

# Social Multi-Criteria Evaluation (SMCE) of Policy Options

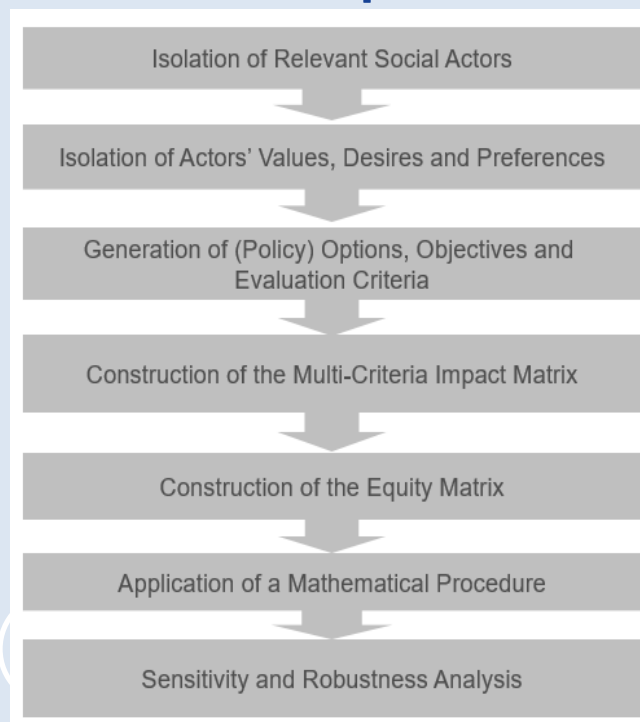
**Multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA)** is the most widespread **multidimensional modelling** approach to decision problems. The basic idea is that one has first to establish objectives, i.e. the direction of the desired changes (e.g. maximize profits, minimize environmental impact, minimize social exclusion, etc.) and then find useful, practical criteria, which indicate the consistency between an option and a given objective.

**Social multi-criteria evaluation (SMCE)**, which is based on MCDA, has been explicitly **designed for public policy** and is a very useful methodological and operational framework for ex ante impact assessment of policy options. Its basic methodological foundation is *incommensurability*, i.e. the notion that in comparing options, a variety of technical dimensions and social perspectives is needed.

**SMCE** has demonstrated its usefulness for **policy assessment** and **conflict management** in many real-world problems in various geographical and cultural contexts, being:

- **inter/multi-disciplinary**, since the various criterion scores can assess a wide range of impacts, for example by using results of economic, environmental, energy, and other simulation models;
- **participatory**, as fairness in the policy process is seen as an ethical obligation to take a plurality of social values, perspectives and interests into account;
- **transparent**, since all criteria are presented in their original form without any transformations in money, energy or other measurement rods.

## The SMCE process



The JRC team working on SMCE (from left to right): Egle Basyte Ferrari, Giuseppe Munda, Nicole Ostlaender, Ivano Azzini

See also: Better Regulation Toolbox, Tool#62 Multi-criteria decision analysis, page 550

# SOCRATES

The importance of mathematical approaches in SMCE is their ability to allow a **consistent aggregation of diverse information**. Otherwise, the standard objection might be that the **famous aggregation of apples and oranges** is impossible. Multi-criteria mathematics does answer to this objection in a definitive way.

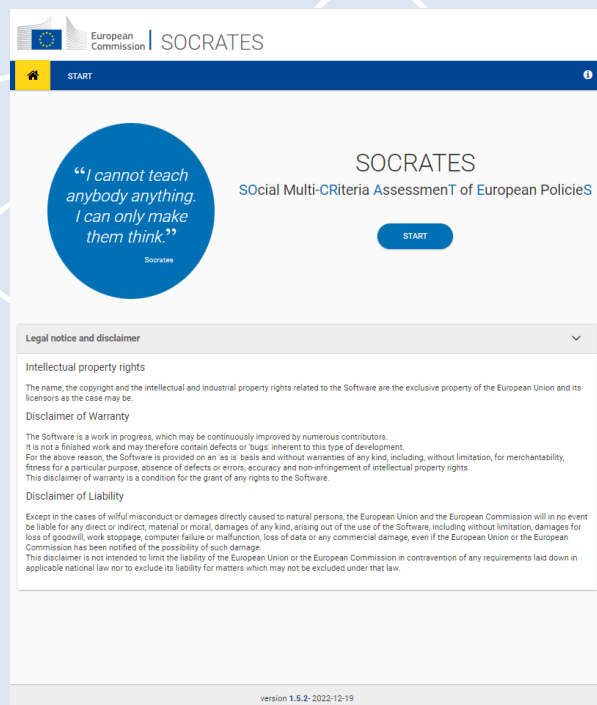
From an operational point of view, the **support of a software tool** makes all the required computations very quick. Currently, the JRC SMCE team is developing a software tool, called **SOCRATES (SOcial multi-CRiteria AssessmentT of European policiesS)**, explicitly designed for impact assessment problems. Three main components constitute the core of SOCRATES: multi-criteria, equity and sensitivity analyses. SOCRATES helps in structuring impact assessment problems in the hierarchy **dimensions, objectives and criteria**, and makes transparent the weighting relations, by also allowing for sensitivity and robustness analysis.

The activities of the **Social Multi-Criteria Evaluation team** include:

- methodological **research** resulting in scientific publications, technical reports and guidelines;
- applied research for the development of software tools, such as **SOCRATES**;
- **support to the policy departments** of the European Commission, known as Directorates-General responsible for different policy areas and international organizations, regarding impact assessments. Completed applications of SMCE and SOCRATES in European Commission impact assessments are documented in the **Commission's Modelling Inventory MIDAS**
- **training courses** on the use of social multi-criteria evaluation for public policy analyses.

The SMCE team collaborates with the main international scientific networks and academic institutions in the field, such as the European Working Group on Multi Criteria Decision Aid.

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SOCRATES web application <https://web.jrc.ec.europa.eu/socrates>

