

EQUALITY OF CHANCES – GOAL OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Adelina Iacob¹

University of Oradea

Abstract. Social policies represent a solution for social problems. The social problems which are solved represent a premise of the social development. They have effects at the individual level, organizational level, on community, in society, too. The paper investigates the need and the effects of social policies in the educational field, focusing especially on some social programs implemented in Romania. Social programs represent a set of planned and coordinated resources and assigned activities, conducted over a period of time in order to meet a social need, to prevent or solve a social problem. We identified concrete social programs which generate stimulating effects in terms of social participation, namely that of ensuring equity in education. Based on data collected through focus-groups, our main results indicate that educational units are not supported sufficiently to ensure optimal conditions for the implementation of social programs. It is required in Romania to develop an evaluation exercise for the social programs, to provide the premises and to identify concrete ways of measurement of their efficiency and their development.

Keywords: educational system, social policy, equality, social integration, social programs

Theoretical premises

The approach of the field of public policy and social policy allowed the appearance of the background which is relevant for the politics that has the merit of promoting and ensuring equal opportunities in education for everybody.

Being integral part of public policy, social policy "is a solution to social problems identified at general or particular level (vulnerable groups) having as main goal the respect of the social rights politically established" (Pop, 2002). Social policies have precise roles at the social level and the political

¹**Author address:** University of Oradea, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Universităţii Street, no.1, 410087, Oradea, Romania. **E-mail:** bogdi_ade@yahoo.co.uk

and sociological science paradigms are able to capitalize them as policies that provide solutions for different social problems and as a concrete result of the actions of both political actors and of social institutions, oriented to change the social reality.

We can detach a first item suggesting the evolution line of the social policies and of their evolution: "Instead of construction made by social actors, based on an intuitive knowledge, using pre-formed ideologies there exists the tendency to prefigure a projection of a social policy based on more accurate measurements of the social problems and also based on the prediction of the effects of different types of social policy" (Zamfir, 1999, pp. 16-18). They have social objectives and they follow the achievement of individual and collective welfare and the social protection, too. They are oriented to satisfy human needs: from education, social protection, health. Of course, we can refer to individual or to collective needs.

The need for social policies, their role in the distribution of wealth, the actors involved in this process, the character of necessary system, dynamic and sustained social policy area, all of these ideas are lines of analysis which take shape in the research of the field. The social problems which are solved represent a premise of the social development. They have effects at the individual level, organizational level, on community, in society, too. But they should not be seen only in terms of negative consequences, as "a process that adversely affects the community." (Zamfir, Stoica & Stănculescu, 2007, p. 15). They are sometimes present in the form of opportunities of development which are required to be valued. The companies have in their public agenda different social issues, which - in the context of social dynamics - must be identified, formulated and then solved. The attitudes that are emerging in relation to them, however, are different. Their lack of ownership generates negative long-term effects and social policy studies talk about assuming the responsibility, referring to a behavior specific for modern societies.

Social programs represent a set of planned and coordinated resources (material, financial, human) and assigned activities, conducted over a period of time (necessary to achieve a goal) in order to meet a social need, to prevent or solve a social problem. (Cace, 2007). We identified concrete social programs which generate stimulating effects in terms of social participation, namely that of ensuring equity in education. Thus, in the category of programs oriented through stimulating school attendance, we can include: the program of allocating free school supplies, the program of free milk and roll, the state allowance for children, High school money, Euro 200, Transportation School, SEI, free textbooks, Euro 100,

respectively in the category ensuring equity in education, we can mention PIR, Phare, the second chance.

The modern management brings into question the need for adopting the participative evaluation model in the social programs. Of course, evaluative approach can be made from specific evaluation criteria to the device methodology.

Focus-group: The Users Perception on Social Programs in Education

William Dunn (2010, p. 367-369) makes an inventory of assessment methods. One of the methods of theoretical evaluation of the decision is to analyze the research of the users. The most important element here is the target users' involvement and the involvement of other actors to obtain data on the degree of evaluation of the programs. I have taken and adapted protocol of interview for the analysis research of proposed users by the authors named above. It was a preparatory approach for organizing focus - groups on social programs in education.

Taking into account application areas of the social programs included in the study (Milk and Roll, Euro 200, Second Chance), focus groups were organized in Oradea, Salonta, Marghita. We specify that host schools are units with legal personality, which also have subordinated schools in the area. Thus, the representation by levels of education, social programs, target groups was ensured. The participants were teachers, businesspersons, representatives of the parents or local authorities, non-teaching persons and support staff, school managers, i.e. the main actors involved in the implementation of social programs.

Because we followed the degree of evaluating the social programs, being helped by the users themselves, we were concerned on the following aspects: identifying the objectives of the social programs detached for analysis, stating their achievement, as shown in perspective of the actors involved, the categories of datum considered by the users to be relevant for the efficiency of the programs, for their future evolution and additional complementary programs, the perception of the future lines of action in program management from the perspective of users.

The general objective of the focus groups was the assurance of equal chances of success in education and the improving the quality of education, while the specific objectives have focused on the following dimensions: presentation of social programs in terms of target objectives, establishing the involvement of the local community in educational issues, generally and social programs, especially, identifying concrete ways of users active

involvement in the implementation and evaluation of social programs in education.

Since the "milk and roll" is the best known program, being in the category of universalistic programs, it was analyzed more than the other programs from the participants at the focus groups.

The degree of achieving the objectives of social programs analyzed

School managers argue that social programs objectives are largely achieved. But it is difficult to determine whether this is due to a social-program or analysis should be performed, taking into account all the programs involved, which are active at the time. What was found was that the community representatives (local authorities, traders, partners) have summary information in relation to programs rather their identification, not their results, effects, analysis, to improve them. Therefore, school managers were able to decide on the degree of achieving the objectives of each program.

Relationship with parents, businessmen, local authorities

Institutional communication on the social programs in education is an exercise less valued and managed. The exchange of dates between institutions implied in the programs focus on a statistical datum, the collection of which is not caught in an evaluation program, it only served to draw up specific situations and statistics. A coherent work which would allow monitoring and evaluation of social programs would generate positive effects, beyond their holistic knowledge.

Parents consider that the benefits from social programs on their children are a real family support; the discussion about their opportunity and about their results, takes place in the context in which it is acknowledged the role of the family in ensuring a proper and healthy nutrition for children, the children's access to information, education and other aspects aimed by social programs.

Measures of improvement, forms of development the social programs

The supportive attitude for "milk and roll" program is built on two elements: support for children from poor families and training framework for healthier habits.

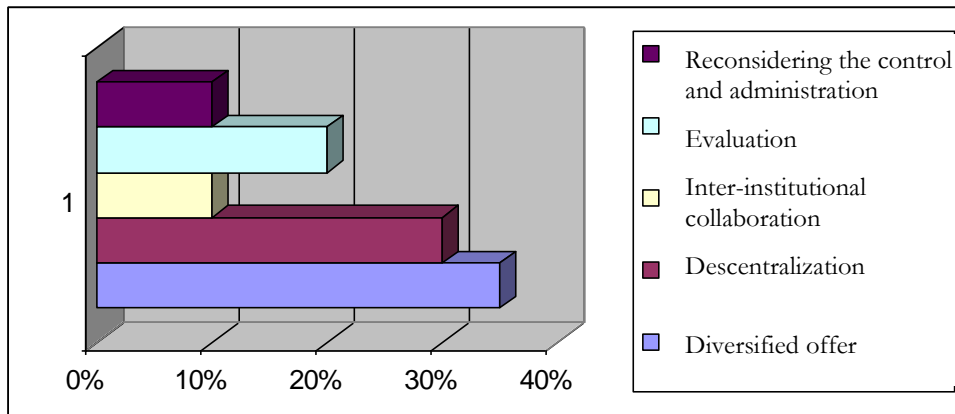


Figure 1. Measures of improving the program "milk and roll"

The research data show a very clear position of the investigators in favor of decentralization the mechanism for implementation the "milk and roll", and of social programs, generally.

Selecting suppliers must be the direct responsibility of the units which implement the program, based on clear criteria. Centralized auctions decrease the chances of local firms to successfully enter in competition with large companies, entered the auction. The less the institutions implied, the better the degree of involvement.

In this framework, a more efficient resource management can be made, a better insurance of products, timely referral and identification of potential problems concerning quality or delivery, too. Implementation of social programs is made without a financial support for organizations, so schools are facing new tasks concerning: storage, distribution of products in the conditions in which the staff receives no financial support. However, schools must provide adequate space for storage and distribution, purchase and maintenance costs are covered from own funds. Therefore, a special category of measures which must lead to efficiency and not least of all, to form a positive perception of the program, refer to reconsidering control and product management at school level.

Collaboration with NGOs, foundations, day centers or other schools could provide a redistribution of the products offered by the program, thus, avoiding wastage. Those more interested in this collaboration are managers of schools in poor neighborhoods, implementing the program "the second chance".

Since the goods are social benefits, a "right" of each, the variant to give up (signature-based) to these in order to be redistributed to those who need

them, is not approved neither by parents, nor by students. 35% of interviewees affirm another idea, that of diversification the products offered under this program. Distribution of a single product leads, in time, at reducing of consume and wasting of products.

Subjects investigated appreciate as a measure which can intervene in increasing the efficiency of the program, the possibility for students to choose -at the level of the unit they belong - from a list of approved foods, products to be delivered. At the time of the study there products set for all set for all implied in the target group, the only difference between schools in urban and rural areas (other products, other frequency in their distribution). Consulting the students, their suitability to their needs, could be a way to prevent the waste, characterizing the implementation process of a standardized program. Advising and informing parents is considered a useful measure for understanding the objectives of the social program, for building a correct perception of the direct and indirect beneficiaries.

Euro 200 program lies in the perception of the focus-group participants as a viable program. It was recorded the proposal to reduce the amount paid, downwards, thus providing access to a larger number of beneficiaries. “Second Chance” program enjoys the support of participants, as it is known. This program is implemented in 25 schools of our district, in communities in which it is demanded. As philosophy and through the actors involved, the program has potential at the level of cultivating and developing partnerships at the community level, more than other programs. “Second Chance” is a focused program which increases the chances of its beneficiaries to access job on the labor market, at a medium and long term.

Presenting alternatives to social programs

Complementary program “apple” was accepted without reservations by its direct and indirect beneficiaries, i.e. it was very much appreciated. There were only some administrative problems brought in discussion, that schools are forced to provide storage space and distribution of this product, which means distributing it after washing it, respecting the rules of proper hygiene, which for establishments with large pupils, is quite difficult.

Specific problems of risk groups concerning their access to education

It was emphasized the idea that social programs targeted, the main beneficiaries are students from rural areas. Statistics show that the number is significantly higher than in urban areas. It was presented the situation of children whose parents have emigrated and they present the characteristics of a group with high risk of social and educational exclusion. Being left without a sustained parental control, these children end up being entrusted

to extended families or to foreign persons, or left alone. School has too high responsibilities to handle the situation of these children. It requires finding concrete ways to support these children, the assurance of a clear legal framework for their protection.

There are differences in the demand for various social programs and on education levels: university or pre-university education. The most beneficiaries come from pre-university education.

Conclusions

Education units are not supported sufficiently to ensure optimal conditions for the implementation of social programs. From their own funds, schools must ensure the storage products delivered and identify the human resource for their distribution in hygienic conditions.

The institutions working in the field perform numerous controls, often targeting the same objectives. It is obvious that there isn't a partnership organized framework and the common actions are, in the best case, a coincidence. The instruments used in these controls are tailored to each institution, without consulting them, resulting different Datum base, which rarely get to be known.

It is required that in the Romanian space to exist the evaluation exercise for the social programs being provided the premises of identifying concrete ways of measurement, in the sense of their efficiency and their development, too. The lack of actions of insurance the access towards education and the conditions of fairness and equity in the system, generates on a long-term, the growth of social exclusion; it is registered by the society as a problem which exceeded the school's responsibility. Parents generally consider the social action programs as complementary actions to those undertaken by them "being a parent". For this reason, comes the strong attitude of support for social programs in education. Social services must be performed / provided in partnership claimed with local authorities. In this context, investments will be made on the line quality of those services. All focus-group participants agreed about decentralization, as main principle to implement social programs in education, identifying immediate positive effects.

Intervention measures in the concrete area of implementation the social programs focus on the following:

Measures to improve social programs

1. "Milk and bread"

- decentralization;
 - monitoring the program;
 - providing the products which meet the needs and preferences of the beneficiaries of an given offer;
2. “Euro 200”
- reducing bureaucracy;
 - giving a lower ceiling to increase the chances of access the program;
3. “Second Chance”
- popularizing the program by various means;
 - differentiated payment and stimulating measures for teachers implied in the program;
 - an active involvement of the local community;

Respondents showed a strong stance support for social programs in education. That “milk and roll” is by far the most popular programs and it has a universal character can influence this attitude. The degree of satisfaction in comparison with the results of the program is high, even if it comes on the fund general opinion about an inadequate resource management.

Each category of actors involved in evaluation enjoys a special status and special roles. Analyzing assessment in terms of multiple actors we have to consider the interdependence of actors, from different social universes. This interdependence is reflected by placing in a common area the actors’ cognitive experience and of their systems of actions. Actors have a specific contribution in every stage of the program or they have concrete interventions in the results or impact. Evaluation tends more and more to dress a participative evaluation involving all categories of actors. Mere intention is not enough. Legislative, administrative, organizational levers must be activated to give coherence and legitimacy to the evaluative approach.

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