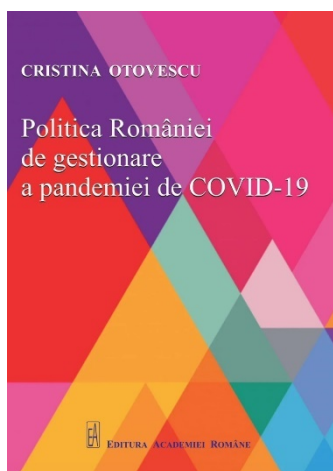


BOOK REVIEW: Cristina Otovescu (2022). *The Policy of Romania to Manage the Covid-19 Pandemic*. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Romanian Academy

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The book entitled „*Romanian pandemic management policy Covid-19*”, written by Cristina Otovescu and published by the Romanian Academy Publishing House, it is a profound and detailed analysis of Romania's response to the global crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

„*Romania's policy for managing the COVID-19 pandemic*” is a remarkable and timely book, which analyzes in detail how our country approached the major challenge represented by the emergence of the new group virus and the alarm reactions in the Romanian public space.

The author offers an exhaustive look at all aspects of the Romanian policy to combat the pandemic.

The book is structured in five main chapters, each addressing different aspects of pandemic management, from the emergence of the virus and initial reactions, to government strategies and the

long-term impact on Romanian society.

The first chapter of the book, „*The appearance of the new influenza virus and the alarm reactions in the public space in Romania*”, explores the origin and characteristics of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and brings to light how it arrived in Romania „*In Romania, certain journals and television stations informed public opinion about the calamity that fell on the heads of the Chinese, affected en masse by the terrible flu, which, on January 24, 2020, claimed the first 26 victims (p.17)*”.

This chapter focuses on two essential components: the dynamics of journalistic information and the involvement of specialists in the fields of epidemiology and public health.

In the first subsection, the author examines the role of the media in shaping public perception and reactions to the emergence of the pandemic. The manner in which the news media were initially the main sources of dissemination of data about the virus is analyzed, providing essential details about symptoms, modes of transmission and recommended preventive measures. Cristina Otovescu emphasizes the importance of the accuracy of journalistic information, considering their significant impact on the behavior of the population. The dual role of the mass media is also highlighted: on the one hand, it contributed to public awareness of the seriousness of the situation, on the other hand, it had the potential to induce panic and misinformation in the absence of rigorous verification of sources.

This detailed presentation of relevant scientific information helps readers better understand the nature and impact of the virus on Romanian society.

In the second subsection, the author addresses the decisive contribution of public health specialists and medical authorities in the response to the pandemic. Emphasis is placed on analyzing the discourses and recommendations made by epidemiologists and infectious disease physicians, which provided a solid scientific basis for understanding and combating the virus. Also, Cristina Otovescu explores the role of the Ministry of Health in coordinating the response at the national level, highlighting the communication strategies adopted and the measures implemented to limit the spread of the virus. By analyzing the positions of these key actors, the

paper highlights concerted efforts to navigate an ever-changing epidemiological landscape, marking the transition from initial reactions to strategies adapted to the dynamic context of the pandemic.

Second chapter, *„Romania in a state of emergency and on alert – an inevitable crisis”*, it explores how public opinion and the media reacted to the outbreak of the pandemic and provides an exhaustive and multidimensional analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Romanian society, focusing on health, demography, moral and political systems. This section also reveals the evolution of the pandemic in terms of statistical data and its impact on the social structure.

The sub-chapter on the crisis in the public health system reveals the immense pressures on the health infrastructure in the face of an increasing number of COVID-19 cases. This context has highlighted pre-existing vulnerabilities in the system, including a lack of medical staff and adequate equipment. The demographic crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic through increased mortality and declining birth rates, has heightened concerns about the long-term sustainability of Romanian society. The moral crisis, reflected in the ethical dilemmas and social tensions generated by the isolation measures and restrictions imposed, has tested social cohesion. In parallel, the political crisis, characterised by challenges in managing the response to the pandemic and communicating effectively with the population, has highlighted the need for strong and responsible leadership in times of crisis.

The author presents a statistical analysis of the dynamics of infections and the impact of the pandemic on the demographic structure and social life, critically analyzes the contradictory and alarming information that has circulated in the media, influencing public perception and generating a state of panic.

The analysis of statistical data on COVID-19 cases in the period 1 March 2020 - 31 August 2021 provides a clear perspective on the dynamics of the pandemic *„In March 2020, the crisis was caused by the penetration of the new influenza virus in Romania, being just another episode, indeed the most serious, in a long process of crisis that the medical system in our country has been experiencing for a long time (p.26)”*. This section presents an evolution of case types, providing a solid basis for understanding how the different waves of the pandemic have affected Romania. The data highlights the rise and fall of cases and the impact of the introduction of vaccination on the dynamics of the pandemic.

The emergence of the Delta strain and the devastating consequences of the fourth wave of illnesses marked a new critical phase of the pandemic in Romania, testing the limits of the health system's capacity and societal response to an impending medical disaster and a particularly serious humanitarian situation.

The introduction of the Omicron variant and the onset of the fifth wave of the pandemic posed a new challenge, bringing with it an unprecedented infection rate and testing the effectiveness of preventive measures and vaccination campaigns *„It had a rapid speed of transmission, arousing huge fears among doctors, as it had a wide spread among children, the young population (p. 90)”*.

By integrating these sections, the chapter succeeds in providing a global perspective on the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania, highlighting the interconnections between the different crises and challenges, as well as the responses to them. It reveals the complexity of crisis management, which requires not only a rigorous medical and scientific approach, but also a deep understanding of social, economic and political dynamics.

Chapter three, entitled *„The role of government in the crisis period and the strategy to combat the effects of the pandemic,* provides a comprehensive analysis of how government institutions have responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper explores the dynamics between policy and scientific perspectives, institutional support structures, regulatory frameworks, and the strategies and measures adopted to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on various levels.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the scenario methodology, which allowed the government to assess the various possible pandemic trajectories and develop appropriate responses. This approach balanced the political perspective, focused on maintaining social and economic stability, with the scientific perspective, focused on reducing the spread of the virus and protecting public health.

The following section details the role of institutional structures in coordinating and implementing crisis measures. Emergency committees, intersectoral working groups and collaboration with international health organisations are highlighted, underlining the importance of an integrated approach.

The chapter goes on to examine the regulatory framework adapted to deal with the crisis, including the introduction of military ordinances. This section discusses the necessity and impact of suspending or limiting democratic rights and freedoms in the context of the state of emergency, highlighting the tensions between the need for health security and the protection of individual freedoms.

The paper then goes on to detail the government's main lines of action in managing the health crisis:

- Monitoring travel flows to prevent the introduction and spread of the virus.
- Preparing and supplying hospitals, including managing accommodation capacity and stocks of protective equipment.
- Protection of medical staff by providing necessary equipment and psychological support.
- Social protection of the population, through support measures for vulnerable and economically affected people.
- Supporting the economic environment through financial incentives and business support measures.
- Health education and information for the population to promote preventive behaviour and combat misinformation.

The reactions expressed by the opposition political parties and the criticism of the measures implemented by the government in the context of the pandemic are a reflection of the diversity of opinions and the intensity of the public debate that has taken place on the management of the crisis. In the same vein, the Court of Auditors' findings on the management of public resources during the state of emergency underline the imperative of transparency and accountability in the management of funds, highlighting the importance of these principles in building public confidence.

Romania's and Europe's post-pandemic reconstruction efforts, underlined by the European Union's Joint Recovery and Resilience Programme initiative, also highlight the commitment to supporting economic and social recovery, while promoting the green transition and digitisation. Emphasising innovation, sustainability and social cohesion, this strategy aims to minimise the long-term impact of the pandemic and lay the foundations for robust and inclusive economic growth.

The fourth chapter „*The role of specialists in crisis management and public health rescue measures*”, highlights the importance of collaboration between politicians and health experts to formulate effective strategies to combat the pandemic. The author discusses value priorities, the differences in vision between politics and science, and proposes mass testing as a strategic solution.

The contribution of doctors to the management of the crisis was vital, as they proposed essential strategic measures such as controlling the flow of travellers across borders, mandatory and regular testing of medical staff, and extensive testing of the population „*Doctors and other specialists considered that the fight against the pandemic in Romania necessarily involved a process of mass testing and retesting of people nationwide, as it helped to discover those infected, isolate and treat them, and stop the chain of serial contamination*” (p. 177). These actions, together with the combination of preventive and medical-scientific methods of

treatment, formed the backbone of efforts to combat the pandemic. The role of doctors was thus essential in establishing and implementing health safety protocols.

Sociologists and social workers have made significant contributions by analysing and explaining the social problems amplified by the pandemic, as well as making recommendations for alternative social policies. They have highlighted collective livelihood needs in the context of restrictions and proposed social intervention strategies to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups.

Psychologists have also played a crucial role, providing support for managing increased stress and anxiety in the population and educating the public on the importance of adapting to unpredictable risks and crises „...*adapting individuals to the conditions of living in isolation from their peers imposed by the action of the new influenza virus, in our case, during the years 2020-2021, is a therapeutic formula advocated in psychology and psychiatry...*(p. 199)”. This contribution highlighted the need for a holistic approach to pandemic management, including the mental health dimension.

In the context of these multidisciplinary efforts, the position of the Romanian Academy on the economic and social recovery of the country has underlined the importance of close collaboration between specialists in various fields to formulate viable long-term solutions. The Academy promoted the need for an integrated approach, combining scientific knowledge with social and humanistic knowledge, to ensure a sustainable and inclusive recovery.

In summary, crisis management and public health rescue measures during the COVID-19 pandemic benefited from unprecedented collaboration between specialists from different fields, each making essential contributions to limiting the impact of the pandemic. This multidisciplinary approach highlighted the value of integrated thinking and close collaboration in tackling complex challenges, laying the foundations for more effective strategies in managing future public health crises.

Finally, **chapter five**, „*The role of population. What Romanians felt and experienced during the pandemic and what they thought the future would be like*”, provides an insight into Romanians' personal experiences and emotional states during the pandemic. Otovescu explores fears, grievances and hopes, putting the social and psychological impact of the pandemic into context.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing the role of the population and its perceptions provides essential insight into the social and emotional dynamics that have shaped the collective experience in Romania. The study of the emotional state of the population revealed an increase in feelings of isolation and loneliness, shaping a true epidemic of loneliness, which went hand in hand with health challenges.

Fear of death, a feeling intensified among the population during the pandemic, has invited wide-ranging reflections for a psychosociological theory of fear, addressing the ways in which society and individuals manage and respond to existential threats. This deep-seated fear has influenced social behaviours and perceptions towards safety and public health measures.

People's assessment of the situation in the country, which includes levels of trust in state authorities and collective grievances, varied throughout the pandemic, reflecting tensions between individual needs and government actions. The experience of the pandemic also catalysed a process of introspection and reassessment of values and beliefs, leading to the formation of new attitudes and perspectives on community life and health.

The thoughts and opinions expressed by Romanians at the end of 2020 and during 2021 highlighted an evolution in the perception of the crisis, marking a transition from immediate reactions to adaptation and anticipation of the future. This period was characterised by an oscillation between hope and uncertainty, as people tried to navigate the complexity of information and predictions about the pandemic.

The socio-political and epidemiological premises of 2022 in Romania were mixed, with expectations of an improvement in the health situation, reflected in a decrease in the fatality rate and an improvement in the epidemiological situation. At the same time, the context was

marked by optimism and public demonstrations expressing the desire for normality and improved dialogue between the state and citizens. This period has highlighted society's ability to mobilise and seek constructive solutions to overcome the crisis.

One of the great strengths of the book is its balanced and objective approach to the subject. Autoareal does not limit itself to a chronological presentation of events, but provides a detailed analysis of the policies and measures adopted by the authorities to limit the spread of the virus. It explores both positive aspects, such as the implementation of restrictions and information campaigns, and critical aspects, such as the management of medical equipment stocks or the effectiveness of testing and vaccination.

In conclusion, *„Romania's policy for managing the COVID-19 pandemic”* is an indispensable book for anyone who wants to understand in depth how Romania managed the pandemic and is a significant contribution to understanding the complexity of responses to a public health crisis of the magnitude of COVID-19. The author provides an objective perspective on the events and critically addresses the policy and decisions made during this tumultuous period. The book not only informs but also challenges the reader to reflect on lessons learned and how we can improve preparedness and response to future public health challenges.