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# **AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS INVOLVED IN THE PUBLIC POLICIES PROCESS**

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## **Abstract**

The behaviour of the actors involved in the public policies process is the result of some reasons enabled, behind which are mostly standing some sets of values of the individuals or imposed on them, as a result of experiencing a particular type of organizational culture, or as a result of some general conditions like the cultural dimensions of the society, general social values or the religious values as the manifestation of the local Orthodox Christianity. Whether we are talking about the rational actor model, about the incremental model and about the bureaucratic organisational model, the values are identifiable in the process of creating the institutional agenda, of the formulation of public policies, of their selection, of their implementation and evaluation, both at the surface and at the deep level, causing a certain way in the decision-making process. The present article aims to identify the existence of a certain axiological panel of the actors involved in the process of public policies with the goal of sketching certain features and elements of decision-making process, starting from two dimensions: the frequency and the intensity of the values.

*Keywords:* values, public policies, decision making process, public administration

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## **1. From the general study of the values to their presence in public policies process**

The values are differently shaped and defined in the literature. While “values are concepts, explicit or implicit, distinctive for an individual, or characteristic for a group” [1], „the ultimate reason of actions of individuals and collectivities, as defining elements of the social life” [2], the culture is a set of „norms and values which prevail for a nation at a certain time” [3]. Robbins said that an integrated and constructive study on this area should take into account three analytical levels: the personal level, the group level and organizational level, all levels being related and caused by the cultural environment and its values [4] and Adrian-Paul Iliescu proposes a study of the values in relation to the political ideologies [5].

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Hofstede [6], Schwartz [7] or Inglehart [8], among many others, consider the values as the central element of culture. The relationship between values and the other elements of culture is extremely close because the dominant values transpose themselves into norms, rituals and artefacts that define the institutions along with the functioning of the society as a whole. Also, the values are close to the religion and can be determined by it. “Each religion offers an embedded view of human nature and the world. (...) religions offer different and sometimes refreshing ways of understanding humanity and the world of people inhabit” [9]. From this point of view, the values of the actors can identify at least partially with Christian Orthodox values, especially as we are a state in which religion plays an important role in the construction of the social dimension of the public space and of the administrative space. Andreescu even talks about a real “interaction between the religious and nonreligious actors in the Romanian context” [10].

In our opinion, the values define the social needs and the general principles that structure social life and are closely related to the “intrinsic and to the extrinsic motivation” of the individuals [11]. Therefore, they depend on how individuals represent their needs, objects and purposes of human existence in defining behaviours and attitudes, in defining and being defined by other values, in defining and being defined by the characteristics of the social environment. The values are not directly observable, involve affective, evaluative and cognitive elements and are relatively stable over time.

On the other hand, the term ‘value’ is associated with a normative dimension, the values becoming standards that are activated from the moment in which the actors decide the implementation of a public policy. “The values are the determinants that influence the public choices. We consider the human rights, the political, the social rights and the role of ideology in public policy as a social practice. However, we need something else to give meaning to the various choices that politicians make, and, ultimately, to be able to constitute a guide for the crucial situations in which they are in everyday life.” [12]

The values are a result of “the political management” [13], regarding the future evolutions of the public space – seen as a *agora* of public policies manifestation, a space which is „in relation to society as a whole (...) the society that defines a certain welfare system, a certain type of economical, legal and political infrastructure” [14]. Political management brings to the public space a certain vision of a problem and of a set of values which must be made known to the target - groups to which a policy is heading. Basically, the actors depart from certain strategic options for a specific public policy, they continue with the formulation of a policy draft, taking into account the values enabled, the general public policy mission and the vision on it that can be a personal, an institutional, or a group level. Other authors [15] identify a direct connection between the administrative system, the goals of administrative projects and the ‘religious content’, the religious values.

**Table 1.** Values

<b>Values</b>	<b>The question</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<i>Effectiveness</i>	Did we obtain a valuable result?	Units of the goods or of the service provided through the application of the policy
<i>Efficiency</i>	How big was the effort required to get that result?	Unit cost Net benefit Cost/benefit ratio
<i>Suitability</i>	Solves that result the problem that led to the formulation of that policy?	Costs Efficiency
<i>Equity</i>	Are the costs and the benefits equitably distributed among the various social groups?	Pareto Criterion Rawls Criterion
<i>Sensitivity</i>	The results of the application of that policy meet to the needs, the preferences, or the values of the various social groups?	Consistency with the opinions of the citizens
<i>Fairness</i>	Are the results desired?	Both efficient and equitable

There are different values which can be activated by the actors involved in the decision-making process in administrative space. A premium value depending on which public policies can be evaluated is that of consistency. Through consistency means “the need of a community that have to be resolved and that is justified for it” [16]. A public policy will be deemed to be pertinent or relevant if its objectives and its course of action are adapted to the nature of the problem. In other words, the actor’s task will be to analyze the presence or the absence of the consistency between the objectives of the programme, his objectives, the measures and the human and financial resources put into practice through that public policy. The relevance of a public policy refers to the measure in which the objectives established and proposed implementation plan are addressed to the identified problem. Equality is a value that can be found at the public policies level especially since these relate to public space as a geographical space of manifestation in which they have to assure the needs of the majority. Efficiency refers to how well the available resources were used to transform the activities proposed in the intended results. This value can bring into question the possibilities to solve a problem with lower costs in the same unit of time. The effectiveness tries to identify if the public policy has fulfilled initial goals. The key question here is what benefits have brought the results once the policy has been implemented. The impact refers to the overall effect of the benefits brought by the policy implementation over the direct or indirect beneficiaries of the programme. Sustainability shows whether there is a

possibility that the positive results of the policy or the project to continue even after its evaluation. In this way, Blalock creates a catalogue of some values, giving examples for each one (Table 1) [17].

The success of any type of public policy is closely connected, in this context, on the values promoted at some point from the actors and on their degree of internalization and promotion of the values in the public administrative space. So, the values can cause a different and a specific way of the decision-making process, beyond any applicable decision-making theories in public policies space or in the administrative space.

## **2. Methodology and results**

This study was designed in purpose to set the methodological framework for identifying the traits of the decision-making process in administrative space, starting from the axiological dimension enabled by the actors involved in the process, dimension based on two variables: the frequency and intensity of the values.

The present study was conducted during the period March-June 2012, on a sample of 568 respondents, public servants, employees of the city town halls which are county residences: Botoșani, Suceava, Piatra Neamț, Iași, Bacău, Vaslui, Focșani, Galați.

The study is based on the questionnaire applied on a sample composed of eight equal number small samples (consisting of 71 respondents). The sample is representative and it is based on probabilistic process, trying to ensure that “each element of the population has equal opportunities to sample” [18]. In relation to the size of the sample, the probabilistic error is most likely somewhere around 6% [18, p. 257].

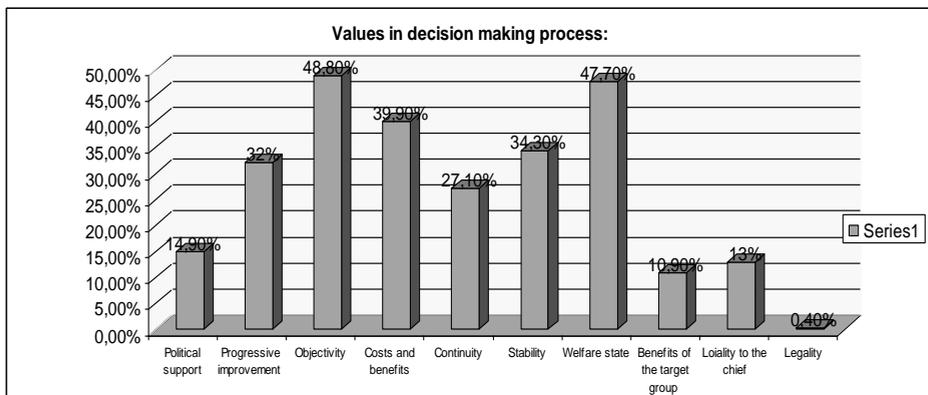
The summary of the demographic data is the following: 61.9% females, 26.1% males and 12.1% non-response; 35.7% aged between 31 and 40 years old, 31.2% between 41 and 50 years old, 20.4% over 50 years old, 12.5% aged between 21 and 30 years old and 0.2% up to twenty years old; 96.6% Christian-Orthodox, and 3.4% Romano-Catholic; 17.5% singles, 72.3% married and 7.5% divorced; last school graduated – 48.3% high school, 12.3% college, 35.6% Master degree and 1% Ph.D. At the time the questionnaire was distributed 47.3% declared themselves advisors, 31.8% inspectors, 11.7% contact persons, 8.4% heads of Office and 0.8% directors; monthly income – 26.8% up to 1000 RON, 14.8% from 1000 to 1500 RON, 8.6% from 1501 to 2000 RON, 1.6% from 2001 to 2500 RON, 0.4% over 2500 LEI and 47.9% non-response.

In terms of general axiological panel, the following results were summarized: from a total of 568 valid responses, the non-responses rate is 6.6%. The value of the political support is positively identified by 14.9% of respondents, while 84.9% identifies it negatively. 32% agree the objectivity, while 51.2% offer negative responses; 39.9% agree the economic values: the costs and the benefits and 60.1% offer negative responses; 27.1% claim the value of continuity, while 72.9% do not; 34.3% claim stability and 65.7% of the

respondents deny it; 47.7% consider welfare state as being decisive for the decision making process, while 52.3% do not; 10.9% claim that decision shall be taken according to the benefits of the group who is involved in the decision-making process, while 89.1% declares otherwise; 13% of respondents declared that they take decisions in relation to the value of loyalty to the chief, while 87% denies this kind of criterion. Another criterion in addition alongside those offered to the respondents was that of legality: 0.4% considers legality as a criterion that must be joined to the others above mentioned.

What we can see at this point in the analysis is the fact that any criterion is not positively valued in a percentage that exceed 50 units and the fact that all these criteria get both positive and negative scores.

However, they can be ranked (Figure 1). The highest positive percentage are obtained by: the objectivity (48.8%), followed by the value of welfare state (47.7%), and the costs and the benefits (39.9%), the progressive improvement (32%), the continuity (27.1%), the political support (14.9%), the loyalty to the chief (13%), the benefits of the target group (10.9%) and the legality (0.4%).



**Figure 1.** The frequency of the values.

Identifying the values, which are part of the subjective size of the individual involved in the process of public policies, is not an easy process. From this point of view we considered that it is necessary to measure at this level of the analysis, both the frequency and the intensity, in order to penetrate to the deep experiences of the actors involved in the decision-making process in the area of public policies. For this purpose we have built multiple choice and ordered scales, in relation to which respondents to choose from the item 'very important' to the item 'not at all important' [18, p. 316].

For utility, from a total of 568 respondents, the rate of valid response is 86.8%, of that 67.5% of respondents declaring that the utility is 'very important' in making decisions at the administrative level; 18.5% declared that it is 'important', and 14% declared that it is either 'some important or unimportant' or 'not at all important'. For efficiency, the valid responses rate is 90.5% of which: 90.2% considers it 'very important' or 'important' in making decisions

and 9.7% are neutral or are negatively orientated. For clarity, the valid responses rate is 85.7% from which: 84.8% of respondents declared that it is 'very important' or 'important' and 15.2% declared the opposite. For brevity, the valid responses rate is 78.7% of which 75.4% trainee's brevity as 'very important' or 'important', and 24.7% are neutral or negative. The novelty has a valid responses rate of 82.2% of which 55.9% find it as being 'important' or 'very important', 25.9% gives a neutral appreciation (neither important, nor unimportant) and 18.2% a negative one. Inequality has a valid responses rate of 74.5%, 28.3% of which are positive percentages and 50.4% negative. Adaptability has a percentage of 81% valid responses, out of 64.7% are for 'important' or 'very important', 22% are neutral, while 13.3% negative. Continuity has a valid responses rate of 81.9% of which 72.4% consider continuity as 'very important' or 'important' and 25.9% are neutral or negative. Stability has a rate of 83.1% valid responses, 79.2% are positively oriented and 20.7% are neutral or negative. The experience has a rate of 84% valid responses, from which 83.6% are positive and 16.4% negative. Non-ideology has a rate of 75.9% valid responses, of which 27.3% consider it 'important' or 'very important', 25.5% are neutral and 46.9% negative. Objectivity has a valid response rate of 87.1%, from which 84.1% are targeted towards 'important' or 'very important', while 16% negative. Loyalty has a valid responses rate of 79.8% of which 70.7% are positively oriented and 29.4% negatively. For the strategy, the percentage of valid responses is 79.9% of which 38.6% are positive and 23.8% negative. Power has a valid responses rate of 78% of which 38.6% are positively oriented and 61.4% negatively (34.8% believes that power is not at all important in decision-making process).

Besides the axiological panel offered to the respondents, they had the freedom to appoint other values that they take into account when they are involved in decision-making at the level of public policies. From a percentage of 29.6% of valid responses, 46.4% sustain the legality; 16.1% claim economic criteria in general; the welfare state – 5.4%; 3.6% - the results and the accuracy; 3% - the duties; 2.4% - the political pressure, the social situation, the continuity, the ethics and 1.8% - the novelty.

What we can see in this case, is that the intensity of the values registered higher percentages than their frequency. In all the cases, the valid responses rate is very high, and the positive valuing (with the qualifier 'important' or 'very important') of different items has also very high percentages. There are registered with positive percentage (over 50%): the utility, the effectiveness, the clarity, the brevity, the novelty, the adaptability, the continuity, the stability, the experience, the strategy and the objectivity, while the inequality, the non-ideology and the power do not receive percentages up to 50% (Table 2).

As in the case of the frequency values, when we speak about the intensity, all the axiological options have both positive and negative values and also (as can be seen in Table 2) these can be ranked among them. Alongside these options must be also added the value of legality that is mentioned here by the

respondents. It received a percentage of 13.7 units from their options. In the same time, we have to say that 96.6% of the respondents are Christian-Orthodox.

**Table 3.** Intensity values.

<b>Values</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Efficiency	90.2%	Loyalty	70.4%
Clarity	85.7%	Utility	67.6%
Objectivity	84.1%	Adaptability	64.7%
Experience	83.6%	Novelty	55.9%
Stability	79.2%	Power	38.6%
Strategy	76.2%	Inequality	28.3%
Brevity	75.4%	Non-ideology	27.3%
Continuity	74.2%		

### **3. Conclusions**

Starting from the two dimensions (frequency and intensity) applied to the values, we might draw a few specific features to the decision-making process.

The decision-making process at the level of public policies is characterized by objectivity and seems to have as declared purpose the welfare state or the good of the community. It is a process characterised by a degree of continuity and stability and it uses as mechanisms the progressive improvement (in a context of stability). It takes into account the economic criteria such as the costs and the benefits. At the same time, there are elements related to the environment in which the decision is taken: the decision-making process appeals to the political context, to the loyalty to hierarchical superiors and the benefits of the target – group (seen usually as a political group). On this dimension of frequency, decision-making process at the level of public policies is close to the bureaucratic model, but it has features that keep to the management or organizational behaviour.

The second dimension – that of intensity – reconfigures the characteristics of the decision and of the decision-making process (characteristics identified on the dimension of frequency). In this case, the decision-making process appeals, first, to that values that send to the bureaucratic model: clarity, objectivity, brevity, loyalty, stability, but also to the economic values: efficiency, strategy, utility or political values (ethics, loyalty to the chief) and organisational values. However, starting from the very high percentages and their close values, it is extremely difficult to find fixed paradigms to frame the decision making process. We believe that saying the decision and the decision-making process have only bureaucratic features would be a limitation of the speech and to our analysis.

We can conclude that the decision and the decision-making process are influenced by different sets of values extremely well connected between them, transposing the decision and the decision-making process at the level of several theories: the rational actor model, bureaucratic theory, incremental theory,

organizational behaviour or economic theories. Beyond this axiological dimension, future studies could make deeper analysis concerning the possible correlations existing between decision-making models in the public policies process and values enabled by each actor involved (personal values, cultural values, religious values, etc.), correlations that can be analyzed in a double sense: as a logical implication starting from the decision-making models reaching to the values or in reverse.

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