

UNIVERSITATEA DIN BUCUREȘTI
INSTITUȚIA ORGANIZATOARE DE STUDII UNIVERSITARE DE DOCTORAT
(I.O.S.U.D. - UB)
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE ASISTEȚĂ SOCIALĂ

Summary of the Habilitation Thesis

**MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL CARE: MEASURING ORGANIZATIONAL
PERFORMANCE, CLIENT SATISFACTION AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

Field of Habilitation: Social Work

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The habilitation thesis of the candidate, Lect. univ. dr. Horia Mihai Raboca, synthesizes the academic, teaching and research activity carried out after obtaining the doctorate and highlights the main scientific contributions developed in the area of social assistance organizations and services. The research program presented in the thesis is focused on the analysis and evaluation of social organizations and services, with an emphasis on measuring organizational performance, evaluating service quality and beneficiary satisfaction, as well as on the management and evaluation of human resources in the field of social assistance. The research capitalizes perspectives and methods from management, sociology, psychology and applied statistics, used to investigate problems specific to social assistance practice and organizations.. For Lect. Univ. Dr. Raboca Horia Mihai, the context of the habilitation is defined by three principal motivations. First, the attainment of a habilitation certificate fulfils the minimum requirements established by Babeş-Bolyai University for the promotion to the academic rank of full professor. Second, the process represents a formal mechanism for demonstrating the capacity to transfer advanced knowledge, research methods and academic rigor to future doctoral candidates. Third, the process serves as an instrument for documenting the maturity and excellence achieved in scientific research (qualities built over an extended period of sustained scholarly engagement).

In this context, the thesis does not aim to generally present the role of doctoral studies in social work, but to highlight the candidate's own scientific contributions, the coherence of his or her research program, and the future development directions relevant to research in the field of social work.

The candidate contextualizes the empowerment process within the broader framework of social work education, identifying four main motivations for empowerment in this field::

- A deeper and more rigorous understanding of complex social problems such as poverty, inequality, discrimination and social injustice, supported by doctoral schools through advanced research, interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based interventions.
- Career opportunities, including academic positions, leadership roles in social work organizations, and policy research and development, enabled by advanced training, professional networking, research experience and academic recognition.
- Contribution to social change through the development of innovative, evidence-based solutions and through engagement with policymakers, practitioners and community stakeholders.
- Personal fulfilment stemming from intellectual and personal growth, engagement in rigorous scholarship, and the opportunity to make a meaningful societal contribution.

The chapter concludes that doctoral schools in social work serve as powerful platforms for knowledge development, innovation, leadership capacity-building and societal impact.

In the chapter of the habilitation thesis, entitled "**RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND SKILLS**", the main research directions followed by the candidate are presented and highlighted. In this chapter, are presented, as well, the main competences (skills) held by the candidate in the field of education and scientific research, as a result of professional and academic development with reference to highlighting the main knowledge and skills specific to the field of research. In that sense, the candidate's research activity has a multidimensional and interdisciplinary character, being oriented towards the analysis of social assistance organizations and services and towards the development of mechanisms for evaluating their performance. Within this research program, four complementary areas can be delimited: (1) the management and performance of organizations providing social services; (2) the measurement and evaluation of the quality of social services and the satisfaction of beneficiaries; (3) the management and evaluation of human resources in social assistance organizations, with an emphasis on professionals in the field; and (4) the development and use of advanced quantitative methods for measuring and explaining organizational and professional phenomena in social assistance.

The research portfolio is notably multidisciplinary, drawing on concepts and methods from management, sociology, psychology, mathematical statistics and computational modelling. From a methodological point of view, the research uses multivariate quantitative methods to operationalize, measure and test constructs relevant to social assistance organizations and services. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, regression analysis and predictive modeling methods were used to identify multidimensional structures, test relationships between variables and develop models for evaluating organizational performance, service quality, beneficiary satisfaction and professional experience. In this sense, the candidate has applied advanced statistical techniques including multivariate regression analysis, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA and CFA), structural equation modelling (SEM), and artificial neural network-based prediction models, using software such as SPSS, AMOS and EQS.

Competencies of the Candidate

The candidate's competencies are organized across three levels. At the professional level, the candidate possesses strong skills in survey design and implementation, advanced statistical processing, problem identification and resolution in quality and performance measurement, and research project management — having participated as researcher or project director in sixteen national research grants and institutional development projects.

At the educational level, the candidate demonstrates expertise in knowledge transfer, the use of online educational platforms (Moodle), the coordination of undergraduate and master's theses (approximately 30 theses supervised in the past five years alone), and the design and accreditation of study programs, including the master's program in Human Resource Management in the Public Sector.

At the transversal level, the candidate exhibits strong analytical and synthetic skills, interpersonal communication abilities, time management competency and team coordination experience — particularly in student research scholarship programs. The candidate's competency profile is considered sufficient and appropriate for undertaking the role of doctoral supervisor in social work, encompassing expertise in the field, strong research abilities, effective mentoring and communication skills, critical thinking, cultural

competence, and adherence to ethical and professional standards. In other words, the skills developed through research and teaching provide the necessary basis for the development and coordination of doctoral research projects in the field of social work. These skills include the design and implementation of empirical research, the development and evaluation of measurement instruments, the use of multivariate statistical methods, the critical interpretation of results and the coordination of student research activities.

The experience of research and the coordination of scientific works thus constitute the basis for the guidance of doctoral research focused on the evaluation of social services, the performance of social work organizations, the experience of beneficiaries and the professional development of social workers.

Chapter 3 of the habilitation thesis, entitled "**RESEARCH ACTIVITY AND RESULTS**", summarizes the main scientific results obtained by the candidate and develops, in particular, the research relevant to the field of social work. This research analyzes three complementary levels of the functioning of social services: the performance of organizations providing social services, the quality of services and the satisfaction of their beneficiaries, respectively the professional experience and evaluation of social workers. On the one hand, reviews (in summary form) the scientific results obtained from the research activities. The main published scientific articles, books in the field, and involvement and participation in various research and institutional development projects are summarized. On the other hand, this chapter presents and develops extensively the research work and results obtained in the field of organizational performance measurement and customer satisfaction with reference to public institutions (including the social care providers sector). The research has generated the following dissemination outputs:

- 6 authored monographs published with recognized scientific publishers (category A2).
- 5 co-authored monographs (category A2).
- 8 articles in ISI-indexed journals with impact factor ≥ 0.1 , of which 6 in socio-human sciences.
- 16 articles in ISI-indexed journals (impact factor ≤ 0.1) or journals indexed in at least two recognized international databases.
- 21 full-text papers published in international conference proceedings.
- 4 papers presented at national and international scientific conferences.

3A. Research on Organizational Performance Measurement

The first research direction aims at measuring and evaluating organizational performance in institutions and organizations providing public and social services. In this direction, the candidate has developed a systemic perspective on performance measurement, by integrating dimensions related to resources, organizational processes, results, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of services. For the field of social work, this perspective is relevant because it allows organizations to be evaluated not only in terms of the resources used or the activities carried out, but also through the results produced, the quality of services and the organization's ability to respond to the needs of beneficiaries. The candidate develops a systemic approach to performance measurement, grounded in the theory of open systems and feedback loops. Within this framework, the performance measurement system is conceived as (1) an informational feedback loop that enables managers to adjust inputs and internal processes based on the quality of organizational outputs, and (2) the principal managerial subsystem providing information on the health of internal processes and supporting informed decision-making.

Performance measurement is conceptualized across ten principal dimensions: inputs, internal

processes, outputs, outcomes (long-term results), efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, quality, individual employee performance, and financial and non-financial performance. The candidate also addresses the ethical and moral dimensions of performance (values such as equity, justice and transparency) as valid performance indicators for public organizations.

The applied research was conducted at the regional level (North-West Region of Romania) through a sociological survey involving 168 public institutions (including city halls, county councils, prefectures, public finance directorates and social protection directorates) with a total of 1,300 valid questionnaires (70% return rate). The sampling scheme combined stratified and systematic random sampling approaches. The principal findings of the empirical investigation are as follows: only 30.7% of respondents confirmed the existence of organizational performance measurement systems (beyond annual individual appraisals) in their institutions; the primary stakeholders expressing interest in performance measurement information were senior managers and civil servants in executive functions, while elected officials, media representatives and citizens showed significantly lower levels of interest; performance measurement systems were most frequently used for statistical reporting to hierarchical superiors, improvement of service quality, and enhancement of decision-making processes; systems were least used for budget construction, benchmarking, resource prioritization, staff motivation and public image improvement. Analysis through linear regression modelling (two models: senior managers and middle managers) further confirmed that performance measurement systems serve primarily as tools for decision-making improvement, statistical reporting and accountability, yet their practical utilization remains limited in scope. This research direction provides a broader organizational and managerial framework within which subsequent research on the quality and satisfaction of public and social services has been developed.

3B. Research on Quality Management and Satisfaction in Public and Social Services

The second research direction focuses on quality management and the measurement of satisfaction with public services, with particular attention to social work services. This research direction reflects the broader interdisciplinary profile of the candidate, developed at the intersection of public administration, public service management and social assistance. The research has addressed the quality and performance of public services from the perspective of their users and has also examined satisfaction among beneficiaries of social assistance services.

Within the public administration dimension of this research, the candidate investigated the determinants and dimensions of service quality and user satisfaction in public institutions, considering satisfaction as an important indicator of perceived service performance and a source of information for organizational improvement. This line of research is relevant to public administration because it places the users' experience alongside organizational and managerial indicators in the evaluation of public services.

Within the social assistance dimension, the research was applied to beneficiaries of social assistance services, including an empirical study conducted among beneficiaries of the Social Assistance Canteen in Cluj-Napoca. The study examined the level and multidimensional structure of beneficiary satisfaction and investigated the relationship between different dimensions of service quality and overall satisfaction. The research therefore extends the general framework developed for the evaluation of public services to the specific context of social assistance, where the quality-of-service provision must be considered in relation to the needs and experiences of beneficiaries.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate a continuity between the candidate's research in public administration and his research relevant to social assistance: quality management and satisfaction measurement are approached as mechanisms for evaluating and improving public and social services, while the specific characteristics of social assistance are considered through the perspective of beneficiaries, service provision and organizational management.

Applied Research 1: Quality of Service and Client Satisfaction in the Romanian Customs System

The first major applied study examined the relationship between service quality and client satisfaction in the context of the Romanian Customs System (Regional Customs Directorate of Cluj, with territorial competence over five counties: Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Mureș, Cluj and Salaj). The sample comprised 420 valid questionnaires (84% response rate) from economic operators conducting import perfection operations. The study operationalized both constructs across four dimensions: systematization of service delivery, the human element of service delivery, tangible (material) aspects of service delivery, and social responsibility. The mean paired t-test results confirmed that client satisfaction and service quality are conceptually distinct constructs, as perceived by clients. Correlation coefficients between the two constructs ranged from 0.534 (social responsibility) to 0.831 (human element), while cross-tabulation analysis revealed an agreement rate of 74.5–89.2% across ordinal response levels. The principal conclusion is that, although conceptually distinct, client satisfaction and service quality are strongly correlated, and an increase in service quality very likely produces a corresponding increase in client satisfaction. Consequently, client satisfaction constitutes a reliable and valid indicator of service quality that should be incorporated into all quality monitoring and assurance systems in public organizations, including those in the social work sector.

Applied Research 2: Client Satisfaction in the Social Canteen of Cluj-Napoca City Hall

The second applied study analyzed the satisfaction of social work beneficiaries (assisted persons) with the services of the social canteen operated by the Cluj-Napoca City Hall's Social Assistance Directorate. The survey included 285 respondents (95% of the total population of social work beneficiaries using the canteen services). The methodological framework combined univariate and multivariate statistical analyses, including exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM), using SPSS 18 and AMOS 7. The model structure was adapted from the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) questionnaire, modified for the specific context of social canteen services. EFA identified five latent factors structuring the quality attributes: food quantity received, schedule convenience of food distribution, duration of the food distribution process, benefits provided to beneficiaries and staff behavior towards clients (equity and amicability). The CFA confirmed the proposed five-factor model with satisfactory goodness-of-fit indices (RMSEA = 0.067, GFI = 0.954, AGFI = 0.910, RMR = 0.037). Univariate analysis revealed that 82.8% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the canteen's services overall. The highest satisfaction levels were recorded for the equitable and amicable treatment of beneficiaries (91.2% and 89.5% satisfied respectively). The lowest satisfaction was reported for the quantity of food received: the finding the candidate explains by reference the very low financial allocation per assisted person (under €1 per day), which structurally constrains food quality and quantity. The SEM validation confirmed that client satisfaction is multidimensionally determined by quality attributes (particularly staff behavior, schedule convenience and food quantity) and client expectations. Importantly, higher expectations were associated with lower satisfaction levels, consistent with expectations-

disconfirmation theory. Furthermore, the model demonstrated that beneficiary satisfaction strongly and positively influences the institution's image among clients — a finding of direct relevance to social work management.

3C. Research on Human Resource Management in Public Institutions and Social Service

The third research direction addresses HRM in the public sector, with particular emphasis on the professional appraisal of civil servants and social workers. A direct contribution to research in the field of social work is represented by the development, testing and validation of a multidimensional model regarding social workers' satisfaction with professional evaluation. The research aimed to overcome a unidimensional approach to professional evaluation by differentiating satisfaction with the evaluation, satisfaction with the evaluation system and satisfaction with the evaluator. Through this approach, the research integrates the professional and organizational dimensions of the social worker's activity and provides an empirical framework for analyzing how evaluation processes are perceived by social work professionals. The candidate situates performance appraisal (PA) as a fundamental component of HRM theory, functioning as a psychological contract between the organization and its employees and linking individual performance to strategic decisions regarding compensation, training and promotion. In the specific context of social work, the candidate notes that performance appraisal is especially complex and high stakes due to the emotionally demanding nature of social work tasks, the risk of burnout, and the tendency for existing PA systems to function as rigid, bureaucratic administrative procedures rather than as genuine instruments of professional growth and feedback. Existing literature reveals a gap in empirical research on the multidimensional structure of PA satisfaction, particularly in the social work sector of Eastern European public administrations. The candidate proposes a theoretical model grounded in Organizational Justice Theory, in which PA satisfaction reflects three dimensions: distributive justice (satisfaction with appraisal outcomes), procedural justice (satisfaction with the appraisal system) and interactional justice (satisfaction with the evaluator).

Applied Research: Multidimensional Model of Social Workers' Satisfaction with Professional Appraisal

The applied study developed, tested and validated a multidimensional model of PA satisfaction among social workers employed by four General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) in the North-West Development Region of Romania (counties of Cluj, Bistrița-Năsăud, Satu Mare and Bihor). A non-probability, convenience sampling strategy yielded 180 valid questionnaires from 300 distributed. A structured anonymous self-administered questionnaire comprising 12 Likert-scale items (1–5) was used, operationalizing three latent dimensions: (S1) satisfaction with the most recent performance appraisal, (S2) satisfaction with the performance appraisal system, and (S3) satisfaction with the evaluator. EFA with Varimax rotation extracted three factors with eigenvalues > 1, accounting for the predominant share of total variance (KMO = 0.879; Bartlett's test $p < 0.001$). CFA confirmed the proposed three-factor structure with excellent fit indices (RMSEA = 0.024, GFI = 0.962, CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.997, RMR = 0.022). Standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.79 to 0.94, confirming strong convergent validity.

The 3 latent dimensions were positively and significantly intercorrelated, confirming their conceptual distinctiveness while acknowledging their interdependence within a unified construct. The principal finding is that PA satisfaction among social workers is not a unidimensional construct but a multidimensional one, encompassing at least three empirically distinct dimensions. Among these, satisfaction with the evaluator (S3) emerged as the most structurally central dimension, presenting the greatest measurement robustness.

This aligns with recent literature highlighting the relational and interactional dimensions of performance evaluation and suggests that in social work (unlike corporate environments) interactional and procedural justice play a relatively stronger role than distributive justice alone. The implications of this validated model are threefold: it provides a precise diagnostic instrument for identifying inefficiencies in PA systems; it supports public policy aimed at designing more equitable and development-oriented appraisal mechanisms; and it enables targeted interventions (such as supervisor training in constructive feedback) that can reduce professional burnout and improve workforce retention in a chronically under- resourced sector.

As a first conclusion, viewed together, this research configures a coherent scientific program on the functioning and evaluation of social assistance services, by integrating three complementary perspectives: the perspective of the service provider organization, the perspective of the beneficiary and the perspective of the social assistance professional. This integration represents the main element of coherence of the research program presented in the habilitation thesis.

The second conclusion is related to the fact that the scientific contributions presented in the thesis can be summarized at three levels. At the organizational level, the research contributes to the development of frameworks for measuring and evaluating the performance of organizations providing social services. At the service level, the contribution consists in developing a multidimensional perspective on the quality and satisfaction of social service beneficiaries. At the professional level, research on social workers' satisfaction with professional evaluation contributes to understanding the organizational and professional dimensions of their work. In addition, the use of multivariate statistical methods provides a methodological framework for the operationalization and empirical testing of these constructs.

In the last chapter of the thesis (chapter 4 entitled "***PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS***") the main future directions (short and long term) of academic career development are presented with reference to both the teaching activity and the research activities and directions to be followed by the candidate. Future research directions represent a direct continuation of the scientific program developed to date. The first direction aims to develop multidimensional models for evaluating the performance of social assistance organizations and services. The second direction aims to develop and validate models for evaluating the satisfaction and experience of social service beneficiaries. The third direction aims to deepen research on the social work profession, including professional evaluation, organizational experience and factors influencing professional performance and well-being. A cross-cutting direction will consist in expanding the use of advanced statistical methods for analyzing data in the field of social assistance and evaluating social interventions and services.

A. Teaching Activity

The candidate's teaching development priorities are centered on the continuous improvement of course content and instructional methods for undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Public Administration, Management of Social Services and Public Relations. Three thematic areas are specifically targeted for course development:

- Quality management in public and social work organizations: courses covering theoretical frameworks (TQM, ISO standards), quality assurance systems, regulatory compliance and client-centered quality monitoring.
- Organizational performance measurement and client satisfaction: courses training students in the design

and implementation of performance measurement systems, key performance indicator (KPI) construction, and beneficiary satisfaction surveys in the social work assistance sector.

- Occupational health and work psychology in social services: courses addressing workplace hazard identification, burnout syndrome prevention, work-life balance and mental health support for employees of social work institutions.

Pedagogical innovations planned include the expanded use of online platforms (Moodle, Zoom, MS Teams), the involvement of practitioners as guest lecturers, the integration of case studies based on real-world professional experience, and the development of online knowledge assessment tools.

A further priority is the continued development and coordination of the master's programs in Human Resource Management in the Public Sector (accredited by ARACIS in August 2017), with plans for regular curriculum updates, the development of practical competencies through internship agreements, a strengthened focus on leadership, diversity and inclusive management, and the development of students' communication, negotiation and presentation skills. The candidate also commits to continued supervision of undergraduate and master's theses, with a focus on methodological rigor, topic relevance, and preparation for research activities.

Research Activity

The candidate's future research agenda is structured around three interconnected directions:

1. Performance Measurement in Social Work Organizations

Future research will focus on the theoretical elaboration and empirical testing of performance measurement models specifically adapted to the social work sector. Research questions to be addressed include: how social work services can be evaluated using relevant indicators (access, quality, efficiency and impact); what contextual and conjunctural factors influence service quality and efficiency (financial resources, staff qualifications, regulatory environment, client characteristics); the degree to which a theoretically grounded, sector-specific performance measurement model can be developed and validated; and how the effectiveness of social work interventions can best be assessed using controlled experiments, surveys, case studies, cost-benefit analyses and impact analyses.

2. Client Satisfaction Measurement among Social Work Beneficiaries

Research in this domain will seek to evaluate social work services from the perspective of beneficiary satisfaction, using mixed methodological approaches (quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, focus groups, observational research and document analysis). Key research objectives include the identification of contextual factors (accessibility, service quality, resource constraints) and conjunctural factors (nature and severity of social problems, personal values, prior experiences) that influence satisfaction levels, and the development and empirical validation of theoretical satisfaction models tailored to the social work context. Models under consideration for adaptation include SERVQUAL, the Kano model, Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory and the Herzberg model.

3. Application of New Statistical Methods

A third research development direction involves the expanded application of advanced statistical methods in social work research. Specifically, the candidate plans to utilize artificial neural network (ANN)-based prediction models and decision tree methodologies. ANN models will be applied to the processing of complex, large-scale datasets and to the generation of precise predictions regarding client behavior, intervention effectiveness and risk factor identification. Decision tree methods will be employed to identify causal relationships between contextual and conjunctural factors and social work outcomes, and to develop evidence-based predictive models that can guide service planning and resource allocation.

These advanced methods are considered particularly valuable in social work research due to their capacity to process large and heterogeneous datasets, to identify non-linear relationships between variables, and to produce actionable, data-driven recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

Finally, this habilitation thesis presents a coherent and cumulative research developed over more than one decade of academic activity at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. The candidate's contributions span three interconnected thematic domains — organizational performance measurement, client satisfaction and quality management, and human resource management — all applied to the context of Romanian public administration and social work organizations. The research outputs are characterized by methodological rigour, empirical originality and practical relevance. The use of advanced statistical techniques (including SEM, CFA, EFA, regression modelling and multivariate analysis) distinguishes the candidate's work within the national academic landscape and renders the findings internationally comparable. The candidate's monographs and peer-reviewed articles have contributed to the theoretical development of performance measurement, satisfaction modelling and HRM in the Romanian public sector. Of particular significance is the candidate's focus on social work institutions as a research setting, which remains underexplored in Romanian academic literature. The studies on social canteen beneficiary satisfaction and social worker professional appraisal satisfaction represent original contributions that address genuine gaps in empirical knowledge and offer actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers. The future research agenda is ambitious and internally coherent, extending the existing program in directions of both theoretical and applied relevance: the development of sector-specific performance measurement frameworks, the elaboration of satisfaction models calibrated to the social work context, and the application of artificial intelligence methods (ANN and decision trees) to social research challenges. In conclusion, the thesis demonstrates the scientific maturity, research capacity and academic leadership competencies required for the role of doctoral supervisor in social work. The candidate's profile (combining extensive research experience, a strong publication record, pedagogical expertise and a clear vision for future scholarly development)

provides a solid foundation for guiding doctoral candidates in this discipline.

These research directions can form the basis for the development of doctoral projects in the field of Social Work, especially in the area of social services evaluation, management and performance of social work organizations, satisfaction and experience of beneficiaries, professional evaluation of social workers and evaluation of social interventions. The experience gained in designing empirical research, using quantitative methods and coordinating scientific works provides the necessary methodological framework for guiding original and empirically grounded doctoral research.

Overall, as a general conclusion, the habilitation thesis highlights the development of an interdisciplinary, but coherent research program in relation to the field of Social Work, focused on the evaluation of social organizations and services, on the experience of beneficiaries and on the professional development of social workers. The research directions proposed for the next period aim to consolidate this agenda by developing empirical evaluation models, using advanced quantitative methods and conducting applied research oriented towards improving social work services and interventions