Introduction

The Romanian government, like other governments of former communist countries, emerged from the collapsed Soviet Union ill prepared to confront the complex challenges of governing under a democratic, free market system. At the core of governments that formulate sound public policies, successfully implement programs, and respond effectively to rapidly changing situations is the capacity to carry out independent, high quality research and analysis that results in improved decision making. During the 21st century, the need and acceptance of the incorporation of policy analysis courses in public administration curricula in Romania is expected to grow. In time, educational programs are expected to result in the following consequences:

- Formation of a body of strong independent policy researchers employed by the national and local governments as well as by universities and non-profit institutions
- Utilization of analytical outcomes as tools of political, social and economic improvement by the executive, legislative and judicial branches and by non-profit and private sectors
- Greater public understanding of and participation in public policy processes

Basic Policy Analysis

Although much has been written about policy analysis, what is policy analysis? Policy analysis can best be described as a process by which people identify and analyze policies and or programs. Although, practice of policy analysis can be traced back to Mesopotamia in the 21st century B.C., in conjunction with the Code of Hammurabi, policy analysis began to be applied in a more systematic way after World War II. It was largely the result of the work of engineers, system analysts, and applied mathematicians who were employed by government agencies in the U.S. and Western Europe. It was
and continues to be performed before and after policies have been implemented as means to select a preferred policy among alternative policies or as a means to describe the consequences of implementing policies. For example, in a prospective or ex ante mode, the government may decide to regulate the quality of food products by concentrating on the addition of certain food additives. It may choose among alternatives such as compliance with standards that prohibit the sale of foods that utilize certain additives, or the dissemination of information by manufacturers regarding the probable effects of additives.

In a retrospective or ex post mode, the government may examine the consequences of implementing standards and of disseminating information to the public. How did the adoption of standards impact the price of the product? How did they affect the quantity sold? And were the purposes of adopting standards met? How did information dissemination affect the sale of foods with additives? Did a particular group of stakeholders cease to purchase food with additives because of the availability of information?

In order to do prospective analysis, the analyst must verify, identify and detail the problem, establish evaluation criteria, identify alternative policies, display and distinguish among alternative policies.

To perform retrospective analysis, the analyst is required to review the design of the policy or program and determine whether the policy or program was implemented as designed. Many of the methods of ex ante policy analysis are used to conduct evaluations.

Policy analysts decompose the design of policies into components through the use of multiple research methods. Analysts routinely produce information about five elements of policy systems: policy problems, alternatives, actions, outcomes, and performance. A policy problem is a value, need or opportunity which may be attained through a public action. A policy alternative is one of several courses of action that may contribute to the attainment of a value, need or opportunity. Policy actions consist of series of steps guided by an alternative; information about policy actions is produced by forecasting and evaluating the consequences of actions. More specifically, a policy outcome is an observed consequence of policy actions and policy performance is the degree to which an outcome contributes to the attainment of values, meets needs, or seizes opportunities.

To deal with the first element, the structuring of policy problems, the analyst must first define the problem and sub problems; classify them according to types of problems (strategic vs. operational or major vs. secondary); and determine if they are well structured (whether they involve a few decision
makers and a few alternatives) moderately structured (whether they involve a reasonable amount of decision makers and a limited number of alternatives) or ill structured (involve many decision makers and many alternatives). To conceptualize problems, the analysts then develop policy models which may be descriptive or normative. They employ a series of techniques such as classification analysis to clarify concepts, hierarchy analysis to identify causes, synectics to recognize similarities among problems, brainstorming to generate ideas and strategies and assumptional analysis to synthesize conflicting assumptions about problems. Although each of these techniques has distinct aims, procedures and criteria of performance, they are designed to make sure that the structuring of problems corresponds as closely as possible to actual problems.

Generating and forecasting alternatives is the next important element. The first step involves clarifying goals and objectives and identifying alternatives. In searching for alternatives one may appeal to experts, draw on theories, examine parallel cases, look at analogies, or review ethical systems. Once goals and alternatives have been identified, consequences of policies may be forecast through extrapolative forecasting techniques (e.g. time series analysis, least squares trend estimation, exponential weighting, and catastrophe methodology), theoretical forecasting techniques (e.g., path analysis, input output analysis, regression analysis, correlation analysis and interval estimation), and intuitive forecasting techniques (e.g., delphi, cross impact analysis and feasibility assessment). Most analysts employ a variety of techniques since a combination of techniques is potentially more powerful because it employs complementary approaches.

After the consequences of alternatives have been produced, recommendations concerning policy actions need to be made. Two major approaches to generating recommendations exist: cost benefit analysis and cost effectiveness analysis. Cost benefit analysis enables analysts to compare and advocate alternatives by quantifying their total monetary costs and benefits. It is used extensively in irrigation, recreation, transportation, health and urban renewal programs. It involves (a) specifying objectives, (b) identifying alternatives, (c) collecting information, (d) identifying affected groups, (e) identifying costs and benefits, (f) discounting costs and benefits, (g) estimating risk and uncertainty, (h) specifying criteria for making a recommendation (e.g., internal rate of return, net efficiency improvement, and distributional improvement) and (I) making a recommendation that satisfies the criteria.

Cost effectiveness analysis is appropriate when objectives can not be expressed in monetary terms. The steps are similar to those performed during cost benefit analysis with two modifications.
Only costs are discounted to their present value. And the criteria that are most often employed are those of least cost and maximum effectiveness.

Monitoring the implementation of policy recommendations is a critical element because it produces information about causes and consequences of policies. The information can then be used to discover whether resources intended for certain groups have actually reached those groups; whether staff, program administrators, and services deliverers are in compliance with standards and procedures imposed by legislatures, national agencies, and associations; and whether programs produce changes. Information on policy outcomes is regularly collected by federal, state and local governments, research centers, and institutes. It is generally compiled into indicators that relate to inputs (e.g., manpower, money, infrastructure, etc.), processes, outputs and impacts. In general the information is presented in graphic displays, tabular displays and index numbers. The main concerns pertaining to the utilization of monitoring data are the reliability and validity of information, the availability of the data, and the selection of key indicators.

The last element of the policy system is evaluation. It is a process used to produce information about the performance of policies in satisfying values, needs or opportunities. Monitoring answers the question: what happened, how and why? Evaluation answers the question: what difference did the policy make? To evaluate programs analysts utilize the following criteria and questions.

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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>* Effectiveness</td>
<td>Has a desired outcome been achieved?</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Efficiency</td>
<td>How much effort was required to obtain desired outcomes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Adequacy</td>
<td>To what extent does the achievement of a desired outcome resolve the problem?</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Equity</td>
<td>Are costs and benefits distributed equitably among different groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Responsiveness</td>
<td>Do outcomes satisfy particular groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Appropriateness</td>
<td>Are desired outcomes worthwhile?</td>
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When formal evaluations take place, they are generally divided into two types: summative evaluation which appraises established policies and programs that have been in place for a period of time and formative evaluation which looks at the accomplishment of goals and objectives during implementation of the program. Techniques for evaluation include regression analysis, control series analysis, objectives mapping, discounting, user survey analysis, interrupted time series analysis, and nearly all of the techniques used in previous stages of the policy analysis process.
Multidisciplinary Approach

One can illustrate the relevance of policy analysis to numerous policy choices affecting Romania. Concrete examples include public policies related to the elderly, to education, to the disabled, to transportation, to energy, to trade and to a host of other social, political and economic problems. Following the example of the elderly, the reader realizes that safeguards in legal proceedings and protection under the law affect the elderly. The ability of senior citizens to obtain access to benefits designed to assist the elderly is also a judicial matter. Lawyers, judges and jurors are involved in policies and programs that deliver services to the elderly.

Public administrators also have contact with the elderly as representatives of the Ministries of Health, Labor, and Housing. Legislators are sensitive to the concerns of the elderly and to their influence during elections. Local government employees also play a prominent role in proving services to the elderly. An example of local provisions of services include healthcare for the elderly. And local elected officials are fully aware that senior citizens vote.

From this brief discussion it is apparent that many fields of study are relevant to the practice of policy analysis. Public administration, law, economics, statistics, history, and psychology are some of the fields of study that provide meaningful perspectives especially during the analysis of the causes and effects of policies. This array of disciplines underpins the notion that policy analysis is, by necessity, an interdisciplinary activity that is conducted by teams of analysts with differing outlooks, priorities and interests. Foremost are advisors to public executives such as national security advisors. They are followed by experts in specific policy areas. These experts can be found in university-based centers, government agencies, or institutions specialized in specific types of policy. Less visible are policy consultants who work for “think tanks” under contract to government agencies. Another category of analysts includes those who work for legislative and judicial bodies.

Within Romania, university departments that are positioned to train analysts with an interdisciplinary approach, balance diverse sets of skills and increase success in developing a team approach to policy analysis are departments of public administration.

Over the years they are likely to best refine the techniques of analysis and integrate the analyst into the fabric of public decision-making.
Institutional Settings

One of the principal goals of the Romanian government is to govern effectively. Effective government means much more than controlling corruption or achieving operational efficiency. It means formulating public policies and implementing programs that respond to the needs of all Romanian citizens, that result in the achievement of satisfactory results, and that assist in correcting important negative consequences.

It was noted that policy analysis may be performed by internal agency groups funded directly out of agency budgets; by universities who generally receive government funds to perform diverse analyses and by non-profit contractors whose ties to the government are shaped by the content of contracts.

Regardless of where the analysts are located, if policy analysis is to succeed, top government managers will have to be involved in identifying and prioritizing the problems to be analyzed. Senior officials will have to be prepared to accept information or recommendations that are sometimes unpopular or run counter to conventional positions. Two other factors will need to be satisfied if the analysis is to bring knowledge to bear on policy. First, senior officials will need to take care to avoid diverting policy analysis resources (e.g., money, manpower, and automated software and hardware) to short term crises or peripheral issues. Second, even if a specific agency decides to contract out a specific policy problem to universities or non-profits, it will need a strong in house policy analysis capability. This capability, consisting of a group of analysts, should be resource rich in expertise, funds, and information. Such a group of analysts should conduct studies, manage external analysis, and act as an integrating mechanism. It should insure that the analytical function reflects an interchange of information from various sources and is not dominated by a single viewpoint or particular interest, and that it balances the theoretical with the realities of the world.

Future Prospects

Within Romania awareness of the need to build a policy analysis capability is growing. Experience to date suggests Romanians have to raise the level of performance of the government institutions by improving decision-making. For policy analysis to move beyond intellectual fashion, three initial steps are necessary. The first step is to promote the idea of reform minded policy analysis among politicians, public administrators, economists, and academics. A series of seminars on the topics of decision-making, on constraints on developing capacity in this area, and on the quality of data on which government depends should be held.
The second step is to increase efforts to document the costs of the lack of a policy analysis, to assess the resources necessary to build a policy analysis capability and to augment current efforts such as the Open Society’s initiative relating to the professional establishment of a policy analysis capability.

The third step is to communicate the need for policy analysis to all sectors of society so that citizens understand the importance of appropriate policies, of well designed programs and of the monitoring and evaluation of performance.

Once training programs are introduced, it will be important to develop a dynamic link between trainers, students and government. Frequent and systematic contact between public administration departments within universities and representatives of both the national and local government will help the students to focus on practical problems and the generation of feasible recommendations. Direct, frequent and repeated contacts with government officials also is a prerequisite for the discipline of policy analysis to gain acceptance and credibility and to utilize the results of policy analysis.

Finally, the government needs to invest in development of a policy analysis capability by funding the activity. Elected officials and career public servants need to take an activist position concerning the need for objective, neutral data and information to steer a course between opposing policy choices, each fraught with political, social and economic consequences. Development of a policy analysis capability can be justified for its own sake and for the way it fits legislative, executive and judicial branch objectives in Romania.

One final point should be emphasized. Governmental decision making is concerned with a precious commodity: the public interest. Although, defining the public interest can be as difficult as arriving at a specific public policy or designing and implementing a highly successful program, decision making in view of the interest of the nation as a whole is best addressed through the use knowledge and common sense core components of policy analysis.