

THE QUESTION OF CIVIL PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY POLICY DECISION-MAKING

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Summary

There has been a sufficient amount of family policy research in Europe, but the focus on family policy-making process is not satisfactory. The policy-making process is influenced by political, economic, socio-cultural context. Policy formation and analysis processes are intermixed.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the use of scientific analysis and civil participation in the family policy decision-making process. The object of the paper is family policy

decision-making process. The paper presents answers for the questions: how the scientific analysis is used in family policy decision-making, who is invited to participate in the process and who has the power to adjust the suggestions. The paper presents the results of the surveys conducted in 2010, highlighting the approach of 34 family policy experts to the problems in family policy issues. The confidentiality of the informants was assured, in accordance to professional ethics. The experts were selected through a purposive sampling strategy. The research technique is an in-depth expert interview. The analysis of the research results suggest that family policy legislation acts are hastily conceived, paying scant regard to the scientific analysis of the situation and research recommendations. The participation of non-governmental organisations or scientists in the formulation of legislation is more formal. The lack of citizenship results in the fact that non-governmental organisations and society play a passive role in expressing their interests. Such a situation has a negative impact on the assessment of family needs. According to experts, all this leads to passing ineffective legislation and establishing reckless and inadequate to the situation procedures.

Keywords: *family policy, family policy formation, decision-making, civil participation.*

Introduction

Family policy decisions affect millions of people, therefore its formation is an important act that requires attention to the process. An increasingly complex society challenges policy makers with more and more complicated problems that are not easily solved. The decisions of the Government need to be based on careful situation analysis defining what family needs by consulting with scientists and those who are target of the policy. Scientific analysis and involvement of citizens can enhance the quality, creditability and legitimacy of family policy decisions.

The object of the paper is the process of family policy decision-making. The aim of the paper is to analyze the use of scientific analysis and involvement of citizens in family policy decision-making process. Paper tries to answer the questions: how the scientific analysis is used in decision-making, who is invited to participate and who has the power to adjust the suggestions.

The paper presents results of the qualitative research regarding experts attitudes towards family policy formation which was carried out in 2010. A total of 34 experts were inquired (N=34), they are 10 scientists from Vytautas Magnus University, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius University and Lithuanian Social Research Centre, 8 members of the Seimas, 8 officials from the Ministry of Social Security and Labour—Family Welfare Division, Equal Opportunities and Social Integration Department, Children and Youth Division, Financial Support Division, Family Policy Division and 8 representatives from non-governmental organisations—Large Families Association, Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, National Family and Parents Association. Expert selection criteria included: at least three years of experience in the field of family policy formation;

at least three years of experience in implementing family policies; substantial experience in the field of scientific research and family policy as its objective (research of the recent ten years aimed at analysing family policy issues). The research technique is an in-depth expert interview. According to recent trends it is suggested to replace non-structured and semi-structured interviews by in-depth or qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2008, 438 p.) The data is placed in tables specifying categories, sub-categories and examples from expert presentations. Research ethics have been maintained, assuring the confidentiality of research participants. There is no personal data presented and there is no possibility to identify the expert's personality according to their answers.

1. The Importance of Policy Analysis and Citizen Participation in Family Policy Decision-Making

During the past decades the changes in all spheres of human life has necessitated the alteration of the role of government. H. Bullock, J. Mountford, R. Stanley (2001, 14 p.) point out, that "The world for which policy-makers have to develop policies is becoming increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable. The electorate is better informed, has rising expectations and is making increasing demands for services tailored to their individual needs." Such a context makes the complicated family policy making process even more confusing. Globalization, the increasing complexity of society, low fertility rate and society ageing as well as limited fiscal resources have raised the demand for good family policy development. Among other features that good policy-making has to cover, it has to be evidence-based and inclusive. Evidence based means that decisions of policy makers are based upon the best available evidence from a wide range of sources (Bullock, Mountford, Stanley, 2001). These sources first of all are based on existing and new commissioned research as well as consultation with experts. W. N. Dunn (2006) calls it policy analysis and describes as "an applied social science that utilizes multiple research methods, in argumentation and debate contexts, to create, estimate critically, and communicate knowledge that is relevant to the policies." Other scholars like D. MacRae and J.A. Wilde (1979) or D.S. Sawicki and C.V. Patton (1993) point the purpose of the policy analysis, which is to indentify, evaluate and select the best policy among a number of alternatives. D. Weimer and A.R. Vining (2010) add two important characteristics of policy analysis—client oriented and informed by social values. This involves the second aspect of good policy making—inclusiveness, which according to H. Bullock, J. Mountford, R. Stanley (2001) means that the policy-making process takes account of the impact on and meets the needs of all people directly or indirectly affected by the policy.

Citizen participation was included into the essence of New Public Management. K. Callahan (2007) criticises this model for promotion of a passive and disconnected citizenry. The author suggests a new model—The New Public Service, which "is based on the assumption that governance is built on democratic citizenship where public administrators serve and empower citizens as they manage public organizations and implement public policy" (Callahan, 2007, 199 p.) Despite the fact that the new man-

agement models emphasise the importance of citizen participation in public affairs, such participation causes considerable controversy and provokes an intense scientific debate. First of all, it must be emphasised that civil society is not an evident part of any society. R. Flatham (1981) distinguishes “high” and “low” level of citizenship. “High” level refers to equal and politically active citizens, while “low” level of citizenship is characterised by citizens’ passivity. Another important subject of discussion in the scientific and practical field deals with the issue of the level of involvement in state governing. K. Callahan (2007) recognises two ways of citizen involvement: traditional and cooperative. The former one is defined as politically and socially constructed discourse, in which administrators determine when and who should be invited to the negotiations. Such citizen involvement is inefficient and causes conflicts. On the other hand, cooperative involvement is characterised by informality, trust and wider debate. Its main features are learning, consolidated problem solving, respect for other opinions as well as knowledge and ability to influence both processes and outcomes (Callahan, 2007). Community-based management is more democratic and leads to more transparent decision-making processes (Smalskys, Skietrys, 2008).

Collaborative participation is also known as direct involvement. Its supporters reject the traditional and ineffective way of citizens’ participation in favour of the direct one. Meanwhile, their opponents maintain that direct involvement is only an utopia, a costly waste of time, which is destructive in nature and politically naive (Callahan, 2007). Regardless to the different views, civic participation is an integral part of democratic governance.

2. Situation Analysis for Family Policy Decision-Making

The research on expert approach to family policy-making has revealed a number of issues related to family policy decision-making. Regardless the importance of research based analysis in decision-making process pointed out by different scientists (MacRae, Wilde, 1979; Sawicki, Patton, 1993; Bullock, Mountford, Stanley, 2001; Dunn, 2006) the study of the decision-making procedures reveals that Lithuanian politicians pay too little attention to the analysis of problems (Table 1). Proper analysis of the problems is associated with adequate decision-making in family policy. One of the drawbacks is ignoring scientific knowledge in forming family policy. Experts lay emphasis on the unrepresentativeness of information the Members of Parliament often use: *when I visited the voter*, or *what is shown on television* and *the case described in the newspaper*. Decisions taken in family policy often lack the thorough analysis of the situation. Thus they focus more on individual family policy measures than on the development of the system of measures. However, as stated by P. McDonald (2000), individual policies may not have a positive effect if there is no common system of measures. For example, a well-developed gender equality policy can be ineffective concerning the birth rate, if the environment is not hospitable to the child.

Table 1. Analysis of situation and collaboration with scientists while formatting family policy

Category	Subcategory	Illustrations
Nature of information	Based on arbitrary information	<i>They don't need any knowledge (...). Some countrywoman's opinion is more important, when I visited a voter (...).</i>
		<i>The discussion about what can be done or what changes should be made is based on what is shown on television or on the case described in a newspaper. Whereas there is a distinct lack of analysis of the situation, or even the data describing the situation.</i>
Underestimation of the complexity of family themes	Family is a complex concept	<i>First of all, the topic is very difficult and creates a lot of problems.</i>
	Family is a well-known domain	<i>When it comes to the topic of family - all feel specialists. On the contrary, not all are experts in economic policy or concerning the taxes. But when we talk about family, everyone knows how it should look like. It doesn't matter that I haven't read anything or that I don't know the contents. Still, I know how it should be.</i>
Problem of politicians' attitude to scientific knowledge	Politicians do not value scientific knowledge	<i>Indeed, there is very little faith in science and spread of information among non-scientists. There is such a view – oh, what they can say, we know all.</i>
		<i>In fact, expert knowledge and scientific knowledge are undervalued.</i>
		<i>But in fact, there is a failure to respond to real knowledge.</i>
	Politicians know better	<i>They know better, they understand better, they are the chosen ones.</i>
	We don't need any knowledge	<i>We don't need any knowledge</i>
	Common problem—underestimation of knowledge	<i>And all political forces have the same problem.</i>
Lack of human resources	Lack of specialists to analyse the situation	<i>The first thing I'd like to stress (...) that the family policy, as well as the whole social policy in Lithuania (...) is non-expert, very primitive. In fact, expert scientific knowledge is overlooked, and if it is ever used, it is only to match some sort of scheme or meet some standards.</i>
		<i>We lack specialists in social and economic policy. As long as we are affected by shortage of resources, we fail to know how we live.</i>
Inefficient cooperation with scientists	Cooperation with scientists is formal	<i>Officially the cooperation is established by the procedures.</i>
	Lack of cooperation	<i>It is no use complaining about the lack of cooperation between science and policy makers.</i>
	Inconsistent cooperation	<i>Cooperation with science occurs occasionally, while it should be a must.</i>
	Use under the procedure	<i>Yes, of course, it is the procedure and it is followed.</i>

Problem of applicability of analysis	Problematic applicability of analysis	<i>The question is how they adapt it for further (...) and if it is at all possible to adapt it.</i>
	Family policy measures are taken thoughtlessly	<i>The measures are adopted almost blindly and intuitively.</i>

According to the experts, politicians are rather reluctant to rely too much on science or on scientific research. Despite the fact that there are a number of competent researchers in the field of family policy, the possibilities to use their studies are not sufficiently exploited in the process of shaping family policy. Cooperation with scientists is a purely formal and procedural matter rather than a permanent necessity. Another point is the devaluation of the complexity of family issues, because, as noted by the experts, the family is a theme where *everyone knows how it should be*. Devaluation of scientific knowledge is related to the overall quality of the knowledge of society. Experts notice knowledge problems that resulted from a historical context of Lithuania (Table 2). Western social science disciplines were not taught until Lithuania regained its independence, and thus many older members of the society, including the majority of politicians, acquired their education during the Soviet era. This influences their attitudes and understanding.

Table 2. *Problem of society of knowledge*

Category	Subcategory	Illustrations
The problem of the lack of society of knowledge	Low quality of knowledge of society	<i>It is a situation of democracy and society.</i>
		<i>We are not a society of knowledge.</i>
		<i>The society is not familiar with those problems either.</i>
		<i>This is related to history that most people haven't studied the social subjects and there are very few of those who have.</i>
		<i>There is little knowledge about those matters. Knowledge is more limited and dilettante.</i>
The adjustment of politicians to the level of knowledge of the voters	Subservience of politicians to the society – to speak only about issues that can be understood by the society	<i>Politicians willing to please their voters and to get more votes, have to talk about the matters their voters can understand.</i>
	Knowledge of specialists is unclear to the society	<i>Society will not understand what is known to professionals.</i>

It should be noted that scientific analysis is not a guarantee of a successful policy as even completed research-based analysis of the situation is not always taken into account in decision making. Another crucial issue is the relationship between the client and the researcher. As observed by L. Hantrais, M.T. Letablier (1996), studies often depend on external funding, and therefore they are likely to reflect the sponsors' interests. Experts maintain that it is essential for politicians to express interest in usage of the analysis available and willingness to make changes on the basis of such analysis.

L. Hantrais and M.T. Letablier (1996), studying public policy in Lithuania, also observe the lack of attention to analysis of problems and assessment of political and administrative implications or impact. Family policy, as one of the domains of politics, is not a priority in Lithuania. Moreover, its complexity is underestimated. Such insufficiency of family policy significance and improper evaluation of its complexity result in shaping amateurish and inconsistent policy, which causes costly mistakes.

Comparing the situation in Lithuania to that in other European countries, it should be noted that the changing family situation in the European countries encourage national governments to pay more attention to family policy research. More money is being spent on scientific studies not only in countries with a long tradition of family policy-making, such as France or Germany, but also in Mediterranean countries, where there is no well-developed family policy (Hantrais, Letablier, 1996).

3. Coordination and Participation in Decision-Making of Family Policy in Lithuania

In the course of the analysis of family policy decision-making it is vital to clarify how the agreement is reached, who is invited to participate and who has the power to adjust the suggestions. One of the shortcomings of decision-making in Lithuania, as noted by R. Vilpišauskas and V. Nekrošius (2003), is a long process of coordination between all institutions. However, it does not mean a thorough discussion on policy matters. The results of the survey show (Table 3) that not all family policy solutions are reconciled, and if they are, it is often with municipalities and only some non-governmental organisations. The alignment with family policy experts is more formal and its only purpose is to meet standards of European Union.

Table 3. Coordination in family policy making

Category	Subcategory	Illustrations
Coordination of decisions	With self-government	<i>I must admit to communicating only with municipalities, the heads of departments of social support.</i>
	With some NGOs	<i>With some nongovernmental organisations.</i>
	Not all legislation acts are aligned	<i>Some members of the parliament are initiating some kind of legislation on Family Law Framework. You know, I haven't had enough time even to take a look. The idea was not coordinated.</i>
		<i>The Seimas makes decisions and no one is invited.</i>
	Lack of consultation with experts	Definitely not experts. They pretend. Clients. Yes, interest groups, in other words friends.
	Formal consultation with experts	The consultations with experts are often only a formality, because it is required by European standards.
		Recommendations are taken into consideration, formally.
Lack of mandatory recommendations	But I suppose there are no mandatory recommendations in this field.	

Another important factor in shaping the policy is a power ratio of participants involved in decision-making. W. Parsons (2001), discussing analysis of public policy put questions related to the issue of family policy maker's power: who is and what is not allowed into the policy-making, whose values prevail? The power structures include class, funds, bureaucratic procedures, political system, pressure groups or technical knowledge (professionals) (Parsons, 2001). C. E. Lindblom and E. J. Woodhouse (1999) state that knowledge of how power relations shape or deform the policy is essential to understand why attempts to help ensure the prosperity of the people by governments are irrelevant.

It should be noted that the civil society in Lithuania is in the stage of formation, when the citizens are yet to feel their power and willingness to take part in public affairs. In economic terms, freedom of many residents of Lithuania is limited (Lauren, 2003), and this prevents the spread of civil society. Society itself is not very interested in family policy or other political issues. On the other hand, the participation of civil society can be limited due to the shortage of power. There are a lot of non-governmental organisations established in Lithuania. However, according to V. Laurėnas (2003), a multitude of NGOs does not have features of active forces. Thus, civil society consolidation potential in Lithuania remains low. The experts emphasise the lack of power of the non-governmental organisations as well as their only formal participation in debates on family issues (Table 4).

In Lithuania, state institutions are the ones which are usually involved in decision-making. This happens not only because the non-governmental organisations are not yet strong enough, but because many of them are dependent on government funding. Many projects launched by non-governmental organisations are funded by Ministry of Social Security and Labour. The findings suggest that some of the non-governmental organisations which have won project funds are afraid to criticise the activities of the Ministry for fear of reducing their chances of winning future projects. Thus, insufficient resources of these organisations set a limit on their power and freedom in expressing their opinions.

A number of active non-governmental organisations representing the interests of a family declare Catholic beliefs. The experts emphasise that the Church plays too significant part in the development of family policy development, which becomes even more active when conservative party gains the power. However, the experts do not approve of the Church's active intervention in family policy-making, since it favours the conservative approach to such issues as marriage, abortion, fertility and others.

Table 4. *Civil society participation in decision making*

Category	Subcategory	Illustrations
Role of interest groups	Participation and activity of interest groups	<i>Another thing is whether these interest groups come or whether they put forward any suggestions, and how actively they participate.</i>
	Interest groups may have impact on decisions	<i>For example, concerning the increase of state pensions. Mr. Sysas was the only one against. And it doesn't matter that you are the chairman of the committee. They all raise their hands in favour as they represent all sorts of outcasts and victims and other worshipers of privileges.</i>
Problem of power of NGOs	There are some NGOs invited to take part in debate	<i>There is community of large families, which clearly states its opinion and if there are any decisions, these non-governmental are informed and they are influenced by those changes in laws.</i>
		<i>The most active communities are those of large families, of parents raising disabled children and that's it.</i>
		<i>I think the disabled have some powerful nongovernmental organisations.</i>
	Lack of family lobby	<i>I don't know any family lobbyist.</i>
	Weak NGOs	<i>On the other hand, those organisations are weak. If you receive support from the government you can survive and be stronger, but if no – you are weak and unable to take part.</i>
		<i>In NGOs all fields are still very weak due to history and insufficient financial support.</i>
Lack of power of NGOs	<i>Those representatives of NGOs are invited but they have no power.</i>	
Nondemocratic relationship between NGOs and the government	Distrust in NGOs	<i>Actually, there is little trust in science and spread of information among non-experts. There is such a popular view: „What can they say? We know everything“.</i>
	NGOs are dependent on the government	<i>Another important thing is that the majority of NGOs is dependent on government institutions.</i>
	Government supports projects	<i>If government institutions allocate funds for various projects, NGOs apply for and carry them out.</i>
	Criticism of the government puts financial support under threat	<i>It is said that if you act as an advocate of NGO and a critic, it may have impact on your applications.</i>
	Loyalty to the government	<i>The organisations become loyal or they express minor criticism as some sort of unwritten agreement.</i>
	Moderate criticism	<i>You criticise but in a mild way.</i>

Formal participation of NGOs	Formal participation	<i>It shows we take part and are criticised.</i>
	Ineffective criticism	<i>On the other hand, the criticism is not so heavy or effective.</i>
	No measures are being taken	<i>No measures are being taken to change the situation.</i>
	Benefit to both sides	<i>In other words both sides coexist peacefully and are content.</i>
	Links between the government financing and the strength of an organisation	<i>If you receive support from the government you can survive and be stronger.</i>
	Links between the strength of an organisation and its participation	<i>But if no—you are weak and unable to take part.</i>
	NGOs initiate some suggestions	<i>It happens that they, those nongovernmental, put forward some suggestions. Then the government is forced to make some changes.</i>
	Theoretically there is no lack of participant	<i>I mean, theoretically many take part as it is obligatory to reach an agreement on those aspects. Unfortunately, we lack the complexity of suggestions.</i>
Problem of civil society	Lack of civil society	<i>Our society is the one that seldom thinks.</i>
		<i>Lack of citizenship.</i>
		<i>We are in such a stage (...)interested how to survive.</i>
		<i>Later on there is the need of citizenship and one feels that he is not alone.</i>
Role of the Church	Influence of the Church depends on the ruling majority	<i>The influence of the Church under rule of conservatives is great.</i>
	The Church influences decision-making	<i>It was passed at second attempt as Bishops' Conference left because of the section on family planning, because of the definition of family and its functions.</i>
	The representatives of the Church should not participate	<i>I'm rather sceptical about the representatives of the Church in general, it seems to me they should to be away from public affairs.</i>
		<i>I don't think the Church should be involved. But it's my personal opinion.</i>
		<i>I'm against the representation of the Church, at least when it comes to issues related to family matters.</i>
	Coexistence of various faiths	<i>Lithuania is a Catholic country, but not only Catholics live here.</i>
	Subjectivity of the opinion of the representatives of the Church	<i>It is followed by a Catholic, rather subjective attitude.</i>

Lithuania is particularly affected by shortage of a strong civil society and non-governmental organisations. In addition, the lack of citizenship leads to passivity of non-governmental organisations and public, in expressing their interests. Lack of citizenship as well as the weakness of non-governmental organisations influence family policy making. First of all, it has a negative impact on the assessment of family needs. All this leads to poor quality of legislation, reckless and inadequate decision-making and inconsistent formation of family policy.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The changing context of family policy formation have raised the demand for good family policy development which among other features has to be evidence-based and inclusive. According to informants, decisions of policy makers should be based upon the best available evidence from a wide range of sources that utilizes multiple research methods and should be client oriented and informed by social values. Even if scientists do not agree on the level of civil participation, traditional vs. cooperative, but there is no doubt that civil participation is an integral part of democratic governance and community-based management is more democratic and leads to more transparent decision-making processes.
1. Pursuant to the outcomes of the qualitative research, family policy formation faces the following obstacles: inadequate situation analysis and the use of its results in the decision-making process, insufficient cooperation between different authorities, politicians and scientists, comparatively weak non-governmental organisations and inadequate representation of interests.
2. According to experts, scientific research is not sufficiently exploited in forming family policy. Cooperation with scientists is a purely formal and procedural matter rather than a permanent necessity.
3. Active involvement of civil society in family policy formation increases the relevance of family policy issues. Low involvement of NGO's, domination of Catholic organisations, resulting in inadequate representation of interests in forming family policy, prevents from the establishment of a family friendly environment.

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PILIEČIŲ DALYVAVIMO PROBLEMA PRIIMANT ŠEIMOS POLITIKOS SPRENDIMUS

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Santrauka

Tyrimų apie Europos šalių šeimos politiką yra daug, tačiau dėmesys šeimos politikos formavimo procesui nėra pakankamas. Politikos formavimo procesą veikia politinis, ekonominis, sociokultūrinis kontekstas. Politikos formavimo ir analizės procesai yra tarpusavyje susipynę. Vienas svarbių šeimos politikos formavimo veiksnių yra piliečių dalyvavimas, jį galima skirstyti į tradicinį ir bendradarbiaujantį. Tradicinis piliečių dalyvavimas yra neefektyvus ir kelia konfliktus, nes administratoriai sprendžia, kada ir kokius piliečius kviesti prie derybų stalo, kai sprendimai jau būna priimti. Priešingai šiam modeliui, bendradarbiaujančiam piliečių dalyvavimui būdingas bendras problemų sprendimas, pagarba kitokiems požiūriams ir galimybė daryti įtaką tiek procesui,

ties rezultatams. Straipsnio tikslas yra išanalizuoti ekspertų požiūrį į mokslinės analizės naudojimą ir piliečių dalyvavimą priimant šeimos politikos sprendimus. Straipsnio objektas yra šeimos politikos sprendimų priėmimo procesas. Straipsnyje pateikiami atsakymai į klausimus: kaip yra naudojama mokslinė analizė priimant šeimos politikos sprendimus, kas yra kviečiamas dalyvauti šiame procese ir kas turi teisę teikti siūlymus. Straipsnyje pristatomi 2010 metų tyrimo rezultatai, išryškinantys 34 šeimos politikos ekspertų požiūrį į šeimos politikos formavimo problemą. Vadovaujantis profesinės etikos principais yra užtikrintas informantų konfidencialumas. Ekspertai atrinkti taikant tikslinę atrankos strategiją. Tyrimo metodika – ekspertų giluminis interviu. Informantų nuomone, šeimos politikos sprendimai turi būti grindžiami įrodymais, gautais iš įvairių šaltinių, taikant skirtingus tyrimo metodus, turi būti orientuoti į klientą bei paremti socialinėmis vertybėmis. Remiantis tyrimo rezultatų analize galima daryti išvadą, kad nevyriausybinių organizacijų ir mokslininkų dalyvavimas rengiant teisės aktus yra formalus, tuomet šeimos politikos teisės aktai rengiami neapgalvotai, mažai kreipiamas dėmesys į mokslinę situacijos analizę ir mokslininkų rekomendacijas. Anot ekspertų, pilietiškumo stygius suponuoja nevyriausybinių organizacijų ir visuomenės pasyvumą, reiškiant savo interesus, o tai neigiamai atsiliepia šeimos poreikių įvertinimui. Visa tai lemia, pasak ekspertų, nekokybiškų teisės aktų ir neapgalvotų bei neadekvačių situacijai priemonių priėmimą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: šeimos politika, šeimos politikos formavimas, sprendimų priėmimas, piliečių dalyvavimas.

