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New Models and Modern Instruments in the Development of Social Services

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Abstract

The fundamental objective of this work has been to reveal the necessity of establishing a quality framework for social services by using the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) method. BSC is a modern instrument of strategic management that facilitates the improvement of quality services in general by increasing their efficiency, a goal that is both timely and topical for the European social services sector. The access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services are priorities for all EU states thus making it imperative to develop and implement innovative processes and models based on modern instruments and methods which facilitate the way for a higher quality of life especially in the existing turbulent and restrictive conditions, mankind is facing. The research performed is founded on documents and reform strategies and based on an analysis of numerous studies realised by European institutions in the field of social services. By means of a case study presented, which highlights scientific investigations in the field of quality management and strategic management, we present a model for Balance Scorecard application in organizations that provide social services. We also introduce a strategic map for the development of social services, based on a model of quality and performance applications within the organizations that provide social services, striving to also address issues of sustainability within the social services sector.

Keywords: quality; sustainability; innovation; strategy; performance.

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Introduction

During this period of economic crisis, social services provide an instrument for minimising poverty and maintaining social cohesion, as well as providing an additional source of jobs. If social services are of high quality, well-planned, organized and adequately financed, they can significantly mitigate the negative effects of the economic crisis and bring prosperity and economic growth to the community. Within this realization, European 2020 Strategy proposes as a general priority the favourable growth and social inclusion by promoting an economy with a high rate of employment, which ensures social and territorial cohesion.

The access to social services is a basic element of inclusion policies and social cohesion in the member states of the European Union, as well as a growth factor of quality of life. Social services are a component of all national systems of social protection, next to the social benefits (performances). They contribute, on one hand, to overcome the difficult situations or social vulnerability, and on the other hand, to growth, though the active participation of people from the community in the economic, political and social life. Following a collapse, it has been proven that economic and social costs become enormous, since economic stagnation and a significant increase in unemployment lead to poverty and loss of social cohesion. In some cases, the debts and deficits of Member States have reached alarming proportions by socializing the private debts of banks. The budgetary pressures arising from this situation exert an enormous pressure on funding Social Services General Interest (SSGI), thus making the pressures exerted by the neo-liberal economic model on these services which regards such services as optional supplementary services, severe and difficult to manage.

The period of social and economic crisis stresses the importance of the social economy theory (Cojocaru *et.al.*, 2010). The global economic crisis and the massive layoffs imposed the assessment of the efficiency of the active measures to promote employment, the rethinking of social policies and especially the social budgets. Therefore, the interest for the social economy increased, due to the limits of the traditional public and private sectors to respond to the present challenges from the labour market and to the development of the social services considering the crisis of the welfare state (Dima, 2013).

Eurofund established, in the studies performed on the quality of life, that one of the most important ways of enhancing the quality of citizens life, to ensure the full inclusion in society and provide social and territorial cohesion is the provision and development of SGI / SSGI either by departments and agencies of state or by local authorities or by enterprises and social economy actors, such as mutual associations, cooperatives and voluntary organizations. The existing economic and financial situation has highlighted more than ever, the fundamental role of services of general interest (SGI) in the European Union (EU). In areas such as

healthcare, childcare or eldercare, assistance for people with disabilities or social housing, these services provide an essential safety net for citizens and contribute to the promotion of social cohesion. The services of general interest in education, training and employment services play a key role in the agenda on growth and jobs.

In the economy based on knowledge, schools, training centres and universities must be of the highest quality in order to ensure that young people acquire new skills for new jobs. At the same time, the budget constraints that the public administrations confront with currently and the need for a fiscal consolidation require the assurance of providing some high quality services in a most efficient and effective way, in terms of costs, as possible. “Improving the access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services, including health and social services of general interest” is one of the “key actions” for the European Union.

The need of quality in services of general economic interest

The modernization of public services is an ongoing concern in the EU, this being considered as a way to stimulate new sources of growth and social cohesion, indicating that “it is necessary to stimulate the general development of health and social services sector by creating, for example, a quality framework for public and social services, recognizing thus their importance in the European model of society” (Policy guidelines for the next Commission, 2009). Europe 2020 Strategy reaffirmed the need to develop new services, provided both physical and online, to generate growth and create jobs. These can include the innovative services of general interest (Europe 2020 Strategy).

The quality frame proposed by EU consists of three areas of action: (Communication Commission, 2011): (1) The consolidation of clarity and legal certainty on how the EU rules are applied to the services of general economic interest (SGEI) and their revision when necessary, to ensure taking into consideration specific needs. This constant revision is essential given the evolving nature of the services concerned. EU Commission proposes the revision of two main sets of rules – those concerning the state aids for the services of general economic interest and those for public procurement – which will enable the Member States to provide flexibility and simplify to a greater extent the provision of these services. Those reforms also aim to increase the coherence between both policies and provide the stakeholders, who fully respect the rules regarding the public procurement, a better guarantee that, under certain conditions, these also meet the relevant requirements in what concerns the states aids set out in the Altmark ruling. This should provide to public authorities and enterprises a greater legal certainty and simplification; (2) To ensure access to essential services: the Commission will continue to fulfil its commitment to ensure the access of all citizens to

essential services in specific sectors, exploiting the recent actions in the field of the basic banking services, postal services and telecommunications; (3) The promotion of quality: the Commission will reaffirm its commitment to promote quality in social services and will use the achievements in this field as a model for other services of general interest.

In Romania, a framework of quality has also been created, which is built on a system of legally regulated standards. Thus, the development of the social services should be based on the following principles (Order of the Ministry of Labour no. 383/2005), which represents the premises for the implementation of the total quality management: (1) organization and management: efficient organization and effective internal processes; (2) rights: equality of chances of beneficiaries, self-determination, personal dignity; (3) ethics: respect for the dignity of beneficiaries and their protection against risks; (4) comprehensive approach: collaboration for the diversification and continuity of services; (5) the focusing on people: the prediction of risks and monitoring of the risk situations; (6) participation: the involvement of the beneficiaries in the decision-making processes; (7) partnership: the involvement of the civil society representatives and the business environment; (8) orientation to results: monitoring and assessing the impact of the impact of social services; (9) long-term improvement: proactive approach, staff training, an efficient communication with the beneficiaries and the decision-makers at department level. Thus, the development of the professional standards and of those from the social assistance services offers the possibility to assess and monitor the system and the practice activities based on some clear benchmarks and on the conditions of quality and social competence (Zamfir, 2009). The quality of social services is based on several key features and related criteria (Second Biennial Report on social services of general interest, 2010), as shown in the *Table 1*:

Table 1. *Key characteristics of social services*

No.	Key Characteristics	Description	Criteria
1	The rights	Choice, freedom of choice (including the personal choice on how the individual services are provided), self-determination, non-discrimination in what concerns the planning and delivery of services.	- systematic information of users; - availability of affordable services; - accessible complaint mechanisms; - the promotion of human rights awareness, providers' training and education;

No.	Key Characteristics	Description	Criteria
2	The focusing on people	Social services of general interest should approach the needs of each and every individual in order to improve the quality of life and equality of chances. Taking into account the requirements of the social model, the social services provided must be based on the psychological and social environment of each person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accordance with the requirements and needs of users; - approach between services providers and beneficiaries; - the use of personal budgets to form the general budget of social services of general interest in order to provide services to people with special needs; - social services are offered at affordable prices for people with special needs;
3	Understanding and continuity	The continuity of services, from a holistic perspective, involves multidisciplinary actions and coordination, having an approach related to the life-cycle. Ensuring continuity is possible by achieving consistency between different services and the promotion of quality of life of individuals, avoiding the negative impact of disruption in providing a service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the proactive reduction of barriers regarding the access to services; - a holistic approach, which reflects the needs, expectations and capabilities of the person served; - the social services provider invests in offering continuous and sustainable services; - the access to supports and multi-disciplinary services – the services providers facilitate the access to multi-disciplinary and support services, which meet the needs and expectations of people with needs; - the promotion of quality of life;
4	Participation	The organizations, which provide social services, undertake to promote the participation and authorization of underserved people to make decisions by involving them in defining their needs and capabilities. The users themselves have to involve actively in providing the service, and to engage in the process of self-evaluation and feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the social services provider has participatory mechanisms of planning and evaluation; - the continuous measurement of the degree of satisfaction of services users; - conducting an ongoing dialogue with the stakeholders on service management, including the defining of needs and services, as well as the quality assessment. - defining the review models of users programs; - social services provider facilitates through full and effective information and transparent processes the inclusion of the person as an active participant in the design, development, decision, planning and independent evaluation of services;

THEORIES ABOUT...

5	Partnership	<p>All potential partners, including employees, local community, social partners, financial authorities and decision-makers need to be involved, together with the services providers, in achieving quality social services.</p> <p>The organizations that provide social services are proactive in creating partnerships to enhance the social structures by involving the society as a whole. They should also contribute to the development of an inclusive society by removing and preventing barriers to the access to services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decentralization of the organizations providing services to local or regional level bringing the social services providers closer to users; - provision of social services in connection with the main trends of social life; - provision and management of services to be performed by trained and qualified personnel having access to the opportunities of the idea of lifelong learning.
6	Orientation towards results	<p>Quality is directly related to the results for users, and measuring these results is crucial. The results referring to quality must be identified by all stakeholders and used as references to evaluate the success of services taking into account individual needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social services provider assesses the impact of its services on the quality of life of the services' user; - responsibility for each stakeholder; - periodic and independent evaluation of systems and procedures; - flexibility and responsibility to the new challenges; - the relevant financial and non-financial results are accessible to underserved persons, sponsors and other stakeholders; - obtaining higher and higher values of the results;
7	A good governance	<p>Openness, participation, transparency, efficiency and responsibility are features which must be applied to all the organizations that provide social services.</p> <p>The organizations that provide social services are managed in a transparent, efficient, structured way and are responsible in relation to the organizational performance.</p> <p>Accessible and easy understandable information is communicated effectively and provided to the service users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the defining of principles and values in providing services; - the defining of responsibilities and interrelations between the actors who manage, design, provide, support and assess the providing of services; - yearly planning and reviewing of processes with the participation of the staff in defining and assessing the roles and responsibilities in providing services; - the cooperation with other agents involved in providing services to facilitate the access to a wider range of services; - the focusing on the results of individual services, planning and continuous assessment of the satisfaction of services beneficiaries; - accessible complaints procedures; - feed-back collecting regarding the performance from the stakeholders; - the services providers use continuous improvement mechanisms of the quality of services;

Therefore, the quality of public services and that of social ones in particular, is a vector of increasing the quality of life that lies at the heart of all the EU member states. Thus, “quality means providing services to the citizen as required” or “the extension by which a product or a service performs the customer’s specifications and complies with the use of it” (Matthew & Lazăr, 2010). The quality of services is an important aspect of performance in any organization in the public sector (OECD, 2001), and the public administration of the national states aims to achieve performance through the strategies of quality management. It is widely recognized that there are difficulties in interpreting the concept of quality in the public sector. These difficulties are due to the multitude of diversities in this sector. Thus, we can illustrate: (1) Diversity in what concerns the multitude of stakeholders specific for the public sector, who have different needs, different perspectives and satisfying the requirements differs a lot in practice; (2) The diversity and complexity of the role of the public sector (offering different services to meet the general interest of the society, the role of control, the harmonization of resources and satisfying the customers’ requirements); (3) Diversity regarding the objectives (efficiency, effectiveness, fairness, impartiality, accessibility, responsiveness); (4) Diversity in what concerns the organizational culture in public institutions and economic particularities of this field;

According to the applicable international standards, a public service is of quality when and only when its features are adequate / compliant with all the applicable requirements (needs, expectations) of those customers / citizens / taxpayers who are its “beneficiaries”. The quality of public services is a priority, in general, an essential objective which consists in the following (Dobrin, 2008): (1) Quality meets the requirements of the present citizens, who are increasingly well informed and trained, being able to compare the quality of public services to that of private services, which are more and more numerous, more diverse and customer oriented; (2) Quality satisfies the growing and important needs of users requiring quality public services; (3) The quality of public services contributes to the development of the social cohesion, security and long-term policies; (4) Quality can contribute to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the public action.

Using Balance Scorecard as an instrument of improving the quality of social services and the development of the organizational performances – case study

Social transformations are fast, intense and have a lasting effect, even permanent, such as “the ocean currents moving in the depths, far below the water surface agitated by hurricanes. They have radically changed the society and economy, the community, the state in which we live” (Drucker, 2010). Starting from the fact that the implementation of the strategy is often stuck when it is to be put into

practice, the authors proposed to eliminate this blockage by measuring and constantly monitoring the achievement of the strategic objectives using scoreboards (scorecard), and, as well as, by implementing some specific strategic initiatives for each strategic objective.

Balanced scorecard (BSC) was developed in the early 1990s as a new concept of management by Norton and Kaplan (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Balanced Scorecard can be defined as a system of management based on performances, which enables the organizations to follow their strategies based on measurements and pursuance (Bergen & Benco, 2003). When it was launched for the first time in the early '90s, the Balanced Scorecard was promoted as a concept which was applied to the need for measuring the performance and later, to the need for a strategic management of the private companies.

However, a few years later, the concept of Balanced Scorecard began to be widely adopted also, by various governmental and organizational institutions in the public sector (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). Today, a multitude of local governmental institutions, organizations that serve the interests of the communities, adopted the Balanced Scorecard successfully. The necessity of introducing this instrument at the level of the organizations providing social services derives from the following: (1) To provide alignment between mission, strategy, processes and performance; (2) To align the priorities of the organizations providing local and regional services to the European priorities; (3) To demonstrate the value of programs for the citizens; (4) To develop consistent performance indicators in order to determine the results of programs; (5) To correlate the mission and vision with the requested budget; (6) To establish the allocated resources and the cost of the contract for each initiative; (7) To improve the coordination in order to eliminate the loss.

The traditional measurement systems were focused mainly on the financial results, and the managers based their decisions on these financial indicators. Balanced Scorecard proposes instead a holistic approach of four dimensions, mainly because neglecting leads to overall unfavourable results and thus, to the death of the organization. Balanced Scorecard is used in social services, Sweden being an example in this area (Second Biennial Report on Social Services of General Interest, 2010), which uses this method to manage and improve the quality of social services, especially in employment services. Balanced Scorecard is used as a methodology to measure and analyze the quality of specific targets which are then used in the assessment of the processes. The main purpose of the BSC is to ensure that the Swedish Public Service of Employment meets the objectives set by the government, including the strategic objectives and the success factors that determine the availability and sustainability of services.

The principles of quality specific for the Balance Scorecard are based on the formulation of some specific and measurable objectives. BSC is oriented to results

and provides regular feedback processes, thus, the established objectives are used to identify the areas that must be improved. This concept is focused on four different essential dimensions that are unique for each organization: the financial dimension, the customer dimension, the dimension of the internal processes and the dimension of innovation, learning and development, as seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. *The BSC Dimensions*

We can exemplify the application of the BSC in a sequence which is specific for social services. The starting point is represented by the general directions (GD) of the organization, which derive in strategic objectives (SO), which in their turn are expressed through performance indicators (PI) and, finally, we reach the measures for the achievement of the planned values (MAPV), as shown in *Figure 2*.

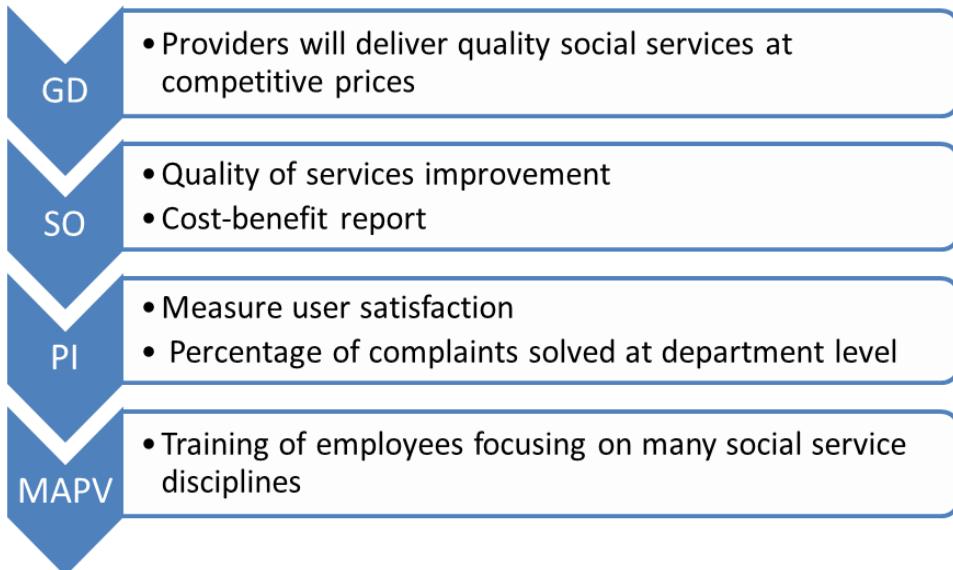


Figure 2. The BSC Model

The application of the Balance Scorecard in this area has a number of particularities, the most relevant referring to the following aspects: (1) In what concerns a public institution the existence of a wide range of stakeholders can be identified, who often have multiple interests and goals, vaguely defined and divergent, which, however, do not hinder the successful application of the management instruments that are developed for the private sector in the public area; (2) What determines public institutions to adopt the BSC models is the fact that the purpose of the strategic approach in the public area is much more complex than that in a private organization, in which success can be measured with a very good approximation, through financial results achieved on medium and long term; (3) In reality, both in the public and private area, it is important that the BSC helps the management to guide the organization towards achieving its mission and vision; (4) In the public sector, the BSC must support the simultaneous tracing of some key aspects such as the quality of services, the budget, the efficiency of internal processes and long life learning.

We can elaborate a strategic map of the Balance Scorecard, which leads to the development of social services and implicitly to the quality of life.

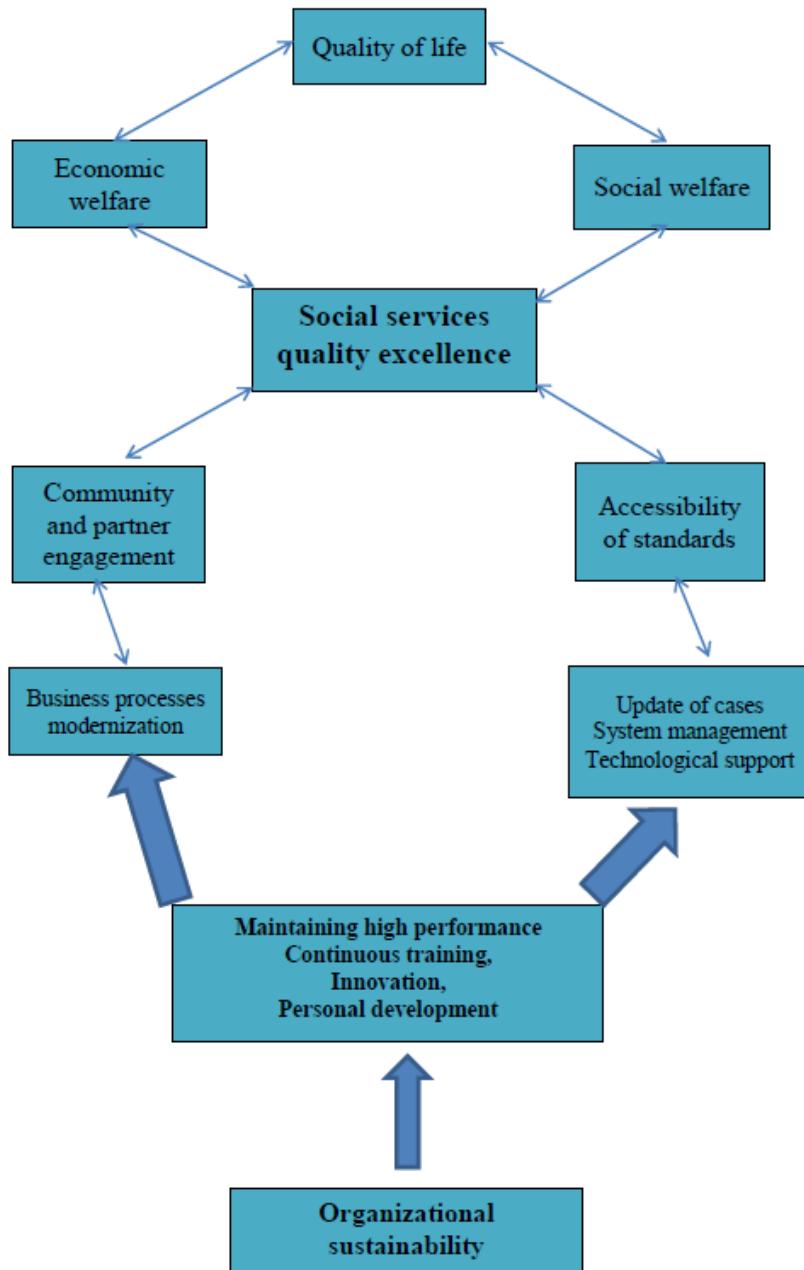


Figure 3. *The strategic map of the Balance Scorecard*

By using the Scorecard, the organizations are able to improve their performances, focusing particularly on the quality of social services that must meet, at a higher level, the requirements and needs of citizens. Thus, the advantages of using BSC can be: (1) The increase of efficiency through a consequent tracing of achieving the established objectives; (2) The use of BSC to communicate the strategy to the employees or the public opinion by presenting the existing values of the performance indicators compared with those planned; (3) The viewing of the strategic objectives and cause-effect relations sustains the communication of strategy. The transparent representation of the strategic content of BSC stimulates the acceptance of the strategy and the increase of motivation in achieving it; (4) It demonstrates responsibility and generates results; (5) It offers recognition for individual and team merits by facilitating the connection between learning, performance and reward by reciprocal trust; (6) Motivation and controlling.

Conclusions

In the existing socio-economic context, marked by profound changes, quality in social services is a necessity, both as a vector of increasing the quality of life and as a successful key factor for increasing the efficiency of the organizations and assuring their sustainability. Therefore, organizations must take action towards creating a rigorous framework, using innovative models and instruments to achieve the strategic objectives and so the development of social services, in an integrated vision of the stakeholders, ensures the way to a higher quality of life.

The Balance Scorecard method and the model presented in this paper can facilitate the development of an efficient strategic process because: it emphasizes the organizational strategy and translate it into real actions that can be performed; it improves the organizational management by reducing costs; it helps to align all the activities and resources to the strategy of the organization; it improves the internal and external communication – it communicates the strategy at all the levels of the institution, and the vision and strategy become more clearly shaped for all the members of the organization, allowing a more efficient assumption of the strategy at all levels; it demonstrates responsibility and generates results; it helps to monitor the implementation of the strategy and allows – often for the first time – a real implementation and application of the strategy continuously; it allows and encourages the change; it produces information and not data. Eventually, in the existing context in which public authorities in EU are exposed to increasing financial constraints, a consensus on quality is required, which should help the decision-makers to prioritize the investments, both from the perspective of improving the quality of social services and also, from the perspective of the cost-effectiveness relationship.

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