Implementation of public policies.
The compatibility of the model of public policy
with the target space of the policy

Luminița Gabriela POPESCU
National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Romania
lgpopescu22@gmail.com

Abstract. *New realities bring to the fore a series of challenges referring to the implementation of public policies. One of the major challenges is caused by the lack of compatibility between the chosen model for the elaboration of policy, on the one hand, and the target public space, on the other.*

That could mean that either the technical solutions formulated by the researchers, to be applied to the target space are totally unrealistic, or in the target space there are zones of confusion, of instability, of unpredictability, where the model chosen by the policy-makers cannot be applied. The degree of difficulty is so much more difficult as the members of the community and society, in general, are preoccupied, predominantly, with the problems that appear in the target public space, while almost not at all interested in the technical problems faced by the policy-makers.

Despite this lack of interest, anyway, the problems that the community/society faces cannot be solved but by the implementation of their initiatives and models proposed by the policy-makers. The success of a policy is, in our opinion, firstly, a matter of compatibility between the model of the public policy proposed and the target public space characterised by a high degree of inertia and tendencies manifest in maintaining the status quo.

How could there be reached the compatibility between a public policy, whose vision is based on the behavioural change of the institutions[1], organisations and people, on the one hand, and the unreformed public space, aligned to the exigencies much exceeded by reality, on the other? Which are the approaches necessary to a compatibility between the models of the policies and the target space? What strategies must be chosen? How must the efforts and resources in the public space be graduated and oriented to become compatible with the model chosen by the policy makers? These are questions which we will try to answer in this article.

Keywords: target public space, policy-makers, evidence-based public policies.

JEL Classification: Z18, Z19.

1. Introduction

Studies on the implementation of public policies constitute a major challenge in today's context. Starting from the citizens' refuse, more and more vocally expressed, to accept *policies formulated behind closed doors* anymore, the rethinking of the public policies process appears as a real priority. So that the implementation of a public policy be a success, an imperative requirement is to give up rigid, inertial and hierarchical structures whose main preoccupation is the preservation of the *status quo* in favour of adopting flexible, transparent, adaptive structures to be consonant with the *novelty* brought on by a public policy.

More precisely, O'Toole assumes that the implementation of a policy "refers to the connection between the expression of governmental intention and actual results" (1995, p. 43) or as DeLeon put it, "what happens between policy expectations and (perceived) policy results" (DeLeon, 1999, pp. 314-315).

There is a multitude of variables that affect the way public policies are elaborated and implemented, the including the political opinion, extant at national level, on the issue that is to be solved by the initiated public policy, the public attitude on the state and the employees, on the skills and knowledge of the managers in the public sector, on the degree public services are citizen-oriented. Despite the fact that the boundary between the elaboration and the implementation of the public policies cannot be clearly established, nowadays, the relationship between the units providing public services and the structures of the governmental policies is called into question.

The main problem is triggered exactly by the impossibility of clearly mark off the boundary between the elaboration of public policies and the implementation of public policies. A good policy cannot be shaped but by the actors who know how services and policies may be managed, while insufficient experience in the domain may have impractical policies as a result (Popescu, 2013, p. 132).

Another major implementation challenge is the lack of compatibility between the model established for policy elaboration, on the one hand, and the space of the target public, on the other hand. That lack of compatibility may mean that either the technical solutions formulated by academics to be implemented in the target space are totally unrealistic or that there are zones of confusion, of instability, of unpredictability in the target space, where the model established by the *policy makers* cannot be implemented. The degree of difficulty is much greater when the members of the community and society, generally, are preponderantly absorbed by the problems that appear in the target public space and almost not at all interested in the technical problems faced by the *policy makers*.

2. Different representations of target public space

As to the representation of the target public space, researchers have rather contradictory opinions. Thus, for D. Shon the target public space is similar to a "swamp" where solutions are confused, incapable of containing technical elements. In these terms, the swamp represents the reality of complex uncertain situations.

Contrary to his opinion, professor Ron Amann appreciates that in this swamp there may also be identified zones of solid ground where real actions may develop to support both the updating of the models of elaborating policies and their implementation (Pearson, 2002, p. 41).

We consider that the solid ground Ron Amann is referring to is representative for the case of the simple uncertain problems.

The issues which are the major subjects of public policy, and which concern, in particular, the future, differ in terms of complexity and uncertainty.

Complexity refers to the number of separate or variable elements, the number of connections between them, and the degree of variability of these connections. Obviously, complex issues admit of a completely different approach than simple ones. Complexity imposes the need to turn to professionals who, based on their experience and knowledge, can develop specific strategies for solving complex problems.

 In the case of simple problems, due to the sufficient volume of information available, they are sufficient experience and intuition supported by routine (standard) procedures.

 The term uncertainty refers to the availability of information and the perception of the phenomenon essential for the decision-making process and for the adoption of the necessary measures. The degree of uncertainty has a significant impact on the possibility of predicting public policy. A detailed policy aimed at reducing or reducing an uncertain problem has little chance of success.

The convenient project (optimal, recommended or preferred) chosen based on the considerations that it will lead to the desired change, with lower costs for society than the other variants, is a desideratum permanently subject to practical and psychological threats.

The analysis of the situation and the identification of its critical elements represent the content of the first stage of the policy design process A clear understanding of the nature of the problem and, implicitly, the location of the pressure sources contributes to the generation of creative solutions. If the problem is insufficient or vaguely defined, the solutions will be far from expected. In order to solve a problem, it is important that, from the very beginning, the problem be formulated in a way that facilitates the discovery of solutions.

## 3. Strategic models for public policy making and different typologies of public space

To answer the questions of compatibility, a first approach means configuring a link between strategic thought, based on elaborating a public policy, the various typologies of the target public space and the graduating of the efforts and resources on that basis. To this effect, we formulated three working assumptions, analysis following.

Assumption 1. *The restraints coming from the concrete reality are neglected, efforts being concentrated, mainly, on the abstract domain of elaborating a policy, observing the rigours imposed by the results of the researches and of the technical solutions.*

Public policies carry values that emerge from the vision of the political management regarding the future evolutions of the target public space. The political management is responsible for the formalisation, dissemination and creation of a climate where the vision and the values defining public policy taken into account will be appreciated by all the actors' part of the target space.

Assuming such a behaviour by the political management will influence the model chosen for elaborating a policy in a positive way (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Strategic concepts of public policies*
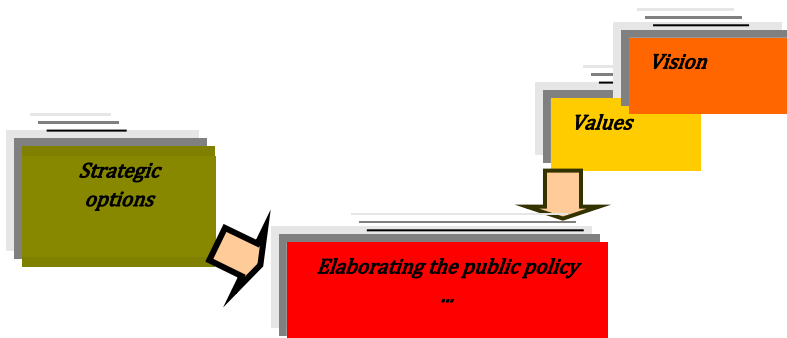
Source: Popescu (2005, p. 118).

In the present situation, requirements aim at democratisation and transparency of the public policy process, which presumes eliminating distortions and testing perceptions and assumptions by debates, argumentations and discussions.

In other words, elaborating public policies should become a process of public learning. This assumption leads to the rational model, formulated by H. Simon (1945), a model suitable for a target space where problems are linear, simple and certain and which is compatible with the traditional bureaucratic structures (see Figure 2.a).

The tendencies of using the rational model were limited as it became ever more evident that the phenomena and events in the real world do not follow a linear model and, consequently, dividing in component parts and their subsequent re-assembly is not a convenient solution for a constantly changing world.

Assumption 2. *Scientific rigour is being abandoned in favour of focussing efforts and resources on the target space where simple and uncertain problems arise.*

In this case, strategic thinking requires the intuitive model, which is based only on the experience, flair and intuition of decision-makers and not on rigorous analysis (see Figure 2.b).

Intuitive decisions are made, inclusively, on the basis of evidence and lessons learned from past success/mistakes, which is a return to the past, despite the rhetoric of "new" and "modernisation" (in a past where better policy making means policy making based on improved instrumental rationality).

Literature takes this approach as evidence-based policy approaches, for which knowledge is the means to control unstable, high-risk situations. From this perspective, the intuitive strategic approach marks not so much a step forward, but above all the best way to what works. The philosophy of "what works" is a real opportunity for social sciences to influence the process of public policies after a long period of time when they were considered irrelevant (Parson, 2002, pp. 44-45).

Making the evidence-based policy-making model compatible with the target space requires strategic approaches aimed at:
- Academic research. The challenge is to influence the production of relevant policy knowledge so that they can be reproduced in a form that can be used by policy makers. The trend in the evidence-based approach is, by excellence, a quantitative approach.
- Professional and organisational experience Focussing efforts and resources is likely to contribute to the development of both the system, which can facilitate better management of learning, as well as knowledge at government and departmental level.

The characteristic of the two forms of management is that they are likely to be explicit and encoded. Evidence can be aggregated and disseminated throughout the target space. From a certain level this means that on the one hand structures and procedures are created so that the institutional modes of "what works" and "contribute to learning" can be extracted, stored, retrieved and communicated, and on the other hand, academic research must be produced and disseminated in accordance with clear specifications (Pearson, 2002, p. 46).

With regard to the evidence-based approach, Pearson considers that its opportunity to contribute to improving the act of government is rather limited, and the contribution of this is, in fact, to make the relationship between knowledge and policy making even more confusing.

In support of this view, we can invoke the risk of uniformity, while the approach toward creativity and innovation is almost completely neglected.

Thus, in evidence-based health policy, the centre of gravity is the disease and the standard procedures laid down for treating that disease. In fact, however, the centre of gravity of health policy is the patient (and not the disease) whose reactions cannot always be standardized. Each patient has his own representation of how he feels the disease (Popescu, 2013b, pp. 96-98).

Another example is in the field of education; through regulations and standards, trends are to standardize education at the expense of educational diversity.

As a conclusion, we can say that, apart from undisputed contributions, the evidence-based approach negatively affects innovation, creativity and, by extension, competitiveness.

Politics should not be guided by dogma, but by knowledge of what works and why. It follows that the evidence/knowledge is needed for policy makers to be able to measure the size of the effect of A on B.

On the other hand, the evidence-based approach is to make changes fast, which will also be positive in other areas. The relatively rapid potential for change and the visible and measurable impact were the main criteria in the choice of transformational areas. There are examples of good practice and successful institutional or managerial models that can serve as a model. Poland, for example, offers a very good model in many areas, from the way it has solved its problems in the state-owned enterprises sector to the way it attracts and implements investment projects financed by European funds.

Without minimizing the contribution of this type of approach, we consider it important to stress that the What works approach is not such as to ensure the success of the implementation process, especially in the case of uncertain and complex situations, which are also the most common in the world we live in.
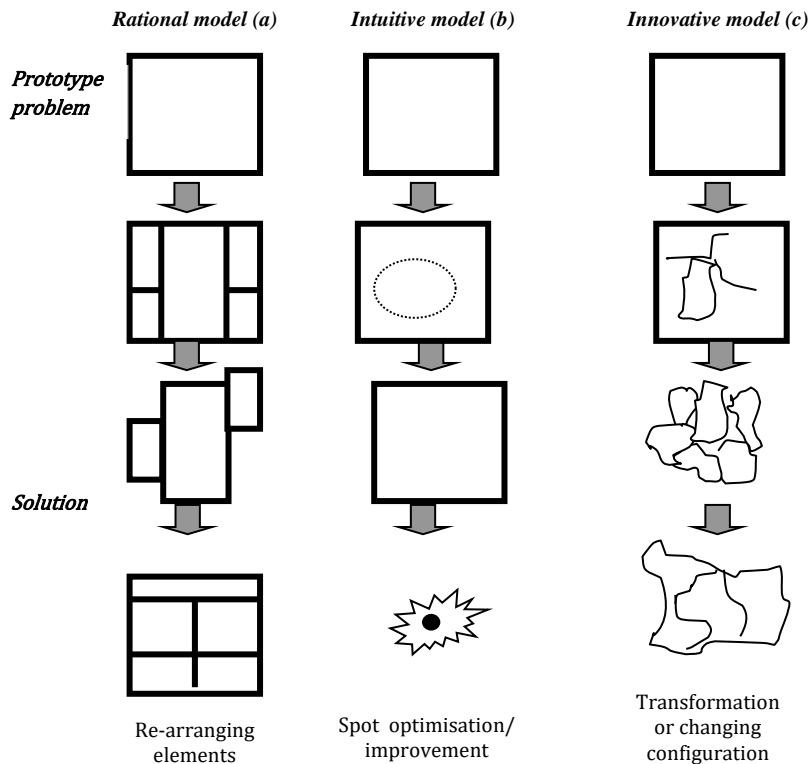
Assumption 3. *Scientific rigour is being abandoned in favour of focussing efforts and resources on the target space where simple and uncertain problems arise.*

We appreciate that we can assimilate Schon's "swamp" to this constantly changing reality, faced with complex and uncertain problems, for which scenarios different from those already in place must be envisaged.

Under these circumstances, the requirements derived from the current requirements lead to a reconfiguration of the target area in a way that stimulates innovative thinking and contributes to the development of innovative models by policy makers (see Figure 2.c).

Edmund Phelps, Nobel Prize winner, pointed out in an interview with the Financial Times in June 2014, that Europe's problem, beyond the financial crisis, was that politicians prevented innovation or reduced incentives for those who want to innovate. After a major slowdown in dynamism in the '60s, productivity growth started to decline in almost all Western countries, halved in the US in the '70s and almost stagnating in France, Germany and the UK at the end of the '90s.

So, despite an increasing need for innovative models, the response of officials is either inadequate or is likely to be belated. They are deliberately involved in swamp, but also in crucial matters and when asked to describe the methods used, they speak of experience, tests, errors, intuition and muddling through (disorder, chaos) (Schon, 1983, pp. 42-43).

Figure 2. *Strategic models for public policy making*

Re-arranging elements

Spot optimisation/ improvement

Transformation or changing configuration

Source: Popescu (2005, p. 152).

Attempts to find an answer to complex and uncertain problems by using, for this, evidence-based approaches, for example, are doomed to failure. The solutions for transforming the target space continue to focus on the old paradigms and this is to the detriment of innovative elements. In this respect, we are raising the controversy generated by evidence-based approaches in the case of educational policies. While not minimizing the contribution of this type of approach to improving educational process, the inherent risk of standardization to innovation in education should be noted.

The success of the implementation of new innovative models in the target public space implies, as stated in the beginning of this chapter, increasing/developing the target space to the level at which it can respond to as many challenges as possible (cognitive, informational, behavioural resource limitation, cultural) associated with innovative policies initiated. The risk of implementation failure is due to the targeting of resources and efforts in areas other than those through which challenges can be overcome. In other words, neglecting or ignoring the compatibility of the target area with the "new" introduced by the public policy initiated leads to major failures that can lead to total undermining of the public policy project. From the panoply of the challenges listed, we bring to the fore the culture and values of the target public space which, in our view, are most difficult to make compatible.

According to the theory developed by Lasswell, values are the essence of a public policy. Moreover, he considers values to be real obstacles that may affect the objectivity of what works (Lasswell, 1951).

In order to be able to understand all the implications, we will continue to look at the key issues relating to the target area.

An organization is not just a conglomerate of people and resources. This is a set of values and assumptions that determine its own climate and organizational culture. In addition, the maturity of the organization is positively reflected in the organizational culture. No matter how they are structured, organizations are not lifeless machines. The people involved, their experience in the past of the organization, their own system of convictions and values contribute to the vitalisation of the organisation. As the organisation gains knowledge and manages to solve the complex problems it faces, it becomes mature. Similarly, cultural bearers can be the engine of change or an element of maintaining the status quo, depending on the values they make explicit by their behaviour (and not the values they publicly declare to support).

4. The culture of target public space a challenge for implementation actions

Meeting the above-mentioned demands raises a new problem, namely the drivers of change (organizations, authorities and officials able to put pressure on change and adaptation to an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable world).

We stress that in our view that the success of any type of public policy is dependent on the change of the culture of the target public space, in the sense of political socialisation. Any other type of change, methods or processes, is favoured or. On the contrary, stopped by the level of political socialisation.

Culture is the way that members of a group communicate with each other and with other groups in society. In the course of the communication process, common behaviours, habits, practices, values, beliefs and visions of the future target space are reflected and become tangible as the policies initiated are turned into action. The importance of a new culture, centred around the transformation sought by the implementation of a public policy, lies in its implications for implementing the project of change. Sequential implementation, of only those new practices that seem more useful or more generally applicable, can have remarkable effects in the short term. Fragmented efforts, however, cannot support long-term performance. For example, consumer policies can only succeed in the short term at most, without a solid consumer culture being crystallised (Popescu, 2005, pp. 119-124).

The result of the completion of the concepts shown in Figure 1 with these considerations is shown in Figure 3. In conclusion, only adaptive organizational environments compatible with public policies (these new and changing promoters) are able to recognize the importance of the new values promoted. From this perspective, the organisational analysis brings the adaptive organization to the fore, characterised by:
- sophistication and maturity;
- flexibility and not rigid bureaucracy;

- proactivity;
- motivation mechanisms that promote openness and commitment to the organisation;
- a collaborative climate that facilitates team work;
- interest shown in openness to the community;
- decision transparency;
- constant concern for the development of the organisation so that it can be continuously transformed.

Figure 3. *From culture to action*
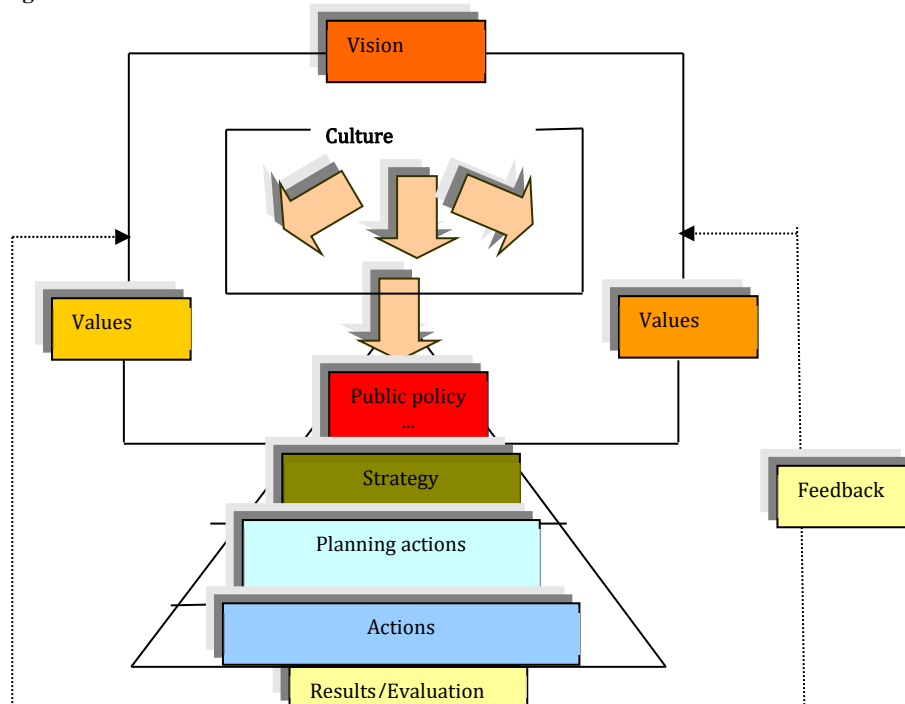
Source: Popescu (2005, p. 120).

How could organisations be forced to give up the rigidity and tradition in which they seem bound and accept the new organisational models? We need to think about how values and identity could be maintained in a changing environment; we need to think about responding to the challenges, how to influence and manage these changes in order to achieve a certain degree of success.

In conclusion, efforts and resources must be allocated to the development of the target public space, including from a cultural perspective.

The culture of public space, which we define as a patchwork of cultures of the actors involved (public, business and civic organisations, of communities that are interested in a given public policy), must be brought into line with the values and ethics that public policy promotes while it is working its way among the Scylla of good intentions and the Charybdis of bureaucracy. It is a difficult process, which needs the support of a strong culture.

However, the strength of a culture lies in its actual content and adequacy of the solutions found to the problems of public policies. A strong culture requires the entities to agree on how to design, implement and evaluate the public policy project.

Strong culture does not mean blind acceptance, but consensus over values and attitudes. Building such a culture requires a lot of time and substantial efforts to learn and strengthen it.

For a better understanding, we will consider that the target public space can be assimilated to a meta-organisation – a conglomerate consisting of all the actors involved in the implementation process. The culture of the meta-organisation is the common places of cultural diversity which must provide coherence and consistency to the complex structure it defines. (In the complex structure, they are non-governmental, private and public, national, international and transnational organisations.)

Despite the fact that cultural uniformity between these cultures is not being sought (nor possible), there is still a need for some compatibility. This means engaging stakeholders, which are members of the meta-organisation, in a sustained effort to create a new culture based on the values and beliefs promoted by public policies.

5. Conclusions

The decline in societal performance appears to be a difference between environmental opportunities and the capacity to promote public projects to capitalize on these opportunities. Improving the quality of public projects, of forecasts of future developments and taking management risk into account in the real-time response is the ability to close this gap.

Under these assumptions, the mechanistic cultural model, typical of bureaucracy, is completely out of date. The cultural model of the organic organisation is the one to which moves to change the organisations that are part of the organisation must be concentrated.

In an overwhelming majority, to the various and serious problems faced by red tape, their only response is to create new institutions and develop new projects, which will help them to overcome the challenges and solve the problems. In most cases, such an approach does not provide the expected satisfaction, due to the erroneous arguments underlying the initiation of the response, in the sense that, for example, an attempt is made to resolve a behavioural problem by means of a structural solution. In addition, the institutions are rather frequent in the cases where they are waiting to replace existing programs with new ones, in which, unfortunately, the same operating practices are used, which have already become traditional, favouring the same customers and are subject to the same errors.

While responsible bureaucracies, so-called learning organisations, are concerned about the added value of the processes they develop, organisations of this kind become active only if signals are made that customer satisfaction is no longer needed.

Public policy-makers must not only rapidly acquire the innovative and creative capabilities needed to define new horizons, but also facilitate their practical implementation. In other words, the old paradigms need to be abandoned, but the complete commitment, in spirit and action, to a process of long-term change, in line with the requirements of the management of complex systems should be taken into account. Situations, where between the culture of the actors involved in the implementation of a policy, significant differences do not appear, are desirable and coincide with the entities have a common organisational past.

Convictions, aspirations and behaviour are specific and reflect activities within the entity, but retain the same general characteristics as the culture of the meta-organisation. It is essential that there should be no too great differences or irreconcilable conflicts between basic culture and the cultures of actors. Seeking cultural uniformity, in the absence of solid arguments, is a source of conflict. Sometimes too much cultural differences between stakeholders hamper communication and collaboration between them or with the various groups of experts participating in the public policy project. Public policy management is favourable to this kind of cultural diversity, as long as it does not affect the smooth running of implementation (Popescu, 2005, pp. 269-271).

Note

[1] Defined as rules guiding the behaviour of the actors involved in the development of a public policy.

References

Laswell, H.D., 1951. The Policy Orientation, in D. Lerner and H.D. Laswell (eds.), *The Policy Sciences,* Stanford University Press.

DeLeon, P., 1999. The Missing Link Revisited: Contemporary Implementation Research*, Policy Studies Review,* Vol. 16, No. 3/4, pp. 311-338.

Popescu, L.G., 2005. *Politici publice,* 2nd edition, Economica, Bucharest.

Popescu, L.G., 2012. *Strategic Responsiveness and Market Repositioning in Higher Education*, LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & Co., Saarbrücken, Germany.

Popescu, L.G., 2013a. Strategic approach of total quality and effects on higher education institutions. Case of Romania, *Journal of Eastern Europe Research in Business and Economics,* Article ID 213298, DOI: 10.5171/2013.213298.

Popescu, L.G., 2013b. From a holistic approach of public policy to co-governance, *Theoretical and Applied Economics,* Vol. XX, No. 7(584), pp. 95-108.

Schon, D.A., 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner,* New York: Basic Books.

Schon, D.A. and Rein, M., 1991. Frame Analysis, in P. Wagner, B. Wittrock, C. Weiss and H. Wollman (eds.), *Social Sciences and Modern States: National Experiences and Theoretical Crossroads,* Cambridge, Stanford University Press.

O'Toole, L.J. Jr., 1995. National Choice and Policy Implementation: Implications for Inter-organizational Network Management, *The American Review of Public Administration*, Vol. 25, Issue 1.

O'Toole, L.J. Jr., 1993. Multiorganizational policy implementation: Some limitations and possibilities for rational choice contributions. In F.W. Scharpf (ed.), *Games in hierarchies and networks*, pp. 1-39. London: Westview.