

Human Well-Being Research and Policy Making

Series Editors: Richard J. Estes · M. Joseph Sirgy

Graciela Tonon

Key Actors in Public Policy-making for Quality of Life


Facilitators and Obstacles

 Springer

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Series Editors

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This series includes policy-focused books on the role of the public and private sectors in advancing quality of life and well-being. It creates a dialogue between well-being scholars and public policy makers. Well-being theory, research and practice are essentially interdisciplinary in nature and embrace contributions from all disciplines within the social sciences. With the exception of leading economists, the policy relevant contributions of social scientists are widely scattered and lack the coherence and integration needed to more effectively inform the actions of policy makers. Contributions in the series focus on one more of the following four aspects of well-being and public policy:

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*To my beloved children Pedro and Erica and
my husband Walter. With their love they
support me in everything I do, lighting up
my life.
Graciela*

Prologue

The transfer of quality of life research results to the field of policy making is a proposal that may facilitate decision making and improve the population's quality of life. Against this background, it is of particular interest to examine the role of the actors involved in the process.

The purpose of this book is to analyse and discuss the role of such actors—researchers, policy makers, citizens—and the relationship between them, and to identify the strengths and difficulties of the process, offering a proposal to bridge the gap.

To write this book, I consulted experts from around the world—researchers, professors, practitioners—on a variety of topics ranging from quality of life to well-being, public policies, human capabilities, and education. They answered questions in writing and authorized the inclusion of their answers in the book. Their contributions enriched my ideas about the different topics that are addressed in each chapter.

In addition to the theory and the results of the interviews, this book features specific cases that provide relevant examples, including experiences developed around the world in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The book is organized in eight chapters.

Chapter 1 contains an overall description of the book contents in terms of constructs and highlights the links between them.

Chapter 2 reviews the genealogy of the concept of quality of life, viewed as comprising a number of dimensions that people evaluate differently according to the importance they attach to each dimension in their lives. The chapter further looks at how quality of life is conditioned by the social structure in terms of demographic characteristics, cultural traits, psycho-social characteristics of the community and its institutions. It explains the changes in the concept of public policy, which has veered away from its traditional conception as an external activity provided by the state to focusing on human rights and including actors apart from the government in the definition of problems and the formulation of alternatives.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the process of transmission of quality of life research results to the field of public policy. It views this process as comprising

various stages, one of them being the production of knowledge. It recognizes that knowledge production has traditionally been generated at universities and that the university structure has been historically based on scientific knowledge. The chapter also explores power mechanisms in the academic field, which have traditionally institutionalized certain topics and actors, making others invisible during the process. Against this background, the creation of international research networks can be seen as an opportunity for researchers to work jointly and show their research results. The chapter finally looks at the major worldwide impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on knowledge construction processes.

Chapter 4 addresses research utilization in the field of public policy and underlines the need to achieve a mutual exchange between researchers and policy makers in order to integrate research findings in the policy making process. Researchers and policy makers have a different idea of what knowledge is. Researchers generally regard knowledge as something that is theoretically and methodologically sound and/or defensible. Policy makers see knowledge as the result of experience. When researchers and policy makers have close personal links, with appropriate chains of legitimacy to those whom they represent, researchers can have more influence, and policy makers can make a better use of research.

Chapter 5 discusses the conception of people as actors or as passive recipients of public policies and its association with the definition of citizenship. Nowadays citizenship is conceived not only as a legal status defined by a set of rights and obligations, but also in terms of identity and the expression of belonging to a specific political community. This scenario requires the participation of citizens as a basic strategy of organization to defend their rights and satisfy their needs, with the consequent impact on the design of policies.

Chapter 6 addresses the topic of aid, which is closely related to the field of quality of life. Special emphasis is laid on the fact that people and organizations are becoming more and more involved in aid actions. Although the state has traditionally been the provider of responses to the needs of the population, the past decades have seen an increase in responses coming from non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, and citizens, whether individually, as a family, or as informal social groups. Helping others not only influences the well-being of the people who receive help, but also that of the givers and thus improves their quality of life. To conclude, the chapter highlights the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic globally and the increase in humanitarian actions in this regard.

Chapter 7 identifies the obstacles and facilitators in the process of transmission of research results to policy making in order to improve people's quality of life. It looks at the importance of the methods and techniques used in research and the availability of data when transmitting research results to the policy cycle. The chapter also explores the critical issue of research funding. It then proposes a series of strategies to improve the use of quality of life research results in policy making, reflecting on the role of oral communication and the importance of dialogue between researchers and policy makers. It also contains recommendations for writing quality of life research results that can be translated into a useful input for public policy

formulation. Finally, the chapter describes a step-by-step process to achieve effective communication between researchers and policy makers and bridge the gap between them.

Chapter 8, the last chapter of the book, presents the final remarks and formulates proposals for further research.

In order to examine how research results can be reflected in the field of policy making, it is necessary to identify the role of the actors involved, together with the obstacles and facilitators in the process, and then propose options to bridge the gap. I hope that this book can provide the readers with a thoughtful and updated proposal on such an important and relevant current topic. If quality of life research results are taken into account and included in policy making, they can make a significant contribution to the implementation of public policies that enhance the population's quality of life and help to build better and fairer societies with fewer inequalities.

Buenos Aires, Argentina
August 2021

Graciela H. Tonon

Interview Script

The experts that answered the questions below have authorized Springer to include and publish their answers to the questions in the written interview conducted by Graciela Tonon for the book *Key Actors in Public Policy-making for Quality of Life: Facilitators and Obstacles* and their names and/or identification by the initial letters, in all formats of the book, and to copyedit language (but not content) of the answers (if needed).

The Production of Quality of Life Knowledge.

The characteristics of the process of production of quality of life research results.

The production of knowledge during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The transmission of research results to the policy cycle: facilities and obstacles of this process.

The power in the research's field.

The quality of research results in the quality of life field and the possibility of its use in policy making.

The Actors of the Process: Researchers and Policy Makers

The possibilities of researchers to decide the research: is freedom possible?

The possibilities of policy makers to decide and construct public policies.

The place of citizens in the policy circle: users, beneficiaries, or clients?

The social citizenship

Citizenship as an emotional and affective state.

Citizens as protagonists of public policies.

The different types of aid

Aid from non-governmental organizations.

Aid from religious associations.

Aid from individuals and families.

The relation between aid and well-being and quality of life for the actors involved in the process.

Aid during the COVID-19 Pandemic

International collaboration between researchers for the production of knowledge.

The creation of international research networks

The relation between researchers and policy makers: the characteristics of that relationship.

The impact of research in policy making.

The strategies to improve the use of research in policy making.

Using Quality of Life of life theory and methodology for policy making.

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Chapter 1

The Role of the Actors in the Process of Transmitting Research Knowledge to the Public Policy Field to Improve people's Quality of Life



Abstract This chapter presents the basic concepts discussed in this book and how they relate to each other. It is intended to act as a roadmap and guide the reader through the book. This book explores the role of the actors in the process of transmitting research knowledge to the public policy field in order to improve people's quality of life. Our theoretical proposal starts from the concepts of quality of life and public policies and then goes on to look at the characteristics of the process of production of quality of life research, the possibility of using quality of life research in policy making and the construction of international research networks based on collaboration between researchers, with a special focus on the current pandemic situation. It then provides an analysis of the actors involved in the process—researchers and policy makers—and the characteristics of their relationship. It also deepens that analysis by looking at the role of other actors in the policy cycle: citizens, considered as protagonists and agents of public policies. From there, our proposal examines the relationship between aid and quality of life, describing current societies, the different types of aid and the relationship between aid and well-being for the actors involved in the process, particularly in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It then explores of contribution of Quality of Life research to the field of policy making, considering the methods, techniques and the issue of funding. Finally, it proposes some strategies to improve the use of research in policy making, focusing on communication between researchers and policy makers. The reader is also provided with some guidelines on how to write research reports that can be useful when making decisions and a step-by-step process to bridge the gap between researchers and policy makers.

Keywords Research knowledge · Public policies · Policy making · Quality of life

1.1 The Theoretical Proposal

Our theoretical proposal views quality of life as a multidimensional concept that integrates a quantitative (objective) and a qualitative (subjective) approach, and comprises a number of dimensions that people evaluate differently according to the importance they give to them in their lives. It is a concept that not only considers

individuals' well-being but also its determinants, relating in this way the personal dimension with the societal one. Quality of life is a theoretical proposal that offers the possibility of a new outlook that includes the analysis of the socio-political context (Tonon, 2003). This proposal takes into account the evolution of the concept of public policy in the past few years, from the traditional perspective centered in government decisions to the inclusion of other actors—citizens, social movements, social groups, NGOs—in the definition of problems and the formulation of alternatives. Likewise, public policies are not independent of the place and circumstances and the historical time in which they are implemented. Thus, public policies need to be considered as contingent responses.

Traditionally, knowledge has been the unique claim of higher education, with universities being the institutions that transmit, study and create knowledge. However, the production of knowledge today is increasingly interwoven with society, because research is becoming more contextualized (Bleiklie, 2005). The 1990s saw the emergence of a new form of knowledge referred to as Mode 2, which was characterized by being carried out in a context of application and by being transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, heterarchical and transient (Gibbons et al., 1994, p. 3). Later, Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot (2002) proposed a third type of knowledge called ethic-oriented conception, focusing on risk and protection of human rights. The interaction between theory and practice means that academics must take responsibility for the results they bring to public debates, since these can serve as a guide for social action or produce decisions in relation to social action. The third mission of universities is to transfer knowledge to society in general and to organizations, including contracts with public bodies, participation in policy making, involvement in social and cultural life, and public understanding of science (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020, p. 17). All experts agree that the production of knowledge in the field of quality of life is a dynamic process, in which a variety of methods and techniques are used: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, as well as different research techniques. The quality of the research will often determine the credibility of the organization that either conducts or financially supports the research, and it may also determine the credibility and/or integrity of the research field itself as a source of useable knowledge (Nielson, 2001). The twenty-first century has seen an expansion in the construction of international collaborative networks in the field of production of knowledge, involving researchers from different regions and countries. Participation in international research networks allows researchers to find other colleagues working on the same topic, and thus generate possible instances of collaboration between them. Working in research networks creates opportunities to relate the specific knowledge of each discipline, which allows the synthesis and dissemination of key research findings in particular contexts. In this sense, research networks play a role not only of dissemination but also of protection of those products that have been generated.

There is a considerable difference between what scientists and policy-makers consider to be knowledge and how that knowledge is developed or obtained. The goal of scientists is to advance science; they are interested in publications, patents, and professorships, and less interested in social policy. Policy-makers are more