# Systemic Conceptual Framework in the Evaluation of Programs in Residential Services for Persons with Disabilities – Literature Review

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**Abstract**

This article attempts to bring visibility through literature, a conceptual framework in the evaluation of programs in Residential Services for Persons with Disabilities, seen in the light of the theory of systems.Residential services programs can be considered under systemic perspective, as one of the subsystems of the institutional system of services, which include other subsystems such as: staff and clients. Authors and researchers in the field of systems, evaluate programs using different qualitative and quantitative methods, which measure the degree of effectiveness of these programs in relation to client outcomes. The application of the programs, according to some authors is affected by the application of such policies, and also by the work of the staff. Program, in the other hand, affects customer system, the results of which appear in changing behavior / attitudes / the level of social inclusion. Since systemic management is focused on the interactions between different elements of a system and between systems, this theory is very useful for staff whose role is to promote the functioning between the individual and his environment. The introduction of this model in social service represents a major change compared to previous individual and psychological character practices.

**Keywords:** program evaluation models, systemic approaches to the program evaluation, residential services, methods

## 1. Introduction

Residential Centres for Persons with Disabilities work with programs to improve the quality of life of people who live there. Currently, in Albania there are 7 Residential Centres of the public sector and other 8 of the non-public sector (SHSSH, 2010, p. 21), for Persons with Disabilities in which it is intervened through programs standardized by the State Social Service (SHSSH).

These programs are realized by multidisciplinary staffs, which are responsible for assessing the situation of these persons, planning of intervention as well as direct intervention to work with the beneficiaries.

One of the problems encountered in the work of these centres to achieve the quality of services and social inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is the lack of models and efficient methods for evaluating the intervention programs.

All Residential Centres in Albania do not work with conceptual models and direct techniques to assess the quality of services and effectiveness of the intervention. If techniques are not used and programs are not measured, how can we talk about their quality, progress, shortages, change or their improvement in the benefit of the beneficiaries?

In these conditions it is necessary to think a) firstly, how these institutions can assess their programs in such a way that they respond better to the customers' needs, b) secondly, how to build a work culture in evaluating programs so that it is developed systematically and not sporadically and c) thirdly, how to build effective strategies and methods for measuring the programs.

Through a review of the literature in the field of concepts and methods used for evaluating programs, this article aims to shed light towards an appropriate approach for the evaluation of programs in the Residential Centres in Albania. The article has been focused on two aspects, which address a) some conceptual models for the evaluation of programs and b) some of the methods used by field researchers for evaluating programs.

## 2. Defining Key Concepts

### 2.1 Program Evaluation

Evaluation is the systematic application of scientific methods to assess the design, implementation, improvement or outcomes of a program (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; Short, Hennessy, & Campbell, 1996).

Evaluation is the systematic process of delineating, obtaining, reporting, and applying descriptive and judgmental information about some object's merit, worth, probity [moral correctness], feasibility, safety, significance, or equity (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007)

Program evaluation can occur in the following domains: (1) program necessity, (2) program design, (3) process evaluation, (4) impact evaluation, and (5) efficiency assessment (Rossi et al., 2004, cite by Walter, Helgenberger, Wiek, Schoz, 2005). Program models, stress the alignment of an organization or system's input throughput, and output/outcome components.

There are different types of program evaluation. According to various types of evaluation can be used to assess different aspects or stages of program development: formative evaluation, summative evaluation (Short, Hennessy & Campbell, 1996), process evaluation, impact evaluation (Rossi & Freeman, 1993), outcome evaluation etc.

Formative evaluation is conducting during the development or improvement of a program or product. It is conducted for the in-house stuff of program. Summative evaluation of a program, is conducted after completion and for the benefit of some external audience or decision-maker (Stufflebeam and al, 2000)

### 2.2 A systemic perspective in program evaluation

Residential centres for people with disabilities as services providers can be considered as open entities, and therefore we can consider it as an entity in continuous interaction with the community's resources.

Since systemic management is focused on the interactions between different elements of a system and between systems, this theory is very useful for staff whose role is to promote the functioning between the individual and his environment. (Lacroix, 1990 cite from Mayer, 2002). The introduction of this model in social service represents a major change compared to previous individual and psychological character practices.

According to Besides, Imam et al. (2007) (p. 54) systems concepts mean to look at the bigger picture, thus gaining from the alternative approach. Also the concept of boundaries for an evaluation is a crucial element of systems thinking. A system always has to be viewed in a dynamic relation with another system(s). Systems overlap or tangle up in other systems. The focus shall not be narrowed to only one view or definition of a system but to its relationships with other systems

Imam et al. (2007) also stressed some of the main advantages of using systems concepts in evaluation. These are, for example, providing means in order to deal with complex situations and developing innovative ways of understanding them, indicating unexpected properties and acknowledging the evolutionary nature of programs. (P. 55)

By incorporating the systems-based evaluation procedure, in the program evaluation we are able to monitor which parts of the program, and to what extent, affect the outcomes (p.55).

## 3. Methodology

In order to develop possible systemic conceptual frameworks and methods in the field of program evaluations of the residential services for peoples with disabilities, it was made an online research in several academic journals, in the disabilities field and psycho-social field. Firstly, it was researched by key words like "residential services for people with disabilities" and "systemic concept framework for program evaluation".

These concepts were cited in 32 papers and from those was selected a number of 11 articles seeking the program evaluation in a conceptual systemic approach. The research was focused in the online journals as Evaluation and Program Planning, American Journal of Evaluation, Educational Research and Evaluation, Disability and Society, European Journal of Social Work.

Furthermore, research was expanded from online material and books published in this field. Empirical and theoretical studies were classified in two aspects: 1. In the conceptual models for program evaluation and 2. Methods used in program evaluation according to each model.

## 4. Results

Research showed that the centres which provide services for Persons with Disabilities in the Western countries today, in most cases do not have only a residential nature. Their focus is directed towards the community developments and not just residential. This made the narrow research only for residential centres difficult. However, it should be said that the models and methods of programs' evaluation can be adapted very well to the context of residential centres, as the latter provide services, which can be measured and assessed using the same models and methods used even by other centres for evaluating programs.

Research showed that there are some models used for the evaluation of programs, but in this study have been developed 4 main models by addressing together with them the most commonly used methods for each of the models (Stufflebeam & Shrinkfield (2007):

1. Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE)
2. Conceptual, Input, Process, Product Evaluation Model (CIPP)
3. Consumer-oriented evaluation approach
4. Responsive evaluation approach

### 4.1 Important mechanisms in program evaluation

Collaboration is the key to successful program evaluation. In evaluation terminology, stakeholders are defined as entities or individuals that are affected by the program and its evaluation (Rossi & Freeman, 1993; C[DC, 1999].

Another crucial key in developing a program evaluation is the program logic model. A logic model can be described as a logical series of statements linking the conditions a social service program is intended to address; the activities that will employ to address specific conditions and expected outcomes of activities (Kumpfer, Shur, Ross, Bunnell, Librett & Millward, 1993 – cite in David A. Julian, Ann Jones and Diana Deyo, 1995).

Yvonne. A. Unaru (2001) argues that program modeling is central to investigating what interventions work in human services programs. Whether clients move through programs voluntary or involuntary, they expect to be changed in some beneficial ways. This anticipated transformation is explicitly tied to program objectives (or outcomes) when logic models are used as program-organizing tools. One of the instruments used for this purpose is using client exit interviews to better illuminate outcomes of programs.

Using Evidence-based practices is very important in programm evaluataion, because it consists of collections of practices within known parameters (philosophy, values, service delivery structure and treatment components) and with accountability to the consumers and funders of these practices. (Staffan Johansson, 2009)

### 4.2 Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE)

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE), developed by Michael Quinn Patton, is an approach based on the principle that an evaluation should be judged on its usefulness to its intended users. Therefore evaluations should be planned and conducted in ways that enhance the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance.

UFE has two essential elements. Firstly, the primary intended users of the evaluation must be clearly identified and personally engaged at the beginning of the evaluation process to ensure that their primary intended uses can be identified. Secondly, evaluators must ensure that these intended uses of the evaluation by the primary intended users guide all other decisions that are made about the evaluation process.

Patton argues that research on evaluation demonstrates that: "Intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings, they are more likely to understand and feel ownership if they've been actively involved. By actively involving primary intended users, the evaluator is preparing the groundwork for use." (Patton, 2008, Chapter 3)

UFE can be used for different types of evaluation (formative, summative, process, impact) and it can use different research designs and types of data.

Patton's original framework consisted of a 5 step added after with a 12 step framework.

### 4.2.1 Outcome measurement

Most of the studies that considered this approach were focused in the outcomes evaluation level. In the study of Wendy P. Crook, Ronald L. Mullis, Thomas A. Cornille and Ann K. Mullis, 2005, about the literature on outcome measurements in homeless systems of care, were gathered data form 32 mixed articles (literature review and empirical). This review did not reveal the existence of any single outcome measurement instrument that could be used for the system of care. (Wendy P. Crook, Ronald L. Mullis, Thomas A. Cornille and Ann K. Mullis, 2005). So the service program-level outcome measurement is typically based on the aggregation of client-level outcomes. Several instruments were identified to enable evidence-based practice by documenting the effectiveness of social interventions. Outcomes can be tracked by multiple testing of clients over time.

### 4.2.2 Quality of Life Outcome Measurement

One of the methods used in program planning and evaluation during the program process and program outcomes is the Quality of Life (QOL) outcome assessment (Robert L. Schalock, 1994). Also the quality assurance can be considered a type of internal program evaluation that uses a decision-making model and focuses on self-monitoring and self-evaluation.

The QOL uses a set of criteria to be evaluated during or after the program fulfillment. These criteria include three big domains (home and community living, employment, health functioning) each containing several quality of life indicators. (Robert L. Schalock, 1994). Author argues that the person-reference quality of life indicators insure that the program's mission statement is being fulfilled on an ongoing basis.

In a recent study, Robert L. Shalock, Gordon S. Bonham and Miguel A. Verdugo, 2008, describe the development of a QOL conceptual and measurement framework. This framework has been developed in three key components: 3 factors (independence, Social Participation and Well-being); 8 domains (Personal development, Self-determination, Interpersonal relations, social inclusion, Rights, Emotional Well-being, physical well-being, material well-being) and 9 indicators for each domain.

### 4.3 Conceptual, Input, Process, Product Evaluation Model (CIPP)

Daniel Stufflebeam's CIPP Model has been very popular in education. The CIPP Model is a simple system model applied to program evaluation. A basic open system includes input, process and output. Stufflebeam added context, included input and process, and relabeled output with the term product. Evaluation's more important purpose is not to prove but to improve. Approach is applied both formatively and summatively" (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

CIPP is a comprehensive framework for conducting formative and summative evaluation of projects, personnel, products, organizations and evaluation systems (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2007). So this model stands for:

1. Context evaluation – program planning decision
2. Input evaluation – program structuring decision
3. Process evaluation – implementing decision – formative evaluation
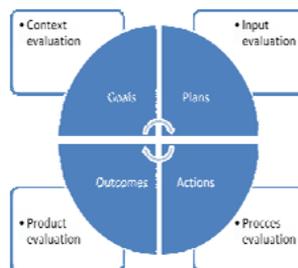4. Product evaluation – summative evaluation



**Figure 1.** CIPP Evaluation Model

## 4.4 Consumer-oriented evaluation approach

A consumer-oriented evaluation approach typically occurs when independent agencies, governmental agencies, and individuals compile educational or other human services products information for the consumer. Such products can include a range of materials including: curriculum packages, workshops, instructional media, in-service training opportunities, staff evaluation forms or procedures, new technology, and software. The consumer-oriented evaluation approach is increasingly being used by agencies and individuals for consumer protection as marketing strategies are not always in the best interest of the consumer. Consumer education typically involves using stringent evaluation criteria and checklists to evaluate products.

The consumer-oriented evaluation approach is typically applied to education products and programs.

According to Scriven a fundamental of a sound evaluation is to judge program's merit, comparative value, and overall worth. (Stufflebeam and al, 2000)

Methods used are checklists, assessment needs, experimental and non-experimental designs. Scriven developed a generic key evaluation Checklist for this purpose. The main evaluative acts in this approach are scoring, grading, ranking, apportioning, and producing the final synthesis (Stufflebeam and al, 2000).

### 4.4.1 Using Client satisfaction questionnaire

Anne-Marie Baronet and Gary J.Gerber 1997, stress that client satisfaction studies were conducted in the context of a developing consumer – oriented society and in an area of program evaluating. Authors bring different literature review of empirical studies, that shows the implication of Client Satisfaction Questionnaire, in the evaluating programs in several health mental centers. The short version of the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8) (Larsen, Attkinsson, Hargreaves & Nguyen, 1979,Nguyen et al, 1983) is one of the few instruments with known psychometric qualities and normative data. It is widely used in studies in the mental health domain. (Anne-Marie Baronet and Gary J.Gerber, 1997,). Through a systemic approach authors bring an example on how the results of study in client satisfaction, effectuated in a crisis center for mental health, were used to improve services. After that the center conducted training sessions in the systemic approach, so that workers would be comfortable with including significant others in the intervention process.

## 4.5 Responsive evaluation approach

A major strength of the responsive/ client-centered approach is that it involves action-research, in which people funding, implementing, and using programs are helped to conduct their own evaluations and use the findings to improve their understanding, decisions and actions. A major weakness is approach vulnerability regarding external credibility, since people in the local settings, have considerable control over the evaluation of their work. (Stufflebeam and al, 2000).

Preferred methods are the case study, expressive objectives, purposing sampling, observations, storytelling, socio drama and narrative reports. Stufflebeam and al, 2000). Evaluators make effective use of qualitative methods and triangulate findings from different sources. (Stufflebeam and al, 2000).

This approach is developed in 6 steps:

1. Engage stakeholders
2. Describe the program
3. Focus on the evaluation design
4. Gather credible evidence
5. Justify conclusions
6. Ensure use and share lessons learned

In recent years, the traditional view of program evaluation has been challenged by contrasting 'postmodern', 'constructionist' views that emphases individual case studies in naturalistic context; qualitative information (Daniel B. Fishman, William D. Neigher (2003). Authors argues that can be a common framework for pragmatic case study, that can reflect two different parts of an evaluation case study: 1. A program part, involving a description and analysis of the process and outcome of the program being evaluated and the clients to whom it provides services 2. An evaluation part, involving a description and analysis of the process and results of the evaluation itself.

*4.5.1 Inclusion of people with disabilities in Program Evaluation*

Including stakeholders in program evaluation is one the most important challenge to evaluation, because stakeholders' inclusion can increase the likelihood of use, relevancy of the evaluation to the community of interests, and accuracy of results. Inclusion may also promote social justice by giving recipients a voice in program decision making (Miriam R. Jacobson, Tarek Azzam and Jeanette G. Beaz, 2012). Authors have done a research in literature review describing which stakeholders have been included in evaluation, how program recipient input was obtained and in which stages of the evaluation stakeholders' participations occurred.

Findings show strong relationships between feasibility considerations (e.g., participant characteristics) and levels and quality of involvement (Miriam R. Jacobson, Tarek Azzam and Jeanette G. Beaz, 2012). For examples, individual with psychiatric disabilities were more likely to be included in evaluation than were individuals with developmental /intellectual disabilities. This study found that most inclusion activities tended to revolve around data collection (77%) rather than deeper participation in the evaluation process (31%). Finally, program recipients with disabilities tended to participate in evaluations comparatively less often than other stakeholder groups (Miriam R. Jacobson, Tarek Azzam and Jeanette G. Beaz, 2012).

## 5. Discussion

Literature review shows that conceptual models for program evaluation are multiple and developed over time to time. According to different authors there are 26 approaches often employed to evaluate programs and projects (Guli Zhang, Nancy Zeller, Robin Griffith, Debbie Metcalf, Jennifer Williams, Christine Shea and Katherine Misulis, 2011). The most used approaches to program evaluation are 1. Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE) (Michael Patton,) 2. CIPP Evaluation model (Daniel Stufflebeam), 3. Consumer-oriented evaluation approach (Michael Scriven) and 4. Responsive evaluation approach (Robert Stake).

In the literature gathering, was revealed the importance of using logic models (Kumpfer, Shur, Ross, Bunnell, Librett & Millward, 1993 – cite in David A. Julian, Ann Jones and Diana Deyo, 1995); evidence-based practices (Staffan Johansson, 2009), and engaging of stakeholders in program evaluation (Miriam R. Jacobson, Tarek Azzam and Jeanette G. Beaz, 2012).

In the framework of the stakeholders inclusion in program evaluation, one important challenge is the inclusion of people with disabilities in program evaluation, using specifics methods appropriates to their capacities. Another challenge related to this issue remains the level the stages of engagement.

This research shows that different researcher guided by this approaches, have developed multiple strategies and used multiple methods to implement program evaluation. Most of them are focused on outcome program evaluation, using techniques like Quality of Life outcomes measurements, Client satisfaction questionnaire.

Some of them are focused on the context and process of program evaluation (inputs and outputs), using different methods as the client exit interviews, case study, expressive objectives, purposing sampling, observations, storytelling, socio drama and narrative reports.

Related to the main problem of this research, for the future, it will be very helpful: 1) using an culturally appropriate approach to Albanian institutional culture; 2) generalizing a logic model appropriate to the nature of the programs developed in this centers; 3) using appropriate methods and techniques related to the nature of the users and 4) developing strategies to enables the feedbacks of the outputs and outcomes and using them for improvement of the programs.

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