

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS AND TYPES OF APPROACHES IN RESEARCHING THE NEEDS

Cristian NICULA, PhD Student

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Craiova

cristian.nicula78@gmail.com

Abstract: *The present article is an approach of conceptual clarification and exploration in an ongoing research on the relationship between motivation, aspirations, values and needs in the Romanian society in a determined context. As a scientific category, the need/the needs is/are used in different disciplinary areas, from sociology to marketing, for example. In the contexts in which it is used, the term/category acquires different connotations. The present article proposes somewhat a methodological reduction of the definition of the term (i.e. negative meaning and affirmative meaning) as well as two ways of its thematization (the descriptive approach and the constructive approach) in the disciplinary researches.*

Key words: *needs, welfare/minimal state, negative/meaning of needs, descriptive/approach, approach of needs.*

I. Meanings and conceptual developments of needs

Starting from the common sense of the term and ascending to its theoretical conceptualization, I think we can identify a negative meaning and a affirmative meaning of the term “need”.

Negative meaning.

In this meaning, need is defined as a *lack*, particularly individual, that must be urgently fulfilled. If, in Romanian, French or English, the term is rendered somewhat univocal (*nevoie, need, besoin*), although it produces more nuances, the German language emphasizes these nuances and connotations more clearly and highlights the negative definition: as lack of need - *Mittellosigkeit*; as a state of necessity – *Not*; demand - *Bedürftigkeit*.

“besoin m 1. Not /; Notstand m; Mittellosigkeit /; Bedürftigkeit /; etre dans le - in (der) Not sein; en cas de – im Notfall 2. (materiel) Bedürfnis n (nach + D): les - s de la societe die Bedürfnisse der Gesellschaft ; avoir - de qqch etw brauchen 3. (economique) -s (en) Bedarf m (an + D); • -senergetiques Energiebedarf; - s en matieres premieres Rohstoffbedarf; - s en capital, financiers, immediats Kapital-, Finanz-, Sofortbedarf; -s previsibles, publics, urgents voraussiehtliecher, öffentlicher, dringender Bedarf ; selon les - s je nach Bedarf ; les - s quotidiens en... der tägliche Bedarf an .. . ••• nous avons un -

urgent de .. . wir brauchen dringend ... ; avoir des – s en Bedarf haben an; assurer les – s d'énergie den Energiebedarf absichern ; couvrir des - s den Bedarf decken; définir les besoins den Bedarf ermitteln ; excéder (dépasse) les - s den Bedarf übersteigen ; /aire un état des - s den Bedarf ermitteln ; pourvoir aux (satisfaire)" (Boelcke, 1989, 32).

A similar meaning we also find it in the English language literature as a lack, *deprivation*, correspondent of the German *Mittellosigkeit*, met in the field of marketing.

"Needs: A state of felt deprivation. Needs are the basic human requirements. People need food, air, water, clothing, and shelter to survive. People also have strong needs for recreation, education, and entertainment. Needs are fulfilled through the purchase of various products and services available in a society." (Kahn, 2005, 352).

Especially in psychology, the term "need" has a connotation from the sphere of frustration and dissatisfaction. We also meet a negative sense in the disciplinary field of social policies where *need* is defined as the *need for social assistance* to cover a shortage, a deficit.

"Two types of social assistance needs can be distinguished: a) the need arising from lack of economic resources - a living standard below the minimum accepted standards, lack of housing, lack of access to healthcare or education; b) the need arising from the severe limitation of personal abilities to lead a normal life - alcohol or drug dependence, problems of integration into family life, school, work, community, difficulties in dealing with others." (Pop, 2002, 445).

In a work on the quality of life we also find the same meaning for the term need:

"Fundamental human need that, if not satisfied, causes discomfort to the person and prevents his/her full social participation" (Voicu, in Mărginean și Vasile, 2015, 161).

1.1. Building the negative meaning of *need* by reference to *poverty* and its conceptual corollaries (*basic needs* and *human needs*).

A particular applicative aspect of the meaning of need as a lack, especially in studies of quality of life or concrete measures in social policies is *poverty*.

1.1.1 Basic needs. As a social category, poverty is defined in correlation with the term of *basic needs*, i.e. the degree of access or satisfaction in a society. In such a case, their conceptual-theoretical determination and empirical determination by measurement implies both a universalistic approach (when by *basic needs* are understood, in fact, *human needs*), and a contextual one,

relative to a determined cultural context and historical moment. These aspects are very well highlighted as below.

“The concept of basic needs has played a big part in analyzing conditions in poor countries in recent years. In reports produced by international agencies, the term has a long history. The term was given particularly wide currency after the International Labour Office’s World Employment Conference at Geneva in 1976, where it was formally adopted. Basic needs were said to include two elements: Firstly, they include certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain household furniture and equipment. Second, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport and health, education and cultural facilities.... The concept of basic needs should be placed within a context of a nation’s overall economic and social development. In no circumstances should it be taken to mean merely the minimum necessary for subsistence; it should be placed within a context of national independence, the dignity of individuals and peoples and their freedom to chart their destiny without hindrance” (Townsend, 2005, 657- 659).

1.1.2. Human needs. Concerning the concept of *human needs*, Watt (2005) emphasizes its generality and ambiguity, the fact that it cannot be determined precisely and that it is often useful in the propaganda and ideological discourse, not having an objective character:

“It was in answer to such a ‘politics of wants’ that Fromm (1955), Marcuse (1964; 1969), Macpherson (1966; 1973), Bay (1965; 1968) and others proposed a ‘politics of needs’. Need, not want, was to be the norm: politics was to be the pursuit of justice, and justice was seen as the meeting of human needs. All these writers agreed that it can be shown objectively what human needs are; indeed, human need could not serve as a political norm unless it were believed to have the status of ascertainable fact. All of these writers held that, though in principle individuals may be capable of recognizing their own needs, in present circumstances most people are so indoctrinated as to be incapable of seeing what their true needs are, or of distinguishing them from false needs or mere wants (Fitzgerald, 1977). Consequently, for the time being, knowledge of human needs will be unevenly distributed; some people will know much more about them than others do, and most people’s ideas about their needs will be confused, incomplete, even mistaken” (Watt, in Kuper and Kuper, 2005, 659).

2. We find the ***Positive meaning*** of the term as a connotation of fulfilment, linked to aspiration and motivation, an example in this sense being the nuanced meaning of needs in the motivation theory of Abraham Maslow (1954; 2007). We also find this meaning when the term is in association with terms

such as *interest* and *rights*, in disciplinary areas such as social and political philosophy.

The connection between *interests* and *needs* already has a tradition in Anglo-Saxon social-political philosophy. *Needs*, in this tradition of thinking, are considered a subset of *interests*. They have an instrumental character, of means or conditions necessary to achieve a goal, but they are not a goal in itself. *Interests*, on the other hand, may be individual or social. *Interests* may represent distinct forms of needs: moral needs (freedom of conscience), social and political needs (the need to be well governed, well represented before justice), and economic needs (fair redistribution of income).

In this sense, the need no longer denotes both a subjective lack at the individual level, as an overcoming of a natural condition given to an ameliorative one at the social level, a mentally built category, a critical category with an orientative or directive role. It is a form of assertion, an impulse, an indicative model in the design of various types of policies (public, social policies).

It is no coincidence that the term *needs* and their status is present in all the major political theories of modernity (socialist theories, conservatism, liberalism). Each of them assert a form of civil needs or rights. Needs, thus asserted, become civil rights, such as freedom or equality. Today's debates in political theories are related to one or the other in asserting these rights as needs. Do we need more freedom or equality in a particular society? From a welfare state or a minimal state? (Iliescu, 2003; Timmins, 2017)

The connection between needs and interests, for example, is constituted in the topic of debate on the way and the legitimacy of resource distribution within a society. We need a distribution of resources according to the needs of all citizens and the shortcomings felt by them or by their merits?

"For half a century, the Democratic Party was sustained by the public philosophy of New Deal liberalism. Democrats and Republicans debated the role of government in the market economy, and the responsibility of the nation for the collective provision of basic needs. The Democrats won that debate, and elected every president but Eisenhower from 1932 to 1964. In time the Republicans stopped attacking the welfare state and argued instead that they could manage it better. But the New Deal agenda continued to define the terms of debate, and the meaning of liberalism and conservatism. Liberals favored a greater federal role in the social and economic life of the nation, conservative less"(Sandel, 2006, 35)

In this way, needs are defined as concrete interests in the form of tax and tax benefits, i.e. the latter meet needs or cause frustrations. Referring to an episode in US political history, Sandel also remarks:

"This presidential campaign offers a choice between one big, unworthy idea and many worthy little ones. The big but unworthy idea is at the heart of

Bob Dole's proposed tax cut: people should keep more of what they earn. It is not clear why they should. First, given the budget deficit and unmet public needs, the government needs the money. Second, Americans already pay a smaller share of national income in taxes than do citizens of any other industrial democracy. Finally, by offering no higher purpose than lower taxes, Dole contradicts the admirable declaration in his acceptance speech that presidents should place moral considerations above material ones. Dole tries, on occasion, to elevate the moral status of tax cuts, arguing that too much taxation encroaches on liberty. But it is difficult to see how shifting a few hundred dollars per person to private consumption will make Americans more free" (Sandel, 2006, 48).

In terms of American political philosophy, needs are associated with rights and freedoms. Guaranteeing individual freedom is a greater need for the citizen, or, more importantly, is the need for social equity and redistribution of the main social goods, thus guaranteeing the basic needs for as many individuals as possible? State intervention in the redistribution of income through taxation is seen by libertarians as a violation of the individual's freedom of space, thus, favouring some, actually depriving others, the autonomous ones, with a spirit of initiative, those for whom freedom of action is a greater need than other needs.

"But as Walzer acknowledges, the idea of spheres, taken alone, does not tell us how to distribute this or that good. Most of our political arguments arise over precisely what goods belong to what spheres. What sort of goods, for example, are health care and housing and education? Should we regard them as basic needs to be publicly provided as required or as goods and services to be sold in the market? Or, to take a different sort of example, in what sphere does sex belong? Should sexual pleasure be "distributed" only on the basis of love and commitment or also in exchange for cash or other goods? Whether we are debating the welfare state or sexual mores, we need some way of deciding which goods fit which distributive principles. One way of deciding, perhaps the most familiar way, is to try to identify certain universal natural or human rights and to deduce from these whatever particular rights may follow—the right to housing or health care or the right to engage in prostitution, as the case may be [...] Egalitarian liberals like Rawls disagree. They argue that we cannot meaningfully exercise our civil and political liberties without the provision of basic social and economic needs; government should therefore assure each person, as a matter of right, a decent level of such goods as education, income, housing, health care, and the like. The debate between the libertarian and egalitarian versions of rights-oriented liberalism, which flourished in the academy in the 1970s, corresponds roughly to the debate in American politics, familiar since the New Deal, between defenders of the market economy and advocates of the welfare state" (Sandel, 2006, 175-212).

II. Two types of approaching the needs

1. Descriptive approach

A descriptive approach to needs is based on the premise that needs are realities or facts (historical, psychological, biological, social) with a certain degree of scientific objectivity. The role of the researcher in such a case is to objectively reproduce their characteristics and only later, as far as possible, to use them in constructions with an applied role such as social policies. The presupposition that underlies these approaches is that the degree of descriptiveness or scientificity is predominant in relation to the degree of imaginative speculation. Hence, the belief that the field of needs must first of all be approached "scientifically" by means of empirical verifications. As it is natural, such steps will be particularly concerned with the determination of *basic needs*, considered to be as ingenuous as possible, closer to a hypothetical universal "state of nature", derived from the bio-psychological characteristics of the human being. Such approaches come from sciences such as biology, psychology, and the economy, which employ empirical data. An illustration of this is the work edited by Augusto Forti and Paolo Bisogno, **Research and human needs** (Forti and Bisogno: 1981). Thus, in an economic approach, **Scientific Research, Human Needs and the New Economic Order**, Augusto Forti expresses his confidence in a universal determination of the needs and rights of individuals:

"Man's needs and rights —for food, home, health, clothing, education, work and freedom to determine his personal development; for the assurance of having these at his disposal for himself and his family —have yet to be made universally available"(Forti, 1981, p. 2).

Paolo Bisogno, on the other hand, in **Scientific Research and Human Needs** is concerned about the determination of basic needs.

One of the first things to be noted is that needs provoke real impulses for action and grow more complex as the single gives way to the plural, the individual to the group, the group to the society. Furthermore, to avoid confusion it should be added that needs are not the same thing as desires or the volition which is often interwoven with them. From the point of view of the theory of social action, on the other hand, we may talk about stimuli for action, which give rise to at least three types of sensations on which social action depends and which reduce the stages analyzed above to three basic ones:

(1) Awareness of the presence of a need;

(2) The expectation of its satisfaction;

(3) The avoidance of the hardships." (Paolo Bisogno, 1981, pp.12-13).

At both cited authors, the terminology and concepts used reveal the objectivist-scientific ambition of dealing with needs, as a distinct field of reality,

with universally objective facts and laws that must be approached, first of all, descriptively.

2. Constructive approach

A constructive approach to the field of needs does not call into question the objectiveness of their essence (*basic needs* for example), but instead considers that needs are more complex, they are built with a certain content of ideative aggregation. Therefore, they are contextually, culturally and historically determined by values, attitudes, and aspirations, some of which are consciously induced by mechanisms such as ideologies, propaganda, or marketing strategies.

Perhaps the most representative area in which needs is built, even in a rather aggressive way, is marketing. It uses descriptive data in areas such as psychology, biology, economics, and sociology to induce commercial needs. Thus, in Khan's marketing work (2006), we find a number of items related to the theme of needs: *need for cognition*, *need recognition*, and *need-hierarchy process for attributes*. Each of these can be converted and exploited to determine the individual to buy products.

Thus, the need is defined in a negative way, as a state of lack or deprivation, which can be satisfied by the purchase of goods:

Needs: *A state of felt deprivation. Needs are the basic human requirements. People need food, air, water, clothing, and shelter to survive. People also have strong needs for recreation, education, and entertainment. Needs are fulfilled through the purchase of various products and services available in a society (Kahn, 2005, pp. 352).*

In another specialized paper, much more detailed on the techniques for determining and building needs (Zwick and Cayla: 2011), we are talking about collecting data to determine consumer needs and wishes, to determine trends in consumer behaviour, on his loyalty to certain brands. This is an approach to abstract the consumer needs.

Regarding the constructive dimension, we observe the following: "In the process of assembling consumers as a branded object for marketing, loyalty programs provide particular services to consumers and fulfil their expressed or constructed needs. It is not that these mechanisms of behavioural analysis simply produce "false needs" within consumers, though that may be part of this process (ibidem, p. 123).

After **Blythe (2006)**, this approach to modelling needs is thoroughly detailed, referring to the formation of attitudes, the cognitive and affective determination of reactions, the stimulation and induction of certain beliefs (*salient beliefs*) about marketed products.

There are three ways of changing attitudes: 1 Add a new salient belief. 2 Change the strength of a salient belief. If the belief is a negative one, it can be

discounted or played down. If it is a positive one, it can be given greater importance. 3 Change the evaluation of an existing belief (Blythe, 2006, pp. 16-27).

The examples to highlight the constructive approach could continue to be presented in a more detailed manner, but in the economy of an article we consider it sufficient.

III. Conclusions

The theoretical approaches to the needs, their conceptual elaboration and the discussion of their type of descriptive or constructive approach bring more clarity in the context of contextual needs research. For example, in the context of Romanian society, these clarifications can help to clarify the assumed perspective and types of research on the needs already undertaken.

In this respect, I believe that in Romania the theme of needs has been approached with predominance and success from the perspectives of research on quality of life and social policies. Life-quality researches have a descriptive character, based on empirical data. They operate with a negative meaning of needs, and deal with determining whether they meet the basic needs of the population or determine the extent of poverty. Complementary or subsequent, social policy researches also start from empirical data, but combine descriptive research with a prospective one, and therefore are partly constructive.

However, I consider that Romanian research on needs from the perspective of a positive meaning or a constructive approach is lacking. Thus, research focusing on the positive dimension of defining needs should bring to the surface the relationship between civil rights and their reflection in specific needs at the level of Romanian society, namely the need for civic freedom, effective representativeness, the need for fair redistribution of resources, and of debates on these themes. The Romanian needs, as they are thematized and approached, are represented only in a negative sense, as a lack, as poverty, as a failure of basic needs. Are there no such needs as these, identifiable in aspirations for a certain type of rights or interests?

Extremely interesting are also the researches on the constructive approach of the needs in the Romanian society, namely the determination of the degree to which one interfere with the induction and the consolidation of certain needs for the public in Romania, at the level of the political or commercial marketing.

Thus, the conceptual distinctions proposed in this article are part of my approach for research and development of a doctoral work on the needs in Romanian society.

References:

1. BLYTHE, J. (2006). *Essentials of marketing communications*, Pearson Education Limited.
2. BOELCKE, J., (1989). *Dictionnaire économique, commercial&financier*, Paris, Presses Pocket.
3. FORTI, A.; Bisogno, P. (1981). *Research and human needs*, Pergamon Press.
4. ILIESCU, A.P. (2003). *Introducere în politologie*, București, All.
5. KAHN, K.M; Kahn, N.M. (2005). *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Marketing*, Sage Publications.
6. KUPER, A.; Kuper, J. (2005), *The social science encyclopaedia*, London, Routledge.
7. MASLOW, A. (2007), *Motivație și personalitate*, Bucharest, Trei.
8. MĂRGINEAN, I.; Vasile, M. (2015). *Dictionary of quality of life*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House.
9. POP, L.M., coord. (2002). *Dictionary of social policies*, Bucharest, Expert Publishing House,
10. SANDEL, M. (2006). *Public philosophy: essays on morality in politic*, Harvard University Press.
11. TIMMINS, N. (2017), *The Five Giants, A biography of Welfare State*, William Collins Books.