

**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

**The policy of social protection and social inclusion in
the North-West Region in the
2007-2013 programming period**

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KEY-WORDS: *social policy, economic and social cohesion, social protection, social inclusion, impact analysis.*

In our research endeavor, we approached social policy as a sectoral component of the state's policy and analysed the impact of the social policy at regional level taking into account the influence of the recent events generated by the financial crisis which began in 2008. The research covers the timeline starting from 2007 into the present, which is also the present programming period of the EU economic and social cohesion policy.

The socio-economic consequences of the crisis at global level changed the approach of social policy and made us search for answers to the following questions: *What is the role of the policy of economic and social cohesion at European level? What are the challenges and tendencies of the European cohesion policy in the 2007-2013 programming period? How do European trends affect Romania's social policies on social protection and social inclusion? How did the economic and financial crisis impacted on the legislative measures adopted by Romania in the field of social protection and inclusion and on the recipients of social protection at regional level? How is the social inclusion policy implemented at subregional level?*

These questions have become research hypotheses. In order to answer them we have operated on several levels of analysis, starting from the European level and going down to the national, regional and subregional levels.

We will argue that: social policy is effective only if it interacts in a system of interdependencies with the other state's policies, such as employment policies or fiscal policies; that European trends in social protection are reflected into the Romanian social policy approaches; that the consequences of the economic crisis have had a significant impact both on all categories of social protection recipients and on the reorientation of the social protection system.

The topic of this doctoral dissertation is treated in an interdisciplinary manner, combining research elements from EU law and social security law with economic aspects, social sciences, environment aspects, political sciences, political philosophy, history, international relations etc. The regional approach is the central theme of the entire dissertation, as it tries to specify in a particular manner the evolutions of the policy of social protection and social inclusion in the North-West region.

We have approached this research topic in a manner similar to the one proposed by J. Baldock, N. Manning and S. Vickerstaff¹, as follows: the intentions and objectives of social policies; the administrative and financial arrangements used in the implementation of public policies; the results of these policies. Hence, we took a normative approach in analyzing the concepts, the organisation and functioning of the social protection and inclusion systems. As regards the implementation of the social protection and social inclusion policies we have used empiric research.

Our analysis is based on research methods borrowed from the social sciences. The methods used are: the observation and comparison concerning the implementation of social policies at regional and local levels in the North-West region; quantitative analysis: statistics; document analysis: activity reports of city halls, reports issued by public social assistance institutions, social strategies/ action plans at local level; case-study on the planning process at subregional level and on a public institution of social assistance at local level.

The sources of the data used in this research have been statistics institutes (the National Statistics Institute, Eurostat), statistical data from county statistics departments, public institutions acting in the social field, national and cross-national researches (eurobarometers). The dissertation has also been founded on Romanian national strategic documents, EU regulations and national legislation supporting the actions of the economic and social cohesion policy and the ensuing interventions through EU funds operated so far and those still into force.

The structure of the thesis consists in an introduction, eight chapters and conclusions, and was conceived so as to establish a causal relationship between the topics developed, following a gradual approach of the research topic in view of reaching the main research goal. The chapters of this thesis aim at identifying the main theoretical elements of social inclusion and social protection, the essential characteristics of the EU's policy of economic and social cohesion, and the community regulations, procedures and policies which have a decisive impact on the national practices in this field, and the convergence of the Romanian system of social inclusion and protection to EU practices.

Starting from a detailed analysis of the EU policy of economic and social cohesion, from its role, evolution of the objectives, principles and instruments underlying this policy, we will trace the new challenges and tendencies caused by today's socio-economic context. We will analyze the system of social protection and social inclusion in Romania and how it is

¹ J. Baldock, N. Manning, S. Vickerstaff, *Social Policy*, Second edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.7.

influenced by European trends. Also, we are tracing the impact of the economic and financial crisis on the Romanian legislative measures taken in the field of social protection and its beneficiaries at regional level. At the same time, we intend to analyze the implementation of the social policies at national, regional (North-West Region) and subregional levels. The conclusions chapter is also presenting a series of proposals based on the case-study undertaken.

The introduction chapter reveals the importance and timeliness of this research topic, as well as the scientific imperative of carrying out this thesis. The complexity of the social dimension of the European cohesion policy circumscribing this research topic and the various aspects under research have urged us to set the limits of the topic under discussion in order to turn to good account the subsequent use of this dissertation. We have thus envisaged to familiarize the reader with the research topic and objectives by explaining the manner in which the topic was undertaken and investigated based on the main approaches found in the specialized literature.

In the *first chapter*, our dissertation has focused on the global context accompanying the social policy sphere by detailing the concept of social policy and its main conceptualizations in a critical analysis of the specialized literature. Starting from the assumption that social policies are treated specifically in each country based on the conceptions of government, we have envisaged a distinctive analysis of how the values, norms and ideologies influence the objectives, and what is the influence of specific factors or specific models of social policy in different states. This chapter creates the theoretical basis of the social policy concept which will be submitted to the larger context of EU policies.

The *second chapter* starts with a short history of social policy at EU level. The main objectives are to confine the place and role of social policy in a European context and to analyze the priority guidelines of social policy from the point of view of the main strategic EU documents in order to define the general framework of the European priorities. Social inclusion, defined as a set of measures and multidimensional actions in the field of social protection, employment, housing, education, health, information-communication, mobility, security, justice and culture, all addressing the fight against social exclusion, is underlining the interdependencies with other policies: economic, employment, environment etc., thus reflecting a new approach of social policies which connects three types of interdependent policies: the economic policy, the employment policy and the social policy.

The third chapter analyses the policy of economic and social cohesion as a EU objective in order to support its role in fighting the development disparities between the most

advanced regions and those lagging behind in Europe, thus aiming to create a more attractive, innovative and inclusive society. We will give a short account of the most important EU legislative regulations addressing the policy of economic and social cohesion and point out its evolution and reconfiguration through document analysis as a main research method.

The fourth chapter presents the objectives of the cohesion policy and its implementation during the 2007-2013 programming period, by analyzing the new dimensions of the cohesion policy, the main challenges posed by the international evolutions (the economic crisis, the demographic aging etc.) and future trends. Also, in this chapter we will analyze the cohesion policy in Romania in terms of objectives, structural instruments and their implementation at national level.

The policy of social protection and inclusion will be dealt with in the *fifth chapter* by analyzing the concept of social protection as a set of measures and actions of collective provision designed to reduce the hardships caused by social risks and needs. Analysing the forms of social protection and the types of systems of social protection has allowed us to classify the systems according to the political orientations guiding the government. The research method will consist in analyzing the main international field approaches against the most recent references in the specialized literature.

Starting from the theoretical framework, the *sixth chapter* will analyze the main objectives, principles, organisation and financing of the systems of social protection, and detail them in a Romanian context. We will present the social protection system addressing the retired and unemployed categories, and the social assistance system in Romania, pointing out the legislative and financial arrangements and the results of these policies' implementation. The research methods used in this section are based mainly on document analysis, statistical analysis and comparisons (2007-2011).

The impact analysis of the policies of social protection (retired and unemployed persons) and social assistance in the North-West Region is the subject of the *seventh chapter*. We will analyze the regional context, the main strategic guidelines at regional level, the impact of these policies on beneficiaries, focusing on the fluctuations due to legislative changes, the financing methods and the impact of the economic crisis started in 2008.

Comparing regions, counties from the North-West region and their evolution between 2007 and 2011 will allow us to formulate conclusions regarding the impact of social policies in the analyzed region, the fluctuations of recipients following the effects of the economic crisis and future trends.

The *eighth chapter* consists in a case-study analyzing the formulation and implementation of the policy of social inclusion in Maramureş county. We will identify the county-related context and analyze the main strategic documents issued at county level, thus achieving an analysis of the planning process at the level of the Baia Mare metropolitan area. We aim at presenting the implementation of the county's policy of social inclusion and the factors underlying its implementation, and eventually make an institutional analysis of a public institution of social assistance in the municipality of Baia Mare.

This research has developed conclusions regarding the role of the cohesion policy at European level, the main evolutions and future trends, the impact of the economic crisis on the legislative measures on social protection and inclusion, the development of the social policy in line with European tendencies (coordination of the EU member states' policies and the interdependencies of the social policy with the other European policies) and the effects of the crisis on the beneficiaries of social protection and inclusion at regional and subregional levels.

The social policy is increasingly relevant in the present context marked by the major consequences of the 2008 global economic crisis. According to the European Commission², the financial and economic crisis caused important job losses and lead to a dramatic decrease in public finances and a worsening of the social context. Recent European trends are focusing on reducing the social and economic impact of the greatest recession of the past years.

The EU policy of economic and social cohesion is fundamental in supporting the regions lagging behind. In the present context affected by the economic crisis, the European Council agreed upon the need for coordinated measures in Europe and beyond in order to create new future opportunities of economic growth and a better employment ratio.

The cohesion policy in the 2007-2013 programming period has been marked – according to J.E. Barosso – by dispersion and lack of prioritization. The next programming period targets the use of funds on a “pan-European” basis supported by synergies and actions which would find it more difficult to obtain individual national financing.

There is an obvious tendency towards pursuing common objectives and leaving aside the discourse on regional disparities, towards a more efficient funding expenditure benefitting all member states. Also, we have noticed a stronger coordination between the Commission and the member states in a common strategic framework. There is a stronger focus on

² Comisia Europeană, *Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines*, 27.04.2010, p.9, disponibil la: <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/Brochure%20Integrated%20Guidelines.pdf>, accesat în data de 15.08.2011.

achieving the Europa 2020 priorities which need to be included by the member states in the development strategies/national reform plans.

The crisis has shown close interdependencies among the economies of the member states, which is why their coordination by means of the European Plan of Economic Recovery has had a significant input into supporting them through the crisis and providing macroeconomic stability.

The current objective, in a climate of economic and financial instability, is to reduce public social protection expenditures, which have grown steadily and are barely supported, through a better redirection of resources towards those truly in need and a reconfiguration of the protection systems based on contributory principles.

Concerning social protection at European level new trends are in place. First, there is a new focus of the systems of protection on contributory schemes, a pattern also followed by Romania. At the same time, changes are being operated in social protection supply, based on the *mixed economy of welfare* principle, and through involvement by several actors from the public, informal, voluntary and private spheres at all levels in planning and delivering social protection. This approach has not been adopted yet in the Romanian social policy. Also, following a decrease in budgetary expenditure, limiting social protection expenditures has been noticed in our country as well.

As a conclusion, the policy of social protection and social inclusion has been drastically affected by the economic and social evolutions at global level in the context of the economic and financial crisis started in 2008 with a serious impact on all the categories of beneficiaries of social protection. These evolutions have produced a reorientation of the policy of social protection in Romania, which now follows European trends.

The present context has shown once again the strong interdependencies between the policy of economic and social cohesion with economic, fiscal, employment, health, education policies etc. at national and European levels. In fact, in order to ensure an efficient Europa 2020 strategy, coordination is necessary between the cohesion policy and the other policies.

The current crisis has proved how important social policy is in all societies in general, especially in times of crisis. The policy of social protection and inclusion is acting as a factor of economic, social and political stability during these difficult times, both for individuals and the society as a whole³, apart from its traditional role to prevent and diminish poverty and

³ Organizația Internațională a Muncii, *World Social Security Report 2010/11*, 2011, p. 23, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/secsoc/downloads/policy/wssr.pdf>, accesat la data de 25.08.2011.

reduce income disparities at acceptable levels. The policy of social protection and inclusion is one of the prerequisites for sustainable economic and social development.