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## Methodology of Obtaining Information about Societal Needs: The Foundations and their Empirical Verification

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### **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This study aimed to identify the concept of a 'societal need', indicate sources of information about societal needs, and conduct a critical analysis of the foundations of the methodology of obtaining information about societal needs and their operationalization (social services).

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The article was written based on a critical analysis of the literature and practical verification of the methodology applied in obtaining information about societal needs used in diagnosing such conditions (from the perspective of local government).

**Findings:** Society's needs are constantly evolving, increasing in volume, and changing their quality. The method applied in this study to obtain information about societal needs of the local community restricted the range of the survey respondents (reporting societal needs-beneficiaries of social services), which points to the problem of selecting the suitable means of communication with the stakeholders relevant in this process. A diagnosis of societal needs cannot be aspect-based. Its potential is determined by the comprehensiveness of information obtained from all the parties representing the stakeholders of the social policy system.

**Practical implications:** The possibilities of practical implementation aimed at identifying societal needs to create a comprehensive range of the offered social services provided by entities from various sectors of the economy and the modernization and maintenance of services in the system of social policy.

**Originality/Value:** A critical assessment of the applied methodology for obtaining information about the societal needs of a given community and the possibilities of resolving social problems thanks to the provided social services.

**Keywords:** Need, societal needs, social policy, social services, diagnosis of conditions and opportunities.

**JEL Classification:** D71, H23, H44, H53, I38.

**Research type:** Research article.

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## **1. Introduction**

The object of interest for social policy are needs-their kinds, state, and ways of satisfying them at a given stage of society's development (Spicker, 2014). This study attempted to present a methodology of supplying information to the system of social policy at the level of analyzing societal needs for which two essential framework criteria were assumed: 1) protection of the system from an arbitrary definition of societal needs which should be satisfied in the process of providing social services, 2) maintaining the traditionally understood economic effectiveness of the system. The methodology was empirically verified as part of the diagnosis conducted for integrating social services within the framework of an institutional restructuring of the system representative for the conservative order, according to the three-element classification by Esping-Andersen (1990; 1999).

This study aimed to present the level of complication in the categories of needs, societal needs, and social services in a theoretical approach and to show the degree of complexity of the measurement of the satisfaction of the demand for social services in a practical way, based on the diagnosis of social services in a local government unit (rural commune), and in particular: 1) the identification of the concept of a 'societal need'; 2) the indication of the sources of obtaining information about societal needs; 3) a critical analysis of the foundations of the methodology of obtaining information on the subject of societal needs and their operationalization (social services); 4) the empirical verification of the foundations of the methodology based on a case study.

The hypothesis guiding the authors was the statement that the optimization of social services requires: 1) a precise definition of the sources and methods of obtaining information about societal needs and the demand for social services, 2) a diagnosis of the needs of persons reporting their need of social services, 3) an appropriate organization of the provision of social services supplied by various entities from different sectors of the economy.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature presents various needs classifications and their multiple hierarchizations (Murray, 1938; Maslow, 2009). Therefore, it seems necessary to identify those needs that should be satisfied through the provision of social services within the system of social policy.

Societal needs, in the economic interpretation, are understood ambiguously. Most frequently, they are seen in the context of goods (products and services) serving for their fulfillment and in relation to the political implications of such postulates. The assumption of a marginalist perspective, which takes individual consumer preferences as a point of reference, leads to questioning the reality of needs devoid of a subjective basis. This undermines the objectivity of societal needs (supra-individual needs) and rejects their characteristics (Mankiw, 2018). Only through complementing the

theoretical foundation with the viewpoint of the welfare economy does it become possible to reinterpret individual usefulness in aggregate categories (not through simple adding up, but rather based on Pareto's rule, Acocella, 1998), which in turn creates conditions for the acceptance of societal preferences, initially being only inter-subjective "wishes." Originally subject to utilitarian assumptions (always of individual usefulness), their understanding triggers the social factor by combining economic effectiveness with the supra-individual good (Feldman and Serrano, 2005; Sen, 2017). The latter becomes the argument behind political decisions that change the point of departure by achieving outcomes defined in social categories. At the same time, any attempts of evaluating the effectiveness of actions aimed at realizing these decisions, about their actual impact, lead to the formulation of criteria constituting the 'social justice' desired by the system (Stiglitz and Rosengard, 2015).

This perspective allows then to justify government interventions co-creating the instrumentation of social policy, undertaken to regain market equilibrium (Barr, 2020) and to expand the category of needs by individual preferences concerning public goods (Stiglitz and Rosengard, 2015), or 'merit' needs as understood by Musgrave (Musgrave, 1959; in: Acocella, 1998: "Needs whose satisfaction the government wishes to promote regardless of individual preferences" – that is, in other words, socially desirable needs).

Such an opinion is difficult to accept, especially for the proponents of a liberal viewpoint, even if -which is not common (Nozick, 1974) in this doctrinally diversified group (Heywood, 2021; Barr, 2020) they allow for limited redistributive interventions justified by social welfare (Hayek, 2011). These interventions are then of an on-the-spot nature, motivated by timely support for the needy but without any reference to the created social justice, the supra-individual needs of society nor undermining the free-market basis of welfare, so crucial for the collectivist narration (López and Assous, 2010; Sardoni, 2011). Within this narration, Marxists radicalize societal needs, bringing them down to the objective and necessary laws of social development, understood only in terms of the class war (Moore, 1957; Harvey, 2018).

Other collectivist critics of the free market find the political implementation of their views within a broad framework of society's welfare provided by the state, which is indicated by its name (the welfare state). They see this as an appropriate form of the political system realizing the ideals of social justice, whose existence-despite the stance of liberals dedicated to a spontaneous order (Irving, 2020) they do not deny. Consequently, based on the doctrine, it is possible to separate needs from wishes and preferences (George and Wilding, 2003; Spicker, 1988; Mullard and Spicker, 1998; Acocella, 2005).

The system of social policy, organized within political activism typical of the welfare state, is an institutional response to the needs of people requiring support, which engages the authorities in the realization of the tasks it involves. The foundations of the system assume that there are needs, which, although not satisfied by the

beneficiaries of the social policy themselves, should be confident in their opinion or that of their milieu, even when they are not articulated (merit needs). It is in the context of the thus interpreted societal needs which are not satisfied by market mechanisms that specific claims emerge (Spicker, 1993) which justify actions undertaken by the state and its institutions in the form of various interventions (material, financial), as well as the organization or direct provision of social services (Jimenez, Mayers, Pasztor, Chambers, Pearlman, and Fujii, 2015). In this way, the mission of the welfare state is fulfilled, which by complementing market mechanisms, supports actions where there is a social need for the involvement of state institutions (Matteucci Civitarese, and Halliday, 2017).

Including societal needs within institutional protection (the welfare state) allows for their more precise definition based on political pragmatism. In line with Hultqvist and Hollertz (2021), the authors assumed that "needs about social policy programs are generally understood as the needs of citizens stemming from pressing social problems." A need will vanish if the problem is resolved, and up to that point, it "is determined by the relations between functional problems and possible responses" (Spicker, 1993), which are linked with the social character of the problems. Their basis is finally constituted by the status quo of societal relations for which an individual is only partly responsible. The loss of a job would not be, after all, a result of the individual professional deficiencies of specific people if a political decision were taken about restructuring the sector (Edwards, Howard, and Miller, 2001; Adams, 2002; Barr, 2005).

This perspective-tying in a societal need with a social problem, becomes possible only in a favorable political and doctrinal system-becomes a source of the objectivity of needs. It is possible to resolve a factual issue resulting from the social relations of a supra-individual character only in a supra-individual horizon (Spicker, 2014). Up to that point, when this happens, even an improvement in the situation of individual beneficiaries will not eliminate the problem. The societal need will continue to exist, retaining objectivity (Barusch, 2017).

Despite the differences in its organization and institutional characteristics, both the evolution and maintaining of the social policy system require information supply. Thus, there emerges a problem with articulating societal needs, which will initiate services as the system's instrumentation. A situation in which the state decides about the majority of those, treating them in categories of unexpressed 'merit' needs, becomes a simple way towards the alienation of social policy (understood as the alienation of bureaucracy, Tummers, 2018). On the other hand, organizing a system based on a simple classification of claims made by potential beneficiaries is impossible to maintain and difficult to justify (Barr, 2020).

At this point, it is worth mentioning that depriving a social policy system of information about the perceived and expressed societal needs is not always dysfunctional. In extreme circumstances, the reaction of the system can be based only

on popular and normative requirements. This approach was presented by Maglajlic (2019), based on the author's model of intervention in the case of a catastrophe. Coincidentally, the analyses by Webber and Jones (2013) using the example of reconstruction following bush fires in the Australian state of Victoria in 2009-proved that even in extreme cases, the efficiency of the social services measured by their durability, in the end, requires the analysis of needs, and not their presumption, even when based on experience.

Human needs were the subject of a monograph (Doyal and Gough, 1991), which has remained a unique proposal of a comprehensive theory of needs, with the conclusion regarding universality and objectivity (in the sense of common rights) of some of them. The critical analytical differentiation of 'needs' distributed by institutions of the welfare state, and 'wishes' (wants, desires) confirmed by the range of products and services available on the market, was explained in detail by Goodin (1988). In contrast, needs in the context of an informational determinant of the quality of social policy were examined by Ife (1983). His study remains valid to this day because the problems of needs as informational support for the system of social policy are still not adequately presented in theoretical works.

One can undoubtedly treat as an exception the taxonomy of needs prepared by Bradshaw (2013-the concept proposed in 1972), or the classification based on the set of needs, the revealed demand for social services, and their supply proposed by Stevens and Gabbay (1991). In the practical context of social policy, the most important source of knowledge about needs remains the analysis of essential services realized in the system in connection with various reports linked to their evaluation processes. This applies in particular to healthcare services in the context of improving their economic effectiveness (McIntosh *et al.*, 2010; Drummond *et al.*, 2015). The non-evaluation source of information about societal needs-especially in the context of 'merit' needs-is still an analysis of both the legislative and doctrinal environment.

The justification of the critical issue for the welfare state of the axiological basis of the state about social assistance, in particular dealing with social justice, has been addressed by many authors, for whom the point of reference has continued to be the monograph by Goodin (1988), which offered a solution free of ideological biases and thus acceptable for supporters of conservative and liberal visions of society, as well as the socialist interpretation of social realities.

### **3. Framework for Supplying Information Regarding Societal Needs**

Ife (1983) claims that the reason for the inefficient allocation of resources in the social policy system is the problems with naming the actual societal needs. The solutions he proposed for supporting data collection are based on a model of social declarations. The following were identified: 1) population needs, 2) needs to be defined by a guardian, and 3) deduced needs. A similar list was presented by Bradshaw (2013) in his taxonomy, which points out the following:

- normative need (based on imposed definitions and expert norms),
- felt need (identified with shortage, but dependent on subjective evaluation),
- expressed need (revealed via manifested expectations),
- comparative need of the population (assumed as a rule which is the basis for standardizing benefits).

The indicated classification puts in order societal needs and allows to catalog the sources of information about them. Thus, on the one hand, normative requirements make up a part of the legislative environment, while on the other, they are presented as the result of the expert experience. Such conditions are 1) socially desirable, 2) regulated by the legislation, and 3) resulting from the theoretical achievements of social policy. The non-expert source of information is, in this case, the stakeholders who represent political decision-makers. The felt needs are the least structuralized because they express emotional neediness, challenging to order formally.

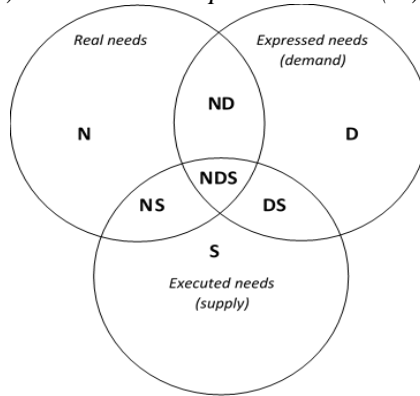
The source of information about these needs is the current and potential beneficiaries of the social policy system, not excluding experts. The same sources, but in institutionally organized forms (trade unions, sectoral groups, NGOs, etc.), should characterize the expressed needs which require a clear manifestation of expectations.

In turn, the source of knowledge about the popularly comparable conditions is experts and practitioners. When supported by reports and theoretical analyses, can draw statistically confirmed general conclusions about the regularities in terms of needs. Such needs, as specific standards, can become a reference for the formulation of future demands based on the extrapolation of experiences.

The indicated taxonomy can be extended by, for example, the latent needs postulated by Vazoniene and Pakeltiene (2017), suggested by research of markets within the social infrastructure of rural areas, just as by conditions pointed out by Stevens and Gabby (1991) when evaluating the effectiveness of the healthcare system. For this study, this taxonomy can be presented in the way shown in Figure 1.

The presented interpretation is based on the differentiation of societal needs as: 1) natural, 2) those for which there is a visible demand, and 3) those satisfied by the offered social services. The indicated needs can be graphically presented as overlapping circles, which allows differentiating seven areas indispensable for classifying and diagnosing possible societal needs. The circles represent the Universum of societal needs about the manifested demand and the operationalization of needs in the provided social services. Applying this perspective, it is possible to depict the purpose of diagnosing societal needs showing maximization of area NDS, especially at the expense of N (real needs, not only not executed by the system of social policy but even unrecognized by the beneficiaries themselves, hence not manifested).

**Figure 1.** Real needs (N) in relation to expressed needs (D) and executed needs (S)



*N* – real needs which are not executed, nor openly expressed

*D* – imagined needs which are not executed by services despite the expressed demand

*S* – imagined needs executed by services despite the lack of demand

*DS* – imagined needs, even though executed by services in response to the demand

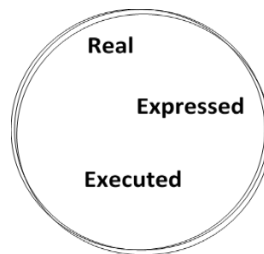
*ND* – real needs, not executed by services even though expressed

*NS* – real needs not expressed openly, even though in reality satisfied by services

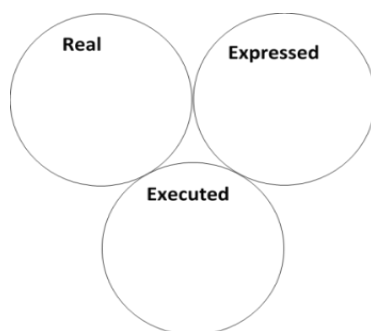
*NDS* – real needs, openly expressed and satisfied by executed services

**Source:** Own elaboration based on A. Stevens, J. Gabbay (1991).

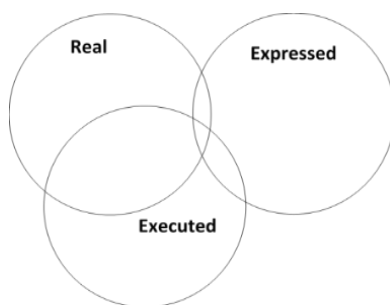
In the ideal model, fundamental needs are close to the needs represented by services appearing as those offered by the social policy system on an expressly manifested wish. However, this is practically non-existent in political practice, independently from the accepted methodology and the range of exploration of societal needs. It does not exclude the existence of ‘merit’ needs that are socially desirable in line with Musgrave, which may be interesting for some stakeholders - political decision-makers. The indicated model lacks the potential for implementation, even because of the unrealistic assumption that all real needs will be satisfied.



Similarly unrealistic is a situation when the manifested social expectations do not bear any relation to the actual needs and have no confirmation in the supplied services. Although it is possible to distance the supply (social services) from the demand, augmenting the ineffectiveness of the social policy system. Yet, it is difficult to envisage such a significant separation of services from needs, particularly the maintenance of this situation.



It is far more feasible to introduce a model in which the overlapping of actual needs by the needs represented by social services (fields NS and NDS) is partial, just as in practice, there is a partial overlapping of the manifested expectations by the services offered in the system (fields DS and NDS). It isn't easy to expect symmetry in this case. A one-sided enlargement of these fields indicates potential dysfunctionalities of the state, whose removal will require legislative support.



Independently from any results, the rationality of modernization activities and the maintenance of the social policy system assumes an environmental analysis concentrated on the inclusion into the needs represented by the realized services, the most frequent real needs, with social approval. This approval determines the effectiveness of the system, even though not in the narrow financial sense. Forcing someone to accept help, which is objectively necessary for this person, yet that need is not perceived, does not solve social problems, even though it remains an accurate measure of the system's effectiveness represented by NDS.

The methodology of the analysis mentioned above is of a complex nature, just as the needs. Based on Bradshaw's taxonomy, it should focus on obtaining information from relevant sources, which is not apparent, especially in actual conditions separated from both the supply and demand (N). Normative societal needs are visible in the system through the services which satisfy them. They also appear in a scattered form in the legislative system-in the more distant surroundings of the social policy.

Therefore, its analysis will become a fundamental source of information. The study



will then be complemented by the knowledge obtained from experts (analysts, theoreticians, and practitioners in the social policy system). The real normative needs that currently are not present in the system (N)-either as manifested expectations or as rights in the scope of services-can be excluded from expert discussion and analysis of trends, even in constitutionalizing societal needs. Specialist knowledge is also a source for other groups of conditions: comparative of the population (in part it may regard the needs from field N, but this group does not require non-expert references), expressed and felt ones.

However, for the latter, the primary source of information remains the beneficiaries of the social policy system. In their case, the methodological problem is concentrated not merely on searching for additional sources of information but rather on a diagnosis of expectations to separate the perceived real needs from those imagined, which should not be institutionally satisfied. The beneficiaries themselves cannot carry out this differentiation. The felt needs are simultaneously expressed by them (NDS, ND, D, and DS). In part, the felt needs may be represented by the needs satisfied by social services, without a clear manifestation regarding their expectations (S and NS), due to certain habits which can become ingrained for some beneficiaries. The condition for the correct separation is to balance the arguments expressed by stakeholders/political decision-makers with those from representatives of the third sector (civic participation) and practitioners responsible for the preparation and distribution of social services. The only confrontation of arguments and assessments can highlight the difference between real and imagined needs, both expressed and felt ones.

Therefore, analyses aimed at informational support in respect of needs must be concentrated on the inclusion of conditions from group N into NDS (ensuring the effectiveness of the system, with support for the real solution of social problems), and possibly NS (ensuring the effectiveness yet without the acceptance of society).

#### **4. Obtaining Information about Societal Needs at the Local Level - A Case Study**

Diagnosing societal needs in Poland has been enforced since 2019 by legislation (Ustawa, 2019) before which there was no obligation to conduct it. The legislative changes were implemented due to the introduction of a new institution to the system of social policy, namely the Centre for Social Services, responsible for the organization of social services on a local level. These centers should base their activities on the correctly recognized (diagnosed) needs and the potential of the local community, which, when identified in a diagnosis, should become the basis of a social services program adopted by the legislative organ of the commune in the form of an act of local law.

Such needs should be satisfied through a wide range of social services, e.g., pro-family policy, social assistance, promotion, and protection of health, etc., provided directly

in a non-material form to individuals, families, social groups, groups of residents with needs, and the local population in general.

Thus, the research team, which included some authors of this study, in the first quarter of 2021, carried out a diagnosis of the needs and potential of a local community in terms of social services in rural communes, the results were presented in a report (Raport, 2021).

The conducted analysis of those needs had a character of quantitative research, supplemented by a qualitative survey. The employed research tools were, a survey questionnaire prepared using Google forms, a lecture introducing the subject of the study to the commune's residents, an Excel calculation sheet, and the analytical package SPSS. Moreover, the authors also used in their diagnosis data for the period 2018-2020, which included: 1) collective information from a local institution providing services in the scope of social assistance (the institution was transformed into the center for social services), obtained via individual interviews, 2) data from the Local Data Bank for the Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, [www.gus.gov.pl](http://www.gus.gov.pl)), 3) information supplied from the development strategy of the commune.

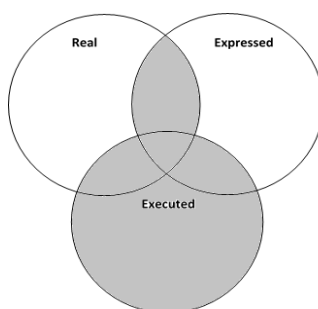
The questionnaires targeted three groups of respondents: 1) persons responsible for creating the realities of the commune and having an influence on its functioning, 2) entities providing social services (in this case, the questionnaire was split into two parts, i.e., general and that dedicated to those providing services in specific areas, such as pre-school education, school education, social assistance and support for persons with disabilities, and others, in a definite form, i.e., organizational units of the commune, entities from outside of the public finance sector including NGOs and public utility organizations), 3) residents of the commune.

The invitation to fill in questionnaires was intended for all willing parties, classified according to the differentiation of groups of stakeholders in social services. The analyses focused on the characteristics of the targeted expectations of respondents, recognized as representative for the socially active members of the examined communities.

Each questionnaire consisted of demographics and a series of questions adapted to the groups of respondents (the first contained ten questions; the second 5 questions addressed to all respondents and 3-10 questions directed to individual groups of entities providing social services, while the third one comprised 16 queries). Most questions were closed and limited the answers to a few suggested variants using a Likert scale (7-point one in the first questionnaire and a 5-point one in the others). In a few questions, the answer was limited to 'yes' or 'no,' and only some were open questions enabling the respondents to express their opinion freely.

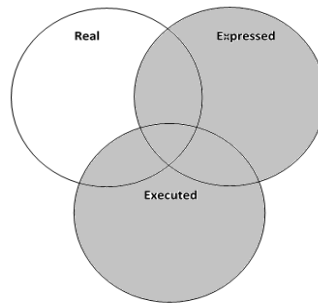
The survey used the CAPI method (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) and CASAQ (Computer Assisted Self-Administered Questionnaires) (Lambries, 2008). Some questionnaires were completed with the staff of the local government office. The completed questionnaires provided information about the areas of needs and supply of social services. In line with the taxonomy by Stevens and Gabby, it was possible to describe information coverage for the assumed ranges.

Questionnaire 1 (directed to institutional stakeholders) aimed to obtain information about the real needs in all the source groups. It turned out that the conditions were confirmed, which are already satisfied by the services provided. The only addition was the real needs which had been demanded earlier. Institutional stakeholders did not refer to the socially desired conditions, which incidentally were also left out by other groups.

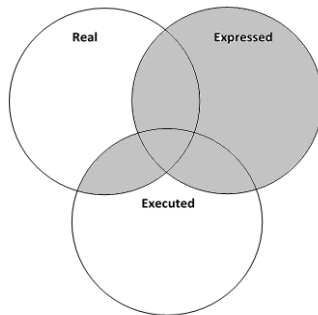


As expected, the respondents assessed the quality of the present range of services highly, even if noting the shortcomings about the potential of popular needs, which did not go beyond the expressed needs. The answers to the open questions did not use arguments related to normative requirements. In the circumstances of the introduction of the new institution (the Centre for Social Services) aiding the integration of social services, it is astonishing not to see any references to normative needs which are socially desirable. Their lack would be justified with sufficient legislative support; however, from the expert perspective also represented by the respondents, such a situation did not occur. Among the shortcomings, there was a particular mention of the needs of persons with disabilities, which are traditionally manifested, and on the political processes without any local empirical confirmation.

There was a similar outcome regarding the material obtained from questionnaire 2 (entities providing social services), even though in this case, there was a broader context of shortcomings in respect of the expressed and felt needs, also connected with the quality of that material. A negligible number of questionnaires representing NGOs minimized the influence of civic engagement on the separation of imagined needs (in certain conditions) from the real ones. In addition, the lack of comments on normative decisional requirements can also be seen as a weakness.



As expected, informational material from questionnaire 3 (residents) centered primarily on the felt and expressed needs. At the same time, it helped to identify the current supply of services based on normative needs without any real value. This material was extensive and constituted an unfocused inquiry into conditions. Its catalog, especially in relation to the present possibilities of their satisfaction, required a confrontation with the (also carried out) analysis of financial and infrastructural potential.



To obtain the complete picture of the informational material provided by the questionnaire survey, the obtained results are imperfect due to the insufficient representativeness of the examined entities. In the first quarter of 2021, the number of residents in the studied local government unit amounted to approximately 5.5 thousand. In contrast, the questionnaires were answered by 407 respondents, namely 40 for questionnaire 1, 57 – questionnaire 2, and 310 in the case of the third one.

Questionnaire 1 was answered mainly by a) women (82.5% of the respondents), b) persons aged 41-60 (47.5%), 25-40 years old – 45%, 61-65 years old – 5%, and those 20-24 – 2.5%), c) persons with higher education (67.5% of the respondents), those with secondary education 32.5%), d) residents outside the central locality of the commune (77.5%).

The respondents of questionnaire two mainly represented entities: a) providing social services in the central locality of the commune (73.7%), b) registered in the given commune (94.7%), c) entities from the public sector, i.e., organizational units of the

commune (93%), d) those providing services in school education (64.9%; 15.8% from entities providing social services in the scope of pre-school education; 10.5% – related to social assistance and support for persons with disabilities, 8.8% –other services). In the case of the latter group, the analysis of interdependencies showed a few areas of the statistically relevant correlations linked with a different perception of availability, quality, and lack of social services provided locally by the entities registered in the given commune and outside it (with a more critical evaluation of their representation by entities registered outside the given commune). The range of social services offered in the given commune was assessed lower by those who represent entities providing services outside the central locality in the commune.

Residents taking part in questionnaire three mainly included: a) women (69.7%), b) persons aged 25-40 (42.9%); persons aged 41-60 – 33.87%; the 20-24 and 61-65 age groups – 6.77%, those aged 66-70 – 4.52%, and 14-19 – 2.26%, children under 13 – 1.61%, and persons over 70 – 1.29%), c) persons with secondary education (50.32%), persons with higher education – 36.77%), d) residents outside the central locality of the commune (70.65% of the respondents), e) those who described their material status as “good” (50%), 40.65% with “average,” 5.81% who saw it as “very good,” and 3.55% as “very bad”).

## **5. Results**

The analysis of needs and potential of the local community in the examined commune showed that:

- 1) in the opinion of all the respondents, the commune should extend the range of the social services on offer in all aspects which are mentioned in the act regulating their realisation of social services;
- 2) the most expected by the respondents are the services related to the promotion and protection of health, and the necessity of developing social services in the scope of promoting and protecting health was highlighted by the respondents to questionnaires 2 and 3; the other two areas-support for persons with disabilities and fighting against unemployment-were indicated by those answering questionnaires 1 and 3);
- 3) not all the needs of the commune’s residents connected with specific areas of social services, named in the Act on the realisation of social services, are satisfied to a satisfactory degree (this concerns in particular unemployment, housing, stimulating civic activity, support for persons with disabilities, promotion and protection of health), which implies the insufficient supply of these social services;
- 4) in view of the diagnosis, the main beneficiaries of social services financed from public funds, should be: a) children and youngsters at a school age, b) problem families with children, c) persons with disabilities, non-autonomous, their care-givers, and the elderly;

- 5) there is a need for social integration of the local community in order to develop social services (increase supply of the services provided by NGOs and voluntary workers).

The diagnosed societal needs (directions of growth in supply of social services) occurring in the examined commune, divided into individual groups of residents, can be presented as follows:

- a) children and youngsters at a school age-the respondents clearly indicated: the shortage of organised forms of spending free time for these ages' groups, the necessity of creating child-minding facilities after school hours, the need to provide wide-ranging support (e.g., pedagogical and psychological) for children and youngsters;
- b) problem families with children-the respondents asked about the hierarchy of the most pertinent social problems of families indicated the following: addictions (63.9%), unemployment (63.5%) and bad financial situation (59.4%), and stated that the family problems in the commune include: the lack of caring and educational abilities, the absence of positive models and authority, alcohol abuse;
- c) persons with disabilities and non-autonomous, and their care-givers, the elderly-the respondents stressed that the greatest needs relate to: rehabilitation and individual care services at the home of the affected persons affected, transport services (e.g. to medical appointments); care service available at a day-care centre and cultural animation; the need to encourage activities for seniors and persons with disabilities; the demand for additional educational training for care-givers of persons with disabilities and patients requiring constant healthcare; organization of free time for the elderly, and persons with disabilities, and organising their education (training).

The conducted diagnosis of the needs of the local community in the studied commune also suggests that the insufficient range of social services which are offered results from the following:

- only a small number of residents are active/participates in a local and/or supra-local social organisation (just over 40%),
- insufficient activities aimed at the integration of the local community, and stimulating civic activity among adults,
- a low level of civic activity in the commune, while its increase would pave the way to a better satisfaction of needs in terms of the social services,
- lack of awareness that the local community, both the affluent and those less so, can and ought to become involved in the activities for the benefit of the whole community, according to the available means,
- low level of social integration as well as that of inter-generational, negligible civic activity and the sense of community, weak responsibility for common property, scant non-professional activity among the persons of productive age, lack of will to cooperate and compromise, and no interest in social issues.

Lack of any mention regarding ‘merit’ (socially desirable) needs, especially in the normative representation of this group, justifies the conclusion about accepting the status quo as a satisfactory reference to all analyses. This is understandable in the group of institutional creators and those currently realizing the objectives of the units of public authorities. The insufficient presence in these group findings representing social engagement shifts the emphasis in the initial model, keeping up with the needs from group S and possibly NS.

There is a lack of sufficient potential to explore N, currently without support by the manifested expectations (NS and NDS). The license for the improvement of the effectiveness of the system is limited. One could formulate a thesis that this situation is due to the unsatisfactorily developed component in the subjective structure of the social policy system, such as the representation of civic society (civic activity). This mainly applies to institutionalized forms of engagement (NGOs) and other conditions (e.g., neighborhood support). It should be pointed out that the lack of perspective on this site cannot be compensated on the level of the methodology of information supply. This lack indicates a deficit of the system (from the viewpoint of the social policy system, but it may also concern the legislative environment, which determines support for various forms of social engagement).

## **6. Conclusions**

The considerations carried out in this study enabled to formulate the following conclusions:

- societal needs are continuously evolving, changing their volume and quality;
- the method applied for the purposes of this research, i.e., to obtain information about societal needs of a local community, limited the group of respondents (those reporting societal needs-beneficiaries of social services), which indicates a problem with the selection of the appropriate means of communication with stakeholders relevant in this process;
- a diagnosis of societal needs cannot be aspect-based, and its potential is determined by the comprehensiveness of information obtained from all parties representing stakeholders in the system of social policy;
- the local community expects the satisfying of many societal needs, but is able to point out the most vital needs such as healthcare, help for persons with disabilities and stimulating civic activity,
- societal needs are often articulated not by the individuals who are to benefit from social services created on the basis of these needs; this is an indirect result of the deficit in civic animation, but at the same time expresses a certain solidarity of society, where the respondents feel that they represent the needs of other groups,

- manifestations of civic activity (NGOs and voluntary work) are the basis of the increase of both the range of social services on offer, as well as the awareness of the needs existing behind them,
- the deficit of civic activity is permanent and cannot be compensated in any way-the quality and effectiveness of the system of social policy are determined by the scope and depth of social engagement, and the growth of citizen participation can be recognized as an element of improving the effectiveness of the social policy system.

Based on these observations, the following recommendations can be made:

- the removal of dysfunctions in the system of social policy requires the appropriate legal regulation, as illustrated by the legislatively enforced diagnostic obligation in the scope of societal needs,
- the elaborated methodology of identifying societal needs and the potential of satisfying them, enables undertaking and executing similar actions on a wider scale (in other units of local government), but it requires perfecting,
- the methodology of a comprehensive diagnosis of societal needs divided into goods and services should include a two-way impact, i.e., development of methods expanding the subject matter supporting the diagnosis with information, and methods allowing to separate-as part of the extended enquiry into the felt and expressed needs – real needs from those imagined,
- the presented contents of the study, both theoretical and empirical, can become a source of informational support for local governments in their decision-making processes connected with social services, as well as an inspiration for the authorities in the scope of legislative solutions which create a social policy.

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