

WELFARE IN PUBLIC POLICIES

ASSISTENCIALISMO NAS POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

EL BIENESTAR EN LAS POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS



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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the phenomenon of welfare assistance within the context of Brazilian public policies, discussing its relationship with social assistance, the role of the State, and its social and economic impacts. The study begins by distinguishing between welfare assistance and social assistance, highlighting that the former has an emergency and palliative character, whereas social assistance constitutes a right guaranteed by the 1988 Brazilian Constitution and is part of the social security system. The research is exploratory and bibliographical in nature, based on theoretical contributions from sociology, political economy, and social theory, as well as the analysis of public policies implemented in Brazil, such as conditional cash transfer programs and the Unified Health System. Institutional data and local experiences in social policy are also discussed, including references to the municipality of Lages, Santa Catarina. The results indicate that although income transfer programs contribute to reducing poverty and social vulnerability, their effectiveness depends on their articulation with structural policies related to economic development, education, and productive inclusion. It is concluded that public policies based on social rights can play an important role in promoting citizenship and reducing social inequalities.

Keywords: Welfare Assistance. Public Policies. Social Assistance. Social Inequality. Citizenship.

RESUMO

O presente artigo analisa o fenômeno do assistencialismo no contexto das políticas públicas brasileiras, discutindo sua relação com a assistência social, o papel do Estado e seus impactos sociais e econômicos. Parte-se da distinção conceitual entre assistencialismo e assistência social, destacando que o primeiro possui caráter emergencial e paliativo, enquanto a assistência social constitui direito garantido pela Constituição Federal de 1988 e integra o sistema de seguridade social. A pesquisa possui natureza exploratória e bibliográfica, fundamentada em autores das áreas da sociologia, economia política e teoria social, além da análise de políticas públicas implementadas no Brasil, como programas de

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transferência de renda e o Sistema Único de Saúde. Também são discutidos dados institucionais e experiências de políticas sociais em âmbito municipal, com referência ao município de Lages (SC). Os resultados indicam que, embora programas de transferência de renda contribuam para a redução da pobreza e da vulnerabilidade social, sua eficácia depende da articulação com políticas estruturais de desenvolvimento econômico, educação e inclusão produtiva. As políticas públicas baseadas em direitos sociais podem desempenhar papel relevante na promoção da cidadania e na redução das desigualdades sociais.

Palavras-chave: Assistencialismo. Políticas Públicas. Assistência Social. Desigualdade Social. Cidadania.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el fenómeno de la asistencia social en el contexto de las políticas públicas brasileñas, discutiendo su relación con la asistencia social, el papel del Estado y sus impactos socioeconómicos. Comienza con la distinción conceptual entre asistencia social y asistencia social, destacando que la primera tiene un carácter de emergencia y paliativo, mientras que la asistencia social constituye un derecho garantizado por la Constitución Federal de 1988 y forma parte del sistema de seguridad social. La investigación es de carácter exploratorio y bibliográfico, basada en autores de los campos de la sociología, la economía política y la teoría social, además del análisis de políticas públicas implementadas en Brasil, como los programas de transferencia de ingresos y el Sistema Único de Salud. También se discuten datos institucionales y experiencias de políticas sociales a nivel municipal, con referencia al municipio de Lages (SC). Los resultados indican que, si bien los programas de transferencia de ingresos contribuyen a la reducción de la pobreza y la vulnerabilidad social, su efectividad depende de su articulación con políticas estructurales de desarrollo económico, educación e inclusión productiva. Las políticas públicas basadas en derechos sociales pueden desempeñar un papel relevante en la promoción de la ciudadanía y la reducción de las desigualdades sociales.

Palabras clave: Asistencia Social. Políticas Públicas. Desigualdad Social. Ciudadanía.

1 INTRODUCTION

The debate about welfare in Brazilian public policies has acquired increasing relevance in the field of social, legal and economic sciences, especially in view of the expansion of income transfer and social protection programs in recent decades. Such policies are often aimed at socially vulnerable groups, such as homeless people, unemployed individuals, and families without access to formal income, seeking to reduce conditions of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.

It is essential to understand the distinctions between social assistance and assistance. While social assistance is a right guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988 and is part of the Brazilian social security system, welfare is usually associated with specific aid practices that do not necessarily address the structural causes of social inequality. The distinction has been widely debated in the academic literature, especially with regard to the effects of these policies on the promotion of citizenship, the expansion of access to rights, and the construction of more equitable conditions for social development.

The expansion of public income transfer policies, although recognized for their ability to reduce extreme levels of poverty and expand access to basic rights, also raises criticisms related to the possibility of generating social dependence or discouraging productive insertion. In this sense, part of the literature argues that such programs should be articulated with broader strategies for economic inclusion, professional qualification, and strengthening of the autonomy of individuals, avoiding that they are merely palliative mechanisms in confronting structural inequalities.

This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of welfare in the context of Brazilian public policies, discussing its limits and potentialities in confronting social inequalities. It seeks to examine the relationship between social assistance, state action and the social and economic impacts of these policies, also considering the criticisms directed at welfare practices and their possible effects on the reproduction of historical structures of dependence and social exclusion.

The debate raises the hypothesis that public policies for income transfer in Brazil should not be understood exclusively as welfare practices. When structured as State policies and articulated with broader strategies for social inclusion, professional qualification, and economic development, such policies can contribute significantly to the reduction of social inequalities, to the expansion of access to fundamental rights, and to the strengthening of the human capacities of individuals.

The discussion becomes particularly relevant in a scenario marked by deep social inequalities and the growing demand for social protection mechanisms. In this sense, the

proposed reflection dialogues with theoretical contributions that problematize the limits of practices based exclusively on immediate care, highlighting the need for public policies guided by the promotion of autonomy, citizenship and social participation.

Paulo Freire's thought contributes to understanding that overcoming conditions of oppression and social exclusion is not achieved only through the granting of material benefits, but requires processes of awareness and social transformation. As the author points out:

The assistentialist practice, when disconnected from processes of awareness and social emancipation, tends to reinforce the dependence of the subjects. The liberation of individuals is not achieved by the simple granting of benefits, but by the creation of conditions that allow the oppressed to understand and transform the social reality in which they live. (Freire, 1996, p. 67).

Understanding the role of public policies in confronting poverty and promoting citizenship becomes fundamental to assess whether such initiatives contribute to the construction of emancipatory processes or end up reproducing, albeit indirectly, historical structures of inequality and social exclusion.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The present research is characterized as an exploratory and bibliographic study, based on the analysis of classic and contemporary works in the areas of law, economics, sociology and political philosophy.

The method adopted consists of a literature review, with interpretative analysis of authors who discuss social inequality, public policies and the role of the State. The theoretical approach allows us to understand assistentialism from different analytical perspectives.

According to José Carlos Libâneo:

Bibliographic research is a fundamental stage of scientific production, as it allows the researcher to situate his object of study within a broader field of theoretical and conceptual debates. By analyzing different authors, the researcher identifies convergences, divergences, and gaps that contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge. (Libâneo, 2013, p. 52).

The readings of references support the article with theoretical analysis and statistical data, institutional reports on social assistance programs in Brazil, especially those related to income transfer policies and social protection systems.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of Brazilian public policies demonstrates that social protection programs cannot be understood only from the perspective of welfare. Unlike specific care practices, many of these policies are structured as social rights institutionally guaranteed by the State.

The most relevant examples are the Bolsa Família Program, considered one of the main income transfer policies implemented in the country in recent decades. Studies carried out by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) indicate that programs of this nature produce significant effects on poverty reduction and local economic dynamism. "Income transfer programs have an important multiplier effect on the economy, as the resources destined to low-income families quickly return to the economic circuit through consumption." (IPEA, 2013, p. 31).

The programs have a relevant social impact, especially when associated with education, economy and health policies. The conditionalities linked to school attendance and health monitoring demonstrate that the policy seeks to act on structural factors related to poverty. "The Bolsa Família Program is part of a broader strategy to combat poverty that articulates income transfer with access to essential public services." (Campello; Falcão, 2014, p. 54).

Another example of structuring public policy in Brazil is the Unified Health System (SUS), established by the Federal Constitution of 1988 and based on the principles of universality, integrality and equity. "The Unified Health System is one of the most important social achievements of the 1988 Constitution." (Paim, 2015, p. 37).

The SUS expands access to health and also plays an important role in economic development, by moving the health industrial complex and encouraging scientific production. "The Unified Health System should not be understood only as public spending, but as a strategic investment for national development." (Campos, 2007, p. 112).

The analysis of Brazilian public policies shows that social protection programs can play an important role in reducing social inequalities and promoting citizenship, as long as they are structured as social rights and articulated with broader strategies for economic and social development.

2 WELFARE

The concept of welfare refers to social practices aimed at offering immediate help to individuals or groups in situations of social vulnerability, especially those affected by poverty, unemployment or social exclusion. Although such actions can alleviate urgent needs, they

are often palliative, as they do not address the structural causes that produce social inequalities.

Historically, welfare has been associated with practices of charity or social paternalism. As Boschi (1984) observes, these actions are often related to the philanthropic tradition and the logic of punctual help, which does not necessarily promote lasting processes of social inclusion. In this sense, Paiva and Ouriques argue that: "[...] in Brazil, the logic of crumbs sets the tone for social policies, marked by fragmented actions and incapable of promoting structural changes in the living conditions of the poorest population." (Paiva; Ouriques, 2006, p. 173).

However, it is necessary to differentiate traditional welfare from contemporary public policies of social protection. From the Federal Constitution of 1988, several policies began to be structured as social rights guaranteed by the State, integrating the Brazilian social security system.

Income transfer programs have gained relevance as instruments to combat poverty. Among them, the Bolsa Família Program stands out, widely analyzed by researchers and international organizations. Studies indicate that programs of this nature have a relevant impact on reducing poverty and stimulating the local economy.

Research by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) shows that the resources transferred to low-income families quickly return to the economic circuit through consumption. "Income transfer programs have an important multiplier effect on the economy, as the resources destined to low-income families quickly return to the economic circuit through consumption." (IPEA, 2013, p. 31).

The economic impact is very important and social dimension policies are significantly added, especially when associated with public education and health services. In this sense, the Unified Health System (SUS) is one of the main pillars of Brazilian social policy.

The Federal Constitution establishes that: "Health is a right of all and a duty of the State, guaranteed through social and economic policies aimed at reducing the risk of disease and other health problems and universal and equal access to actions and services." (Brasil, 1988, p. 118).

According to Paim (2015), the SUS represents one of the most important social achievements of the Brazilian redemocratization, by guaranteeing universal access to health services.

The Unified Health System is one of the greatest social achievements of the 1988 Constitution, as it instituted a health care model based on the principles of universality, comprehensiveness and equity. It is a structuring public policy that significantly

expanded the population's access to health services and consolidated health as a right of citizenship and responsibility of the State. In this sense, the SUS represents not only a system of service provision, but also a civilizing project committed to the reduction of social inequalities and the promotion of social justice in Brazil. (Paim, 2015, p. 32).

The system also has an economic impact parallel to the social one in a relevant way by mobilizing a broad productive complex linked to the health area. Demonstrated by Campos 2007:

The Brazilian public health system should not only be understood as a social policy to serve the population, but also as an important inducer of economic development. The SUS mobilizes complex production chains that involve pharmaceutical industries, medical equipment, specialized services and scientific production. Thus, the public health system constitutes a relevant component of the national economy, articulating social policies and development policies. (Campos, 2007, p. 115).

Research by Rego and Pinzani (2013) also indicates that income transfer programs do not produce generalized social dependence. On the contrary, they can contribute to expanding the autonomy of beneficiary families and strengthening social participation.

Contrary to the argument often used by critics of cash transfer policies, our empirical research demonstrates that the beneficiaries of these programs do not tend to be accommodating or permanently dependent on the state. On the contrary, income transfer programs can contribute to expanding the autonomy of individuals and strengthening their capacity for social participation, to the extent that they provide minimum conditions of material security necessary for the exercise of citizenship. (Rego; Pinzani, 2013, p. 147)

Relevant aspects of the expansion of autonomy refer to the so-called social conditionalities, such as the requirement of school attendance and monitoring of children's health. According to Campello and Falcão (2014), such mechanisms seek to act on structural factors related to the reproduction of poverty.

The conditionalities associated with income transfer programs do not have a punitive character, but constitute instruments of articulation between different public policies. By requiring school attendance and monitoring of children's health, these programs seek to act on structural factors responsible for the intergenerational reproduction of poverty, simultaneously promoting social inclusion, expanding opportunities and strengthening the human capital of beneficiary families. (Campello; Falcão, 2014, p. 63).

Public policies for income transfer can function as instruments of social protection and promotion of citizenship, especially when articulated with broader strategies for economic development and social inclusion.

2.1 SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AS A PUBLIC POLICY

Social assistance is one of the policies that is part of Brazilian social security, along with health and social security. Unlike welfare, this policy is based on principles of universality, social protection and guarantee of rights.

The regulation occurred with the creation of the Organic Law of Social Assistance – LOAS (Law No. 8,742/1993), later complemented by the implementation of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), responsible for the decentralized organization of social assistance services in the country.

According to the Ministry of Social Development: "The Unified Social Assistance System organizes, in a decentralized and participatory way, the services, programs and benefits of social assistance in Brazil." (Brazil, 2005, p. 12).

This institutional structure represents an important advance in the consolidation of Brazilian social policies, by replacing welfare practices with public policies based on social rights.

2.2 CASE STUDY: PUBLIC POLICIES OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN LAGES (SC)

In the local context, the municipality of Lages, in Santa Catarina, has relevant experiences in the implementation of public social assistance policies aimed at the population in vulnerable situations.

The municipality is part of the national network of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), with Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS) and Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centers (CREAS), responsible for serving families at social risk.

Among the actions developed are family monitoring programs, access to social benefits, inclusion in income transfer programs and referral to education, health and professional training services.

These initiatives demonstrate the importance of municipal action in the implementation of social policies provided for in federal legislation. In the case of Lages, the social assistance programs seek not only to offer emergency support, but also to promote processes of social inclusion and strengthening the autonomy of the families served.

The local experience shows that structured public policies articulated with territorial services can contribute to reducing situations of social vulnerability and expanding the population's access to fundamental rights.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis developed in this article shows that welfare is a complex phenomenon, located at the intersection between social policies, economics and political culture. Public policies of income transfer and social protection in Brazil play an important role in tackling extreme poverty and reducing social inequalities. Programs such as Bolsa Família and universal systems such as the Unified Health System (SUS) should be understood not only from the perspective of welfare, but as institutional instruments to guarantee social rights provided for in the Federal Constitution of 1988.

National and international research highlights that such policies have contributed significantly to the reduction of poverty and inequality in Brazil, expanding the population's access to essential health, education, and social protection services.

Studies by international organizations, such as the World Bank and public policy research centers, indicate that conditional cash transfer programs, such as Bolsa Família, have relevant impacts on improving the living conditions of families in vulnerable situations, especially when associated with conditionalities related to education and health.

[...] these programs contribute to the reduction of extreme poverty, the increase in school attendance and the improvement of child health indicators, in addition to having a reduced or statistically insignificant impact on the reduction of labor supply among adult beneficiaries (World Bank, 2019).

The initiatives should be interpreted as components of a broader strategy for social protection and human development.

Authors such as Amartya Sen (2010) and Celso Furtado (2004) emphasize that development should be understood as the expansion of human capacities and social opportunities. Overcoming structural inequalities requires public policies that integrate economic growth, education, health, and productive inclusion. In the legal field, Lenio Streck (2014) and Pedro Serrano (2016) highlight that the Brazilian Constitution instituted a State model committed to the realization of social rights and the promotion of material equality. On the other hand, the critical reflection of Slavoj Žižek (2011) warns of the risk of policies that only alleviate the symptoms of inequalities without addressing their structural causes, which reinforces the need for social assistance policies to be articulated with strategies for economic development and productive inclusion.

The analysis of the public policies implemented in the municipality of Lages, in Santa Catarina, highlights the importance of local action in the consolidation of the Brazilian social protection system. Municipal social assistance, structured through the Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS) and actions linked to the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), serves thousands of families in vulnerable situations, offering both immediate benefits and services aimed at strengthening family and community bonds and social inclusion. This case study demonstrates that the effectiveness of public policies depends on the articulation between the Union, states and municipalities, as well as on the performance of local institutions in the implementation of social protection actions.

The emancipatory perspective proposed by Paulo Freire (1996) shows that overcoming poverty and social exclusion depends not only on distributive policies, but also on processes of awareness, social participation and strengthening of citizenship. The contemporary challenge of Brazilian public policies is to consolidate a social protection model capable of balancing immediate assistance and long-term development. The articulation between income transfer, universal access to health, quality education, professional qualification and generation of economic opportunities is fundamental to promote the social emancipation of the population. Public policies such as Bolsa Família and SUS should be understood as pillars of a social development project that seeks to reduce historical inequalities, expand human capacities, and strengthen social justice, inclusion, and democracy in Brazil.

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