

Introduction to Social Policy Analysis

Introduction to Social Policy Analysis

(A concise, easy-to-read guide for students and practitioners)

1. What Is Social Policy Analysis?

Aspect	Description
Definition	Systematic examination of public policies that affect the welfare of individuals and groups (e.g., health, education, housing, employment).
Purpose	• Diagnose social problems • Evaluate existing policies • Design evidence-based alternatives • Inform decision-makers and the public
Scope	Local, regional, national, and international policies; formal legislation, programs, and informal arrangements.

2. Core Concepts & Terminology

Term	Meaning	Example
Policy Cycle	Stages a policy typically goes through: agenda-setting ? formulation ? adoption ? implementation ? evaluation ? termination/reform.	The rollout of a universal child ?care program follows this cycle.
Stakeholder	Any individual or group with an interest in the policy outcome.	NGOs, government agencies, beneficiaries, private sector.
Equity vs. Equality	<i>Equality</i> = same treatment for all; <i>Equity</i> = fairness, taking differing needs into account.	Equal school funding vs. additional resources for disadvantaged schools.
Policy Instruments	Tools used to achieve policy goals (regulation, taxation, subsidies, public provision, information campaigns).	A carbon tax to reduce emissions.

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Term	Meaning	Example
Evidence-Based Policy	Decisions grounded in rigorous data, research, and systematic evaluation.	Using randomized controlled trials to test a new welfare program.
Policy Transfer	Adoption of policies or practices from one context to another.	Borrowing Singapore's public housing model.

3. The Policy Cycle – Step by Step

1. Agenda Setting

- Identify problems that require government attention.
- Sources: media, interest groups, research findings, public opinion.

2. Policy Formulation

- Generate options, analyze feasibility, cost, and impact.
- Tools: cost-benefit analysis, stakeholder consultations, scenario planning.

3. Decision Making (Adoption)

- Formal approval by legislative bodies, executives, or administrative authorities.
- Political negotiations and compromises often shape the final text.

4. Implementation

- Translate policy into programs, services, or regulations.
- Key actors: bureaucracies, service providers, NGOs.
- Issues: capacity, coordination, compliance, unintended consequences.

5. Evaluation

- Assess outcomes against objectives.
- Methods: quantitative impact evaluation, qualitative case studies, performance audits.

6. Termination / Reform

Introduction to Social Policy Analysis

- Policy may be continued, modified, or repealed based on evaluation results and changing contexts.
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4. Analytical Frameworks

Framework	Main Focus	Typical Use
Institutional Analysis	How rules, organizations, and norms shape policy processes.	Studying the role of ministries in health reform.
Political Economy	Interaction of economic interests, power relations, and ideology.	Explaining why welfare cuts occur during austerity.
Stakeholder Mapping	Identifies actors, their interests, and influence.	Planning a participatory budgeting process.
Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)	Quantifies monetary costs and benefits to assess efficiency.	Evaluating a new public transport subsidy.
Social Impact Assessment (SIA)	Looks at distributional effects on different groups.	Measuring how a housing policy affects low-income families.
Logic Model		