a collection of methods, skills, capacities and sensitivities necessary to determine whether a social service is necessary and it is likely to be used, if sufficient efforts are made to meet the social needs identified, but still unsatisfied, and if services meet the needs at a reasonable cost , comparing the cost with the effects"<sup>6</sup>. Despite the many definitions that have been given, we can find common elements. The basic idea is that the success of a program is given in relation to the social problem covered by the program. Assessment highlights the extent to which the program operated within the meaning of that resolution or improvement of social problems.

The extent to which the program operates is within the meaning of the resolution or improvement of social problems. As dimensions of the approach of social policies dimensions, namely social programs, Luana Miruna Pop (Social policies. Elements of theory, analysis and evaluation of social policies ", 2005, p. 175) presents the following:

Analysis of- institutional and regulatory design program

This dimension will seek to capture the degree to which social policies respond to the established objectives. A correct policy molded by objective, i.e. the "resolution" of certain social problems, will have a very clearly defined framework, based on a

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<sup>2</sup> Tripod, Felin and Epstein, 1986

<sup>3</sup> Tyler, 1949

<sup>4</sup> Schulberg, 1969

<sup>5</sup> Posavac and Carey, 1992

<sup>6</sup> Posavac and Carey, 1992

comprehensive approach. However, as the model of participatory evaluation proposes, the idea of institutional actors involved in different stages of policy cycle or in the process of implementing a social program must be accepted and valued. These actors make their presence felt not only in developing and implementing policies, but including their evaluation phase, too.

Analysis of- institutional space in which the program works

We discuss here the role of context in which a social program is implemented, knowing that legal, administrative and legislative structures configure a space which can lead to efficiency, or, by the contrary, the inefficiency of a social program.

**Organizational Analysis** The discourse on social assessment is less oriented to highlight the influence of elements of culture and organizational climate on the evaluation of social policies and programs. There is, as Miruna Pop says, the possibility of explanation the "strategies developed by various organizations involved in the process of organization, management and delivery of social policies in order to adapt them to the institutional design required by the program evaluated"<sup>7</sup>. Organizations have an active role and they shape the implementation of programs, ensuring conditions for success (or not). Therefore, an important element in organizational analysis is to identify the pattern promoted by organizations.

How institutional design can influence the effectiveness of a program? It is supposed that public organizations have patterns that stimulate or not, the implementation of social programs. Analysis of legitimacy? and political support for social programs Each program is built and it promotes certain principles, values, social representations "ordered" by an administrative context. The legitimacy of a social program and its political support depends on these elements. In order to exist and function, it requires a stable institutional framework.

In the speeches of many researchers, the evaluation is discussed in relation to social management. Whether it is treated as an internal or external management activity, as distinct stages in social policy-condition of their effectiveness, as a function or as a management tool, it is considered that the role of evaluation is significant in the decision-making.

There are views that highlight the importance of evaluative practice in identifying ways to improve the program implemented in making its use efficient, in obtaining the suggested results, beyond the secondary effects that may occur.

Some definitions of evaluation focus on methods used to ensure the scientific nature of the approach, while others seek to capture the value of the program.

Whatever the definitions of evaluation are different, it is clear that evaluation is directed towards a profile of the program which can be implemented in a certain context, following at least one of these aspects:

The extent to which the objectives of the program / social policy are fulfilled;

Relevance of the results in relation to the social problem for which the program was created;

Identify the effects that emerge during the program;

Setting directions or concrete interventions to improve the program;

Turning views of all stakeholders in the program;

Promoting best practice models in relation to methodology.

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<sup>7</sup> Luana Miruna Pop, Social policies. Elements of theory, analysis and evaluation of social policies, 2005, p. 175

The conduct of the evaluative process allows the definition of two perspectives:

User-centered evaluation perspective – 'It is a collective process of decision made in collaboration with an identified group of users'<sup>8</sup>.

Participatory assessment perspective - involvement in the assessment of actors who have an interest or they are affected by running a program: implementers, partners, beneficiaries or other stakeholders (Mitroi, V., in "Encyclopedia of Social Development", p. 225).

According to BIM book for social inclusion, we may indicate opportunities and risks associated with valuation. It is a process that causes some opportunities that require an asset.

a) opportunities

Continued reflection on the decisions and actions on the ground;

Avoid duplication of mistakes and dissipating the resources;

Integration of accumulated knowledge in various fields;

Improve decisions;

Identify the intended and unintended positive and negative effects at the various stakeholders;

Prevention of distortion and major derailments on targets;

Foster innovation processes;

Creation of space of communication, and negotiation between stakeholders;

Increased portability of well practice and visibility between institutions;

b) risks

Use as a means of controlling people and their activities, particularly disadvantaged or socially excluded groups;

Pseudo evaluative or evaluative forms of abuse;

Assess processing in a management or accounting office, having the role of explanation of how funds were spent;

Mechanical application of assessment without taking into account the general and local context;

Poor allocation of resources and time needed for the assessment. (Apud Stănculescu, S., in "Encyclopedia of Social Development, p.218)

The evaluative approach of a social program is justified if it helps us in making decisions into opportunity and efficiency.

In his speech, Carol Weiss (1998) indicates the following ideas as significant elements in decision-making based on assessment: ideologies, interests, institutions, information.

Ideologies-the decision environment is characterized through high receptivity ideologies promoted by structures / institutions that are part makers.

Institutions - the decisions have the imprint of culture institutions;

Interest - it is an issue that emphasizes the importance of compatibility of interests and the interests pursued by the program makers, if it does not exist, it can minimize the importance of the evaluative approach in relation to the program evaluated.

Information - the data obtained from evaluation, especially those from sources believed to be relevant, determine the "value" of assessment. If decision makers are consistent with expectations, this kind of information is very important for decision making.

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<sup>8</sup> Patton, 2002, p. 20

Regarding evaluation, the three categories of applicable methods are: quantitative methods, qualitative methods and economic methods.

What is very important in an evaluative design of each project is to identify appropriate methods, folded on the concrete reality of social program implementation.

Assessment of - quantitative methods and standardized tools appeals to reveal cause - effect relationships that are emerging in the implementation of program. They are regarded as traditional methods for evaluating social program. As characteristics of quantitative methods we can name: accuracy, precision and usage of standard instruments. If they are used effectively and if we take advantages from the characteristics mentioned above, quantitative methods are able to provide answers to questions like: Can the program be improved? If so, what are directions for this goal? Do the target groups got the effects of the program? Gabriel Mățăuan proposes a typology of these quantitative methods of evaluation:

1. Inexperienced methods
2. Experiment methods
3. Total experimental methods

The importance of experimental methods is that they can ensure validity of measure. They can show if the program produces changes among beneficiaries.

Whether they complete and support the quantitative evaluative approach, whether they help to design, quality assessment methods have an important role by facilitating the direct involvement of beneficiaries in the evaluation (participatory evaluation).

Qualitative methods are characterized by flexibility and power towards the need of evaluation. Valadez and Bamberger say that qualitative assessment focuses on "understanding processes, behaviors and conditions as perceived by individuals or groups studied"<sup>9</sup>.

Economic evaluation method - is the quantification in monetary units and it is to be applied to the process, but also to results.

Evaluation is important to make the stakeholders aware of their responsibility and of their need to be involved in developing / implementing a social program. This evaluation promotes best practice models that can be adapted to different specific contexts.

In "Participatory Model for Evaluating Social Programs" (Hasenfeld Yeke Yheskel, Katherine Hill, Dale Weaver), evaluation of social programs is treated in terms of participatory design .This evaluative approach answers to challenges and proposes assessment as "a way of organizational learning".

Promoting participatory community development paradigm of participatory evaluation model favored entry in the interest of many social actors.

"Participatory evaluation focuses more on process and indirect effects and it is important for community interventions, since they mostly concern the participation of community members"<sup>10</sup>.

Overcome the stage when evaluative approaches were made in a technical-objectivistic way, we have now models of evaluation that are centered on participation. The author develops an interesting topic: participatory assessment.

Literature shows that participatory evaluation model is well and it proved its viability and efficiency in general in relation to broad category of social programs (not just

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<sup>9</sup> Valadez and Bamberger, 1994, p. 67

<sup>10</sup> Stănculescu M. S, 2007, p. 219

community programs). 12 principles are proposed as a "summary" model of participatory evaluation:

There are often many stakeholders with multiple objectives in an assessment. Views and interests of all parties involved must be articulated, understood and has to be taken into account.

In response to external and internal pressures, the social programs are always changing. Evaluators should understand these changes and incorporate them in the evaluation.

It is not the design of a program which should necessarily stay in the attention of evaluators, but they must be centered on the delivery of the program.

Evaluators should be guided by the range of available research methods and use different assessment methods, based on the program.

Assessment should not just be a neutral registration of program processes and of outcomes. It should be a catalyst for organizational change by providing regular feedback. In this way, we facilitate the discussion about the results and we can propose alternatives to the negative aspects highlighted by the evaluative approach.

Evaluators should be in working relationship/partnership with managers and staff implementing the social program.

The involvement in the assessment program of managers and of the staff, too, can foster organization of learning.

Program managers receive the evaluation of key learning opportunities.

Successful assessment requires trust between evaluators and stakeholders.

Protecting the rights and the dignity of all involved, especially through confidentiality is essential for establishing and maintaining trust.

Formal or informal sessions for sharing information between participants is essential for successful assessment and evaluation and to identify lines of program improvement.

Evaluators must have beyond their expertise in research methodologies, sensitivity and ability to develop trusting relationships with a wide range of stakeholders in a changing program.

Therefore, the idea that assessment is more than informing policy makers about the success of their program is emphasized here. The program constitutes terms of efficiency and accountability, a "learning tool". The evaluation can also be "a catalyst for innovation program "(p. 3), because it manages to provide a formal response to user needs.

After Kassamm Jackson (2006, p. 3) participatory evaluation model is characterized by "a process of self-characteristics, collective production of information and cooperative action in which the actors help to identify the subject evaluation, the evaluation stages, the collection and analysis data"<sup>11</sup>.

The next phases of participatory evaluation can be identified, covering:

Assess the necessity of achieving participatory evaluation.

Program and social policies raise more or less general interest of the beneficiaries and stakeholders in their development, implementation, or evaluation. There are situations where in relation to the effects of political / social program there is not an interesting high knowledge. Therefore, promotion and implementation of a participatory evaluative model, which requires additional time investment, human resources, financial resources, is sometimes less justified.

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<sup>11</sup> Kassamm Jackson, 2006, p. 3

In conclusion, not every program/social policy raises the need to implement a participatory evaluative process.

2. Identification, distribution or taking roles in the evaluative process for all categories of actors.

Each actor involved in the evaluative process has assigned or assumed roles in relation to the needs of the social program evaluation.

### 3. Develop evaluation plan

In order to achieve the evaluation objectives, it is necessary to have a clear established plan, to have an organized nature, to look for precise targets, and the evaluator and stakeholders involved in the process to know exactly their functions and roles.

### 4. Making evaluative approach

Evaluative approach offers an opportunity for participatory evaluator communication with other actors involved in evaluation. Each side has clear objectives, aimed to collect relevant complex and useful data for the program.

### 5. Assessment Report

Writing assessment report must have the next interest: each player's assessment has to reach a consensus which will be valued in the analysis and interpretation of data obtained. We take into account the information from all major players involved in the evaluation.

### 6. Identification of the elements needed to develop program

An efficient evaluative process will be able to provide data with generalization power or it will have applicability in different contexts. The benefit from evaluation, will be not only for this program (to develop and improve it), but for other similar program, too.

Performing a comparative approach between the standard evaluation and the participatory evaluation, we are going to make an inventory of characteristics of the latter:

Participatory Assessment relies on objectivity and impartiality of the assessors, who put on market accurate and reliable instruments designed to provide data that reflect on a large scale the policy impact / social program evaluated.

The involvement of actors at different levels in the evaluative approach outlines a self evaluative approach, containing valuable means for shaping and supporting the reasoned of concrete measures of development.

Participatory evaluation is a source of personal and organizational learning which offers providing premises for significant changes at these levels: innovation, culture assessment.

The author quoted above speaks about two sets of criteria which are required to be activated in monitoring and evaluation instrumental- significance criteria (efficiency, effectiveness) social significance- criteria (equity, popularity)

Changes at specific standards, related to implementation of the policy / program office, may act on the effects recorded at a different time, after the implementation approach.

Of course, to measure physical progress of a social program we depend on the accuracy of determining indicators of performance. The monitoring merely records data, which are then interpreted based on specific criteria.

Monitoring is based on evaluation, providing data for the formulation of assessment judgments. Effective management is therefore a condition for a successful social program.

Of course, the register of factors influencing the evaluative approach is broad and some limits may appear that may be related to the difficulty in identifying them correct, the extent to which each factor acts.

To go beyond the collection of statistical data on the implementation of social policies and program is an approach that derives from the awareness of policy makers to social problems and the need of their assistance, the ownership of their responsibility to ensure efficient and sustained programs. Continuing this idea, we draw attention to the use of the assessment, without which it remains an artificial exercise, both for the organizations implementing the program and for the beneficiaries, too.

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