

Abstract

**Of a dissertation for awarding the scientific degree
Doctor of Science**

**On the topic:
The Bulgarian path in social policy**

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Content of the dissertation

Prelude	4
Introduction	5
First chapter. Social policy as an instrument of public governance	16
1. Public policy: the scientific tool of research	16
1.1. Main points of the concept of public policy	19
1.2. Social policy as a public policy	27
1.3. Social policy as a process	30
1.4. Social policy as a content	35
2. Social policy in modern conditions	43
2.1. Market and policies	45
2.2. Factors for the emergence and development of modern social policy	48
2.3. Decomposition of modern social policy	54
2.4. Traditional and modern social policy	74
3. Choice of public governance instruments	78
4. From policies to institutions and vice versa	88
5. The theses of First Chapter	91
Second Chapter: The Real Types of Modern Social Policy:	
Convergence and divergence	93
1. Formation and institutionalization of Western welfare states	93
1.1 Origin of Western welfare states	93
1.2. Territorial models of social policy	100
1.3. Development of social policy models in the conditions of retrenchment	113
1.3.1. Reasons for retrenchment policy	113
1.3.2. Models of adaptation of Western welfare states	117
1.3.3. Results of the welfare states retrenchment	129
1.4. Time models of social policy	134
1.3.1. Theories of social policy cohesion	138
1.3.1.1. Diffusion of policies	138
1.3.1.2. Policy transfer	143
1.3.1.3. Convergence	144
1.4. The market paradigm of modern social policy	159

2. European social policy as an arena of learning	167
3. Convergence and divergence simultaneously	178
4. Theses of Second Chapter	183
Third Chapter: Social Policy in Bulgaria: From Transition to Stagnation	185
1. Process of paradigmatic change of social policy	189
1.1. The story	189
1.2. Transitology and Social Policy Reform	228
1.3. The diffusion of the market policy paradigm	244
2. The process of adjusting social policy	259
2.1. The story	259
2.2. The path dependence in the Bulgarian social policy	266
2.3. Policy transfer in the framework of European social policy	273
3. The change?	292
3.1. The discrepancies in the Bulgarian model of social policy	292
3.2. Multistreaming of policy change: Multidimensional model of John Kingdon	297
3.3. Assessment of the factors of the social policy change	303
4. The theses of Third Chapter	307
Conclusion	309
References	312

Theory and practices of social policy niches

The unbiased observation of the social sciences and social practices of the last 30 years in Bulgaria shows several serious deficits, due to which the dissertation "The Bulgarian Path in Social Policy" was developed.

The first deficit concerns social policy: for a number of reasons, it is linked either to the practices of the period before the politico-economic changes of the 1990s or to left-wing governments and political ideologies. This makes it impossible to analyse and study social policy as an equivalent and therefore an alternative tool of public governance, with which the desired social goals can be achieved.

The second deficit concerns public policies in general. In the most common case, they are associated with the so-called scientific approach to public governance and the use of scientific methods and especially quantitative data. This makes it impossible to explain a few obvious facts that accompany the current situation in democratic states. Many questions stay without answer:

- ✔ Why do the expert analyses themselves contradict with each other?
- ✔ Why do experts engage the public in a debate about methods and sources of information?
- ✔ Why cannot science-based policy analyses be applied?
- ✔ Why, after scientifically justified measures have been applied, they do not lead to the desired and expected results?

The explanations of these facts are not necessarily related to errors in the analyses themselves, or to the lack of political will for their application, or to the inability of the public authorities to implement the measures. The problems can be and often are that:

The analyses make various preliminary assumptions, incl. for development purposes;

The measures become inapplicable because core values or influential interests make their effectiveness controversial and impossible to implement;

Their application itself falls into a dynamic environment and causes changes in individual behavior, which can almost never be predicted. As a consequence the results become uncertain.

There is a connection between these two deficits. The scientific approach to policies and its obligatory connection with the economy and econometric methods - an approach that conquers the Western world and its spheres of influence, limited the options of public governance, "closing it" within the approaches and measures pre-defined as correct. This

ideologizes public governance and prevents policy debates at the political level from taking place because alternative ideas or alternative interpretations of public interests are not present. This is what leads to the transformation of social policy into a residual instrument with limited opportunities to contribute to the achievement of public goals.

The dissertation deals with these deficits by analyzing the factors that influence the formation of current social policy and its subsequent development. The study uses the categorical apparatus of public policies to prove that current public policy processes are embedded in what happened in the late 1990s and that solving the emerging problems requires a reform for which internal conditions do not exist.

The main research questions in the dissertation

In Bulgaria, in the 1990s – the decade of transition, social policy was a marginal topic. After the economic crisis of 2008, there are little signs of any public debate about it. Now the current crisis related to the global Covid-19 pandemic has sparked a wave of comments about the necessary change in its use.

The aim of this paper is to study the model of social policy in Bulgaria, which is shaped as a result of the social transformation of Bulgarian society in the 90s of the last century. This is a topical issue because the need for social policy and the arguments for choosing certain forms of it are the subject of asymmetric discussions, in which dominates the thesis that social policy violates the economic logic of capitalism thus hindering adaptation to the global market. The other logical thesis - that social policy can be used to achieve favorable economic results is practically not present in the public debate. This state of ideas in Bulgarian society turns social policy into a residual instrument, admissible only to offer relief to individuals who cannot provide for themselves on a daily basis alone or through their families.

Despite the fact these theses are widespread all Bulgarian governments in one form or another pursue a social policy that intervenes in employment, in the distribution of income, in access to public and social services, and ultimately - in consumption. Following the economic crisis of 2008, global expertise has not only reduced its critical tone towards social policy, but has largely reformulated its attitude towards it. The need for a new approach to public governance and the development of new tools to correct the natural consequences of free market play is being justified increasingly more often. Prominent scholars are calling for a change in the European Union, which they say has become the Union of Austerity, and for

new policies focusing on employment, reducing inequality, reforming the banking sector, new taxation and new social policy¹. According to them, the policies that have been imposed on European countries affected by the crisis since 2010 are causing a slowdown in economic growth and at the same time are socially unfair. These policies include a reduction in public investment, an unprecedented cut in wages and pensions, a reduction in social spending for the most deprived, a dramatic increase in taxes on people living on wages, all of which lead to rising unemployment and the breakdown of basic social institutions. The cited economists propose a new macroeconomic strategy that, like post-war approaches, includes an active employment policy and social solidarity with the disadvantaged. According to them, the growing inequality is becoming one of the main problems that public governance should address.

As a result of the changed discourse and the breakthrough in talking about the European political agenda, the European Union (EU) launched the European Social Pillar initiative, which became institutionalized into the European Pillar of Social Rights. Even the very change in the term used in European discourse shows that traditional approaches survive and that active measures again give way to regulatory ones.

From the point of view of social policy, Bulgaria, although a member of the EU, is a special case, similar to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), different from the countries of Continental and Southern Europe, and almost opposite to the Scandinavian countries at least from the point of view of redistribution. This makes the study of social policy a topic that is essential for solving the problems of public governance in the country. The questions "What is the social policy in Bulgaria?", "Why is it as it is?" And "Is it possible to change it?" are the basis of the present work. This is not a policy analysis, but a policy study. The intention is not to formulate the necessary policies, but to explain the process that has taken place and the probable scenarios for its continuation or interruption.

The search for answers to these questions faces two significant challenges. The social transition of the 1990s is a complex process that lays the foundations for a new society radically different from the existing one. Very often it is analysed as a transition to a better - fairer, more efficient, more functioning social model. This is the ideology of the transition, which is increasingly hesitant because of the obvious impossibility of declaring some

¹ Stiglitz, J. E.; Fitoussi, P.; Bofinger P.; Esping-Andersen, G.; Galbraith, J. K.; Grabel, I. (2014): A Call for Policy Change in Europe. In *Challenge* 57 (4), pp. 5–17.

unfavorable social outcomes fairer, or more effective, or more workable. However, there is a bigger issue and it is related to the content of the change not at the level of principles, but at the level of instruments: not at the level of consolidated democracy, but at the level of party or electoral system; not at the level of market economy, but at the level of financial supervision and regulation; not at the level of an efficient public sector, but at the level of providing social rights and social services. The transition at the instrumental level is a great challenge for both practice and science, because it is not related to a common model typical of the West or modernity. Even though democracy and market economy are the basic characteristics of Western countries, the instruments through which public goals are achieved in them differ significantly.

There is an additional challenge: the decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall is a decade of radical change in the public sector in Western countries, which includes a change in the instruments through which public services are provided and social rights are guaranteed². At the instrumental level, the transition in the countries and societies of the countries of CEE seems even more controversial due to the inclusion of models that are in the process of transformation and adaptation.

Apart from giving some answers related to the transition in the 1990s and the path that started from it, the present study goes beyond social policy. Clarifying the conditions that make policy change possible is an important research issue. Reducing them only to the elaboration of the idea of policies and its acceptance by the legitimate government, which has the relevant majority to turn it from intention to action, is largely misleading - at least this understanding of the policy process cannot explain a series of real cases, everywhere in the modern world.

Although the present study is on a period that presupposes change as a goal, i.e. no special preconditions are needed for its implementation at the instrumental level, public governance is generally conservative and the forces of continuity usually prevail over the forces of change³. However, sometimes there are historical moments in which a radical change of public governance in all spheres of society becomes possible. The so-called social transition of the 1990s is such a situation. In it, radical change becomes possible, and the forces of continuity almost disappear.

² Esping-Andersen G. (1996): *Welfare States in Transition. National Adaptations in Global Economies*: SAGE Publications Ltd.

³ Dunleavy P. (1989): *The United Kingdom: Paradoxes of an Ungrounded Statism*. In Castles, F. G. (Ed.): *The comparative history of public policy*, Oxford University Press, pp. 242–292.

The choice of social policy model in Bulgaria in the 1990s depends on many factors. Regardless of the theoretical paradigm within which the specific analysis develops, the question of the relative influence of the legacy of state socialism on the one hand and of international organizations and Western countries on the other is extremely important. The first thesis emphasizes on the path dependence⁴ in outlining the new social models, the second - on the transfer and diffusion of policies⁵ and ultimately - on institutions and models. The question "Which influence prevails - the inherited conditions in which the model of public governance is formed or the transfer and diffusion of policies?" is essential for understanding the social transition. The focus of the present study is on social policy, but through it the content of the transition is analysed, defending the thesis that this period of development of the Bulgarian state and society "opens a window of opportunity"⁶ during which policy transfer and breaking with institutional tradition becomes possible. Once introduced, the original model outlines a path that limits the next reforms and they remain within the accepted logic until favorable conditions for its change appear. For social policy, the moment that marks the beginning of the Bulgarian path is the period 1998-2000, when the three-pillar system in social security and the insurance principle in public health care were introduced. Each subsequent change is perceived due to existing unfavorable social results, but does not deviate from the path and seeks solutions through parametric changes. It is difficult to say how long Bulgaria will follow the same path. It is even more difficult to identify those individuals, organizations, or groups who can chart a new path. In this part, the present study formulates questions rather than answers. The thesis being defended is that the road has become a dead end and no longer corresponds to the public desires and needs. Thus, the unanswered question is "Who and when can change the outlined model of social policy?"

The object of the present study is this segment of the social transition in the Bulgarian state and society, within which the new models of public governance are introduced. This segment of the transition is often underestimated and new policies are seen as a natural result of the introduction of the basic features of the Western model. In fact, this segment of the transition has its own logic. The transition to politics affects the transition to policies, but it is

⁴ Pierson, P. (2000): Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics. In *The American Political Science Review* 94 (2), pp. 251–267.

⁵ Dolowitz, D. P.; Marsh, D. (2000): Learning from abroad: the role of policy transfer in contemporary policy-making. *Governance*, vol. 13, pp. 5-24. 13, pp. 5–24.

⁶ Kingdon, J. (2001). Speech delivered at the Second Annual Quello Telecommunications Policy and Law Symposium. Washington D.C., 4/4/2001.

not the only factor for it. In turn, just as there is a reciprocal link between politics and policy⁷, so the transition in policies affects the transition in politics. However, the focus of this study is not on the relationship between the quality of democracy and the type of social policy. The transition in public administration, the perception of new public policies, is studied as a relatively separate transition that takes place under specific conditions and under the influence of specific factors.

The subject of this study is the model of social policy, which is formed as a result of the overall social transition in the country. The aim is not to explain all the changes, but only those that set the logic of the public governance approach, the chosen way of influencing and intervening in social structures. To clarify the model means to identify the public perception of social policy, its goals, tools and desired outcomes. In fact, most public policy analyzes, are "drowning" in the facts about the tools and practices without reaching the logic of the impact behind them. At a theoretical level, the present study seeks to address the question of the content of the social policy model in order to sort out the chaos of facts about "what do public authorities do or do not do?"⁸ in the social sphere and to bring out the logic that unites them.

The main goal of the work is to analyze the current model of social policy in Bulgaria and to outline the possibilities for its change. The study seeks to substantiate the thesis that social transition becomes a prerequisite for the diffusion and adoption of models of public governance that correspond to the prevailing ideas in the 90s. Once outlined, these models limit the development and change of public governance approaches, becoming a path along which only parametric changes are possible. Paradigmatic change is possible only with a new opening of a window of opportunity, through which three streams pass simultaneously: the stream related to the identification and cohesion around the problem, the stream related to the idea of the change and the stream related to the existence of political conditions for change⁹. The lack of coincidence between these streams makes paradigmatic change impossible.

The subject of the research - the model of social policy, is related to the second main research thesis, according to which the social policy in Bulgaria is unbalanced. It is dominated by the protective function, which in turn is realized at a very low level of individual needs. For this reason, the unexpected and even erroneous results of the existing model of social

⁷ Howlett, M.; Ramesh M.; Perl A. (2009): *Studying Public Policy. Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*. Third Edition: Oxford University.

⁸ Dye, T. R. (1972): *Understanding Public Policy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

⁹ Kingdon, *ibid*.

policy prevail, stimulating the emergence of public discontent and a sense of lack of social justice.

Methodologically, the present study is based on the understanding that, like any public policy, social policy has two main aspects: process and content. The process involves the interaction between stakeholders and the formation of policy communities or networks. On the surface, the process is the debate between the participants and the unification of some of them around the content of the policy, which in turn consists of a problem, goals, tools and results. The study of the policy process answers the question "who formulates and implements it?", While the study of the content clarifies the question "what is being done to achieve the public goals?". Only a study of the policy process and the relationship between the content of policies and the factors that determine it can answer the question "why are policies the way they are?" Such a research question is formulated mostly in the framework of comparative studies of social policy. They try to explain the factors due to which specific political communities perceive and turn into institutions specific policies different from those followed by others. At another research level, this is the question of policy determinants. Most often they are associated with the socio-economic, political and cultural environment in which policies acquire a specific form. There is no unanimity on the determinants of policies in the scientific literature. There are many theories that make the content of policies dependent on various factors. Moreover, very often a particular case receives a specific explanation that cannot be applied to other similar cases.

The introduction of the concept of policy process makes it possible to overcome the contradictions in the understanding of the determinants of policy. It contains in a concentrated form the peculiarities of the socio-economic, political and cultural environment: the institutions set the rules of interaction between the participants, the values determine their behavior, and the socio-economic environment shapes the problems to which the policies respond. In this sense, the interaction between the participants in the policy process and the formation of policy communities is a transformed form and concrete expression of the peculiarities of the environment in which it takes place. In terms of research, the resumption of the process is a prerequisite for explaining the content of the policy.

Theoretically, the process and the content of policies are interrelated. However, the relationship between them is not reciprocal. In this regard, the process is the factor and the content is the variable. This means that policy objectives and instruments are not random, but largely depend on the way in which they are formulated and implemented.

Based on the above theoretical assumptions, the present study explains the process of social policy after the late 80's in identifying the prerequisites that shape its content and on this basis draws conclusions about the features of the adopted model and the prospects for its development.

Social policy is rarely an independent research object in the current Bulgarian scientific literature. When it occasionally occurs, it is to justify the need to adopt certain practices or, conversely, to reject others as inapplicable. There has been a slight movement in this respect since the 2008 crisis, but even this social fact has failed to unlock research interest in it.

This is not just a scientific weakness or deficit. It corresponds to the influential public and expert attitudes from the time of the so-called transition (90s of the last century) to the fundamental contradiction between the market economy and social policy. Due to the distinction from the past of state socialism, rather subconsciously in public attitudes or implicitly in expert analyses, the idea is accepted that democracy and the free economy do not tolerate social policy, and vice versa. Social policy and the attitude towards it is becoming one of the many indicators for overcoming the legacy of the previous social system. This point of view simultaneously influences science, the Bulgarian reading of political ideologies (including the left), education and publishing.

Consequently, at the instrumental level during this period of transformation of Bulgarian society, the public governance of the country adopts values and ideas, according to which social policy generally leads to market and economic hardships and therefore can be used only in the form of compensation for the socially disadvantaged. The idea that social policy can be used for the overall management of social processes and to achieve the desired state of politically organized communities disappears - both in research and in public debate.

At the same time, even a little earlier, a similar selection of issues and approaches conquered the world scientific literature. The contraction of social policy research is taking place at the same time as the actual "retrenchment" of the Western welfare state. In the 1980s, the ideas and practices of Western public governance changed their trajectory from the post-war period. And it is this approach, marked by the concept of "retrenchment", is adopted in Bulgaria, as well as in all CEE countries during the radical social transformation of the 90s of last century.

This policy approach, adopted in the 1990s and marked the entire social development in Bulgaria at least so far, should be analyzed: as origin, content, practices and impacts. This scientific need is a consequence of the assumption that the "retrenchment" approach becomes

a paradigm of public governance and builds a "path" that determines the content of each subsequent reform. At the same time, there are social contradictions and deficits, which due to the path dependence cannot be addressed. The "path" is so stable that only external factors can cause deviations from it.

The argumentation of the above thesis goes through the clarification of several relatively separate research questions.

The first is related to the content of the concept of social policy. For a number of reasons, social policy is highly ideological. It is associated either with the left political ideology or with the practices of public administration in the conditions of state socialism. Such an approach contradicts the widespread use of social policy instruments in the public administration of capitalism, as well as the fact that much of the reforms there have been made by right-wing politicians and justified by right-wing ideas.

The second question is about the models of social policy and their connection with the public context of their outline. In itself, this question is the subject of a comprehensive study due to the huge number of literature that seeks its answer. It relies primarily on the idea of the existence of various forms of social policy within political democracy and the market economy. This topic is of interest to many researchers and is the basis for the construction of concepts for the families of nations¹⁰, for the regimes of social policy¹¹, for the varieties of capitalism¹², etc. However, these concepts refer to the varieties of economic and social policies derived from the practices of the Western welfare states (50s - 70s of the 20th century). They analyze the difference in territorial terms and look for an explanation for its existence. This direction in the development of science is extremely important because it is the basis of comparative research and the identification of policy factors. However, in order to explain the development of social policy in Bulgaria and the outline of the Bulgarian model, it is necessary to clarify the difference in the models of social policy in time. This means identifying the stages in the development of the "Western model" and deriving the features of public governance that accompany it. Such a comprehensive study does not exist in the literature. There are many studies that outline the model of social policy during industrial

¹⁰ Flora, P. (Ed.) (1986): *Growth to limits: the Western European welfare states since World War II*. Walter de Gruyter. 2 volumes; Obinger, H.; Wagschal, U. (2001): *Families of nations and public policy*. In *West European Politics* 24 (1), pp. 99–114.

¹¹ Esping-Andersen, G. (1990): *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*: Princeton University Press.

¹² Hall, P.; Soskice, D. (2001): *Varieties of capitalism: The institutional foundations of comparative advantage*: Oxford University Press.

capitalism and its spread¹³, the transition to active state intervention in the economy and social life after the Great Depression and especially after World War II¹⁴ and finally - the transition to a market model of public governance in the 1980s¹⁵. There are temporal models of social policy, and probably of public governance in general, which, regardless of the specifics of their adoption in different families of nations, in or for a certain period of time influence and shape specific practices and the direction of their reform all over the capitalist world. To explain the Bulgarian model of social policy, the reference to closeness - cultural and institutional, with a specific Western country is not enough. Such a factor is important, but decisive is the fact that the modern social policy of Bulgaria was institutionalized in the late 90's and shaped its content in accordance with the processes of dispersion of specific ideas and theories of social development. To explain the processes in Bulgaria during the so-called transition, the temporal aspect in the varieties of public governance of capitalism prevails over the territorial one.

The third research question is related to the formation of the Bulgarian model of social policy. Since its initial institutionalisation, many reforms have been undertaken, but they remain within the paradigm adopted in the late 1990s. The three decades after the beginning are just maintaining the "path" on which Bulgarian society started in the 90s of the last century. The factors that keep the "path" characterise the society as a whole, and not only the peculiarities of the political power in it.

The answer to the fourth research question is almost impossible, due to the fairly unpredictable social future. It is obvious that the "road" does not lead to where Bulgarian citizens expect. Can we deviate from it - probably yes, in the presence of a number of factors. The fourth research question is related to these factors and the possibility that they coincide over time.

The formulated research questions set the structure of the present dissertation. The first part defines the instrumental approach to social policy and the possibility to use it to

¹³ Ginsburg, N. (1979): *Class, capital and social policy*: Macmillan International Higher Education; Fraser, D. (1992): *The evolution of the British welfare state: a history of social policy since the Industrial Revolution*: Macmillan International Higher Education.

¹⁴ Dobbin, F. R. (1993): *The social construction of the great depression: industrial policy during the 1930s in the United States, Britain, and France*. In *Theory and Society* 22(1), pp. 1–56.; Amenta, E.; Carruthers, B. G. (1998): *The formative years of US social spending policies: Theories of the welfare state and the American states during the Great Depression*. In *American Sociological Review* 53 (5), pp. 661–678.; Ferguson, T. (1984): *From normalcy to New Deal: Industrial structure, party competition, and American public policy in the Great Depression*. In *International Organization*, 38 (1), 41–94.

¹⁵ Frederickson, H. G. (1980): *New public administration*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press; Bonoli, G. (2006): *New social risks and the politics of post-industrial social policies*. In Armingeon K., Bonoli G. (eds.): *The politics of post-industrial welfare state*, pp. 3–27.

achieve collective goals regardless of the nature of political power. The second substantiates the need to combine the territorial and temporal breakdown in the analysis of social policy models. An attempt is made to systematise the factors for territorial and temporal differentiation of public policies. The third analyses the modern social policy of Bulgaria after the changes of the 90s of the last century and seeks evidence of its compliance with the market model. On this basis, the factors that can change the adopted model of social policy are identified and conclusions are drawn about the prospects for its development.

The main theses of the dissertation

- ✔ The study of social policy in the concept of public policy makes it possible to overcome the difference between economic and sociological analyses, which lead to conflicting assessments of it and to contradictory arguments about the need for its application.
- ✔ The concept of public policy is related to behaviorism in political science and suggests that the actions taken by public authorities to achieve public goals are related to a number of factors, including the behavior of participants in the process of its formulation and implementation. In this process the specific relationship and the interaction between them are essential.
- ✔ The research field related to social policy covers an extremely large number of practices that seem to have nothing in common. The development of an ideal type of social policy overcomes this research chaos and provides an opportunity to explain the different approaches that modern political communities have taken to tackling the social problems.
- ✔ Social policy is the impact of political power on the social structure of society, which does not lead to a change in its systemic characteristics, but rather responds to public problems. In modern conditions, market distribution and consumption are adjusted or modified through social policy. After all, modern political communities are a specific mixture of regulation (control) through power and market competition between individuals.
- ✔ Both the debate and some of the studies of social policy burden it with values and through them try to assess its applicability. The instrumental approach to social policy involves identifying what can be achieved through it, what changes in social processes can be challenged. This means developing social policy technology. Whether it will be used or not, which of the possible tools will be chosen and implemented, is a question

that is decided in the process of spontaneous and largely informal shaping of policy communities.

- ✔ Policies are the product of a specific historical moment and situation. Their institutionalization transports them over time and they continue to be applied, albeit reformulated, as a result of the institutional tradition. In turn, their reproduction reproduces the social relations that caused them. The transmission is not only temporal, it is also spatial - between the political communities separated on a territorial principle.
- ✔ The definition of social policy as an instrument of public governance has several consequences. On the one hand, understood in this way, it consists of many techniques that are comparable to each other only in terms of the results they lead to when applied in a particular socio-economic environment. On the other hand, the choice of these instruments in a real situation depends on the specifics of the political power, as well as on the influential stakeholders and the interaction between them. For this reason, some of the theoretically possible tools become inapplicable and the list of possible techniques is practically reduced. To these assumptions is added a third, which is related to the process of transforming specific policies into institutions, due to which the relations from the past, in which the policies are formulated and implemented, are transferred to the future.
- ✔ At the end of the 1980s, there were four European models of modern social policy. They are the product of an institutional tradition that began with Bismarck's legislative reforms in the late 1880s and its subsequent dispersion throughout the world. Finally, European models of social policy were shaped in the post-war period with the macroeconomic regulation of aggregate demand and the expansion of consumption through full employment and the redistribution and regulation of income. In the 1980s, with the spread of the ideas of globalization and the theory of new public management, Western models of modern social policy entered a period of transformation without losing their structural characteristics.
- ✔ There is a line (path) in institutional development, which begins with one, largely unpredictable - due to the accidental accumulation of several social facts, phenomenon. This line (path) is difficult to break, except in the presence of an external, and destructive factor. Until this happens, the institutional logic introduced by the first event is reproduced by itself.

- ✓ European models of modern social policy are emerging as a result of simultaneous convergent and divergent processes. Convergence is a consequence of the dissemination of certain ideas about the world that reform the views of all major actors in the process: political ideologies, attitudes and values of bureaucracy, the reference framework for both policy expertise and the way in which community and the groups see their own interests. Divergent processes are a consequence of the internal peculiarities of the independent political communities: the existing institutions and especially the institutional tradition, the power resources and their distribution, the behavior of the main participants in the policy process.
- ✓ Policies are "path dependent". From a research point of view, this means that establishing where the road starts is fundamental. Transferred to the development of capitalism, this means that if Bismarck had invented something other than social security, or Marx had not written the Communist Manifesto, or Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Treaty" had failed, social issues policy at the moment even in Bulgaria would not stand that way. Policies that exclude this prior experience are in fact inapplicable. Both research and policy analysis cannot fail to take into account path dependence.
- ✓ Path existence does not mean that change is not possible. The change of the policies content remains within the set tradition, but is able to transform it significantly. However, the change itself becomes possible in the presence of coinciding facts over time. It presupposes both a change in policy ideas and political and social conditions that allow it. Both policy research and policy analysis cannot fail to take into account the path dependence.
- ✓ Bulgaria is reforming its social policy, adopting a market model that is the result of a global diffusion of policy ideas. The adopted model is formed as a result of convergent factors. This is a convergence to an ideal model that sets the tone for reforms in Western welfare states, but is nowhere fully realized. In the CEE countries, due to the institutional vacuum of the transition, the degree of convergence is much more pronounced.
- ✓ In Bulgaria, similarly to the other CEE countries, an institutional vacuum is formed in the field of social policy, thanks to which it becomes possible for the global diffusion of ideas to spark a radical reform. The internal supportive coalition is being created, which is sufficient to introduce the market principles of providing social rights and services without taking into account the specific context.

- ✓ Due to the poor economic performance, the introduced market model of social policy has been changed many times. This model is poorly protective and cannot compensate for the weaknesses of the economy. Moreover, in these economic conditions, it cannot exist and its maintenance requires the expansion of the role of the state for the sake of its stabilisation and preservation. Thus, the Bulgarian society and State, after accepting the privatisation of the welfare state as the only right decision, are constantly expanding the state funding for social protection. This does not change the introduced model on a paradigmatic level, as the expanded role of the state is seen as a temporary measure.
- ✓ In the outlined model of social policy, 20 years after its introduction, a series of inconsistencies become apparent. The model, which is designed to support itself through contributions or additional payments to social rights holders, is constantly increasing its deficit. The latter is covered by the state budget and general taxation. The health care system is not able to limit the consumption and costs associated with its maintenance. Bulgarian social policy and domestic political preferences are holding back the construction of the common market within the EU, due to the lower cost of labor that it forms. Finally, social policy institutions do not create support for themselves. On the contrary, citizens feel massively affected by the transition and the social policy pursued.
- ✓ Despite these discrepancies, the market model of social policy is deeply rooted in Bulgarian society. There are three main reasons for this: the lack of an alternative due to the lack of real debate in the expertise; the one-sided training of specialists for public administration; the increasing returns of the market model of social policy due to the benefits it creates for private social security and insurance companies, as well as for certain groups in the medical profession and for employers in general.
- ✓ At the moment, the change of the Bulgarian model of social policy depends only on exogenous factors. Several phenomena can change the situation. On the one hand, this is the emergence of another legitimate frame of reference, different from neoliberalism and the new public management. On the other hand, this is the abandonment of political strategies for "searching for blame" and replacing them with strategies for "creating community".

The conclusions of the dissertation research

This dissertation was developed not for “searching for blame” or to reminisce about the past of state socialism. On the contrary, one of its very important points is that blame-seeking as a political strategy for the transition and for all these 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall is at the heart of the blocked process of changing public policy and therefore the impossibility to find solutions that are perceived as rational, effective or fair by citizens.

Nor is it a reassessment of the transition from the 1990s. On the contrary - the dissertation explains what happens then as a random (unforeseen and unplanned) process in which many events occur, so that the changes seem to be a spontaneous result of the internationalisation and diffusion of the market paradigm for the world and the peculiarities of internal political, economic, cultural and social interactions.

In the model of public governance in Bulgaria, which is formed as a result of the transition, convergent tendencies prevail over divergent ones. This is a convergence to an ideal model, the result of the development of ideas in global plan. These ideas become a frame of reference, which determines at the same time the content of the expert analyzes, the political programs of the main political forces, the identification of the interests of the main social groups. This does not mean that they do not enter into a debate with each other through their representatives. However, this is a debate about the tools and techniques of their application. This is a misleading debate, because all participants share the market paradigm of policies.

This situation creates the necessary preconditions for the transition to a market economy and democracy to take place, but it "locks" the accepted models and makes it impossible to change policies at least until now - 30 years after the beginning. Thus, the transition of the 1990s created a path that made possible only a small change that adapted social models without changing their basic principles.

"Policy locking" is a consequence of several factors.

The political strategies of the “searching for blame” are constantly being replicated. This is how political forces want the trust of citizens and the support of external actors in the policy process. Thus, the policy debate (what to do?) is always shifted towards competition for control of political power (who does it?). In principle, successful policies are consensual. This does not mean that there are (objectively) no winners and losers from them. This means that no one (no social group) feels harmed and can refuse them. When political discourse divides society, public consensus is not possible.

The second factor for the "policy locking" is related to the state of internal expertise. Both university and research communities, as well as civil servants, continue to reproduce the influence of the market paradigm of public governance and to be guided by it in expert analyses. In fact, among the expertise in Bulgaria there is no debate about the model of public governance. All disputes are apparent because they are united by the approach. Even if different, scientifically based ideas for social development emerge, they remain marginal and do not become a frame of reference in professional policy analysis. This state of expertise is exacerbated by the fact that classical economists have a reserved primary niche in expert analysis, as well as in their public presentation through the media.

The third factor that reproduces the path taken by the transition is the increasing returns on accepted models of public governance. The latter create benefits for a huge number of private - commercial and non-profit organizations, as well as related citizens. In healthcare - these are the successful medical institutions and part of the medical staff, which takes over the vast majority of services and is therefore paid disproportionately to the level of income in the country; in social policy and in social services - these are the private insurance companies, as well as the non-profit organizations to which the state transfers functions; in active employment policies - these are the companies that receive subsidies (on a competitive, project basis) for the implementation of the relevant measures; in the very process of public governance - all organizations that have received and are gaining access to policy formulation. All these organizations (and not only them) are interested in the reproduction of the adopted models. The transition has created its own "happy groups" that defend the resulting social positions.

The fourth factor is related to the lack of a new wave of global or supranational diffusion of ideas for public governance. Although global financial organizations are gradually softening their tone on social policy, there is currently no new paradigm of public governance. Replacing the New Public Management with Good Governance does not lead to much change. The world social science itself, largely due to the global diffusion of the market model, has become a science of good practices. It does not give birth - at least for now, to new knowledge about social development.

Given these factors, policy change can only be triggered by a crisis that shifts the ideas of expertise and of key policy actors. Such a prerequisite is not only related to the possibility of a new participant appearance. If the new entrant shares the frame of reference that gave birth to and made the transition, there will be no change in public policy. It is possible for an existing participant in the policy process to change its own frame of reference - in this case

the probability of change is much higher. The emergence of a new participant who is the bearer of new ideas is a strong prerequisite for change

Another possible trend that may create preconditions for a change in domestic public policies is related to the probable delineation of global public governance. For now, however, this is more in the realm of science fiction.

This story is based on the development of social policy in Bulgaria. However, it seems to us that it is true in principle.

Self-assessment of contributions in the dissertation

1. For public policy research

- ✔ The thesis that the policy process is random and largely unpredictable is accepted and applied.
- ✔ A distinction is made between the process and the content of policies. The need to study process and content at the same time is substantiated. In policy research, this means explaining the content of policies through the process that led to their formulation and implementation. In professional policy analysis, this means assessing possible alternative policies in terms of the choice constraints that the process imposes.
- ✔ An instrumental approach to policies is introduced, according to which they do not have a presumptive goal, but can be used to achieve certain impacts through which collective goals are achieved. A consequence of the application of the instrumental approach to policies is the thesis that each political power, regardless of its characteristics, has the same set of tools (policies) for influencing the community of people over which it has powers. Whether or not it implements them depends on the policy-making process, as well as on the rules (institutions) that structure it.
- ✔ The thesis is accepted and applied that policies depend much more on the ideas behind their elaboration than on the facts related to the environment in which they are implemented. The concept of "policy reference framework" is introduced - this is the paradigm of values and ideas for social development, against which the expert analysis is made, the programs of the political parties are developed and the interests of the main stakeholders are identified.
- ✔ A system of criteria for typology of social policy tools is being developed.

2. For the models of modern social policy

- ✔ The existence of territorial and temporal models of modern social policy is substantiated. Time models emerge as a result of the movement of ideas and their spread among (politically or culturally) connected societies and countries. Territorial models refract temporal models in relation to the internal peculiarities of a relatively closed political community. Temporal models and their distribution are the basis of convergent processes, while spatial models are a consequence of divergent factors. Each specific model is a combination of convergent and divergent trends.

- ✓ The characteristics of the market model of social policy, which emerges as a result of the global spread of the ideas of globalization, neoliberalism and the new public management, are presented. Its impact on the CEE countries is analyzed, where the "institutional vacuum" caused by the transition in the 1990s makes it possible to perceive it to a much greater extent than in the old Western democracies.

3. For the study of the transition in the 90s of the last century

- ✓ The thesis the transition starts a path that limits the next changes in the policies is substantiated;
- ✓ The path and "lock-in" of social policy is supported by political strategies for "searching for blame", by the lack of adequate, balanced debate among experts, as well as by the increasing returns on established practices.

4. For the process of institutionalisation and development of modern social policy in Bulgaria.

- ✓ The new model of social policy, introduced in the late 90s of the last century, is presented and the high degree of its compliance with the ideal, market model is substantiated. The new social policy of Bulgaria is dominated by convergent rather than divergent tendencies.
- ✓ The factors for outlining the new model of social policy are presented. It is explained primarily as a consequence of the internationalization of domestic policies and the diffusion of neoliberal ideas and the ideas of the new public management.
- ✓ The thesis is proved that the new model of social policy leads to unexpected results due to the special environment in which it is applied.
- ✓ The existence of path dependence in the development of social policy is argued. The adopted model of social policy is "locked" due to the constantly reproducing reference framework of the transition. Therefore, all reforms remain in the logic of the original model.

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