

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION PROCESS - A SHORT SURVEY

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Abstract:

The participation of citizens in the local administration process means decisions and public measures that correspond to the real needs of the community. This micro-research aims to examine the opinions expressed by the members of the local community in relation to their participation in the local administration process, with applicability at the level of the city of Târgu Neamț. The approach carried out in the pages of this paper showed that the local residents want to get involved in public affairs and services that they believe can be remedied by their participation in decision-making, mainly in areas such as jobs, public lighting, sanitation.

Key-words: local collectivity, citizen participation, local public administration, public affairs, public services

JEL classification: D73, H83

1. INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation in local governance involves the assessment by ordinary citizens of their own needs and their participation in the planning of local projects (Strengthening Citizen Participation in Local Governance, 2023). For citizens to become motivated to participate, they must feel that their voice matters and that they can influence the situation and the course of action. (Ploštajner, Mendeš, 2005, p. 99) Through citizen participation, public policies could be more realistically based on citizen preferences, the public would be more sympathetic to the difficult decisions that public administration authorities must make, and public support could create a less divisive and combative population for government and administration. (Irvin, Stansbury, 2004, p. 55)

At the local administration level, the idea of citizen participation in the government process has a deep meaning. This is because people live in cities, communes and villages, and here: the decisions of the administration have the most visible impact on the people and the contribution of the citizens is obtained more easily, if the administration wants it. (Matei, 2002, p. 22)

The purpose of this micro-research is *to examine the opinions expressed by the members of the local community in relation to their participation in the local administration process, with applicability at the level of the city of Târgu Neamț.*

In order to achieve the previously formulated goal, we aim to achieve the following specific objectives:

O1: highlighting the importance of the relation between community members and local public administration institutions

O2: measuring the degree of involvement of local residents in the local administration process

O3: identification of public affairs that are a concern for members of the local community

O4: determining public services that require local participation for improvement

O5: assessment of the level of trust of community members in local administration authorities.

2. THE MICROSEARCH SAMPLE

Members of the local community from the city of Târgu Neamț participated in the micro-research, the structure of the sample of respondents, by age group, being as follows (see Table no. 1):

Table no. 1. Structure of the sample of the local community members

Sampling base Age categories			Sample		
Age categories	People no.	Percent (%)	Age categories	Respondents no.	Percent (%)
0-19	3.968	22,01%	0-19	13	8,33%
20-29	1.649	9,15%	20-29	99	63,46%
30-39	2.169	12,03%	30-39	18	11,54%
40-49	2.545	14,11%	40-49	15	9,62%
50-59	2.948	16,35%	50-59	10	6,41%
Over 60	4.750	26,35%	Over 60	1	0,64%
TOTAL	18.029	100%	TOTAL	156	100%

Source: own processing according to the data provided by the Population and Housing Census. (2021). Resident population by age group, by counties and municipalities, cities, communes, on December 1, 2021, available at <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-demografice/> [accessed on October 17, 2024]

Data collection took place between January 16 and February 4, 2025, with a total of 175 questionnaires administered, and as a result of the verification, 156 valid questionnaires resulted.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RELATION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS WITH LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITIES

Studying the responses of the members of the local community regarding the importance of the relation with the authorities in the City Hall institution shows that the majority of respondents (88%) declare that such a relation is important (13%) and very important (75%) (see Figure no. 1):

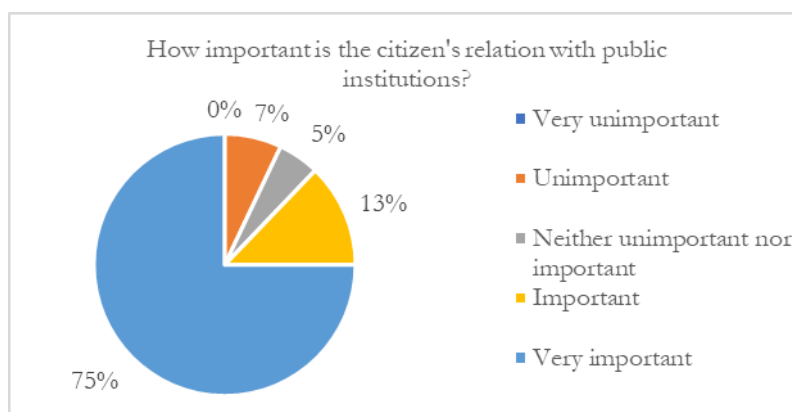


Figure no. 1. The importance of the relation with public institutions

As we can see in the diagram above, for the locals the relation with the public institution of the City Hall matters enormously. The recorded results were predictable, since, at least theoretically, there must always be effective collaboration and communication between the two parties - the local community and the local City Hall.

4. THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS' INTERACTION WITH LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITIES

The answers expressed by the members of the local community to the question *As a citizen of the city of Târgu Neamț, how much do you get involved in the local administration process?* can be viewed in the following figure (see Figure no. 2):

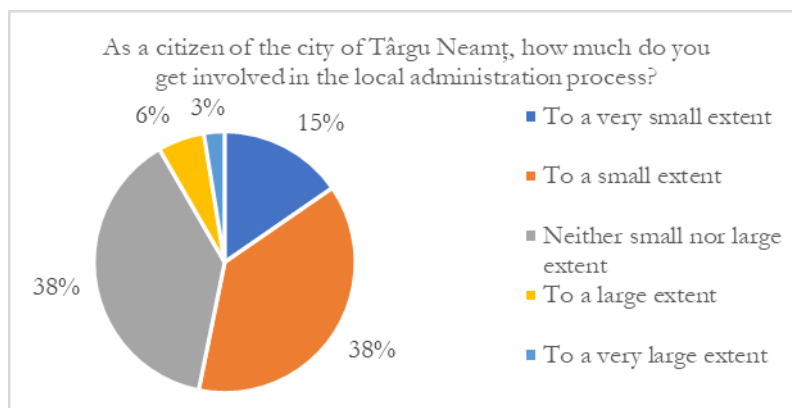


Figure no. 2. The involvement of citizens in the local administration process

From the analysis of the recorded responses, it results that the involvement of local residents in the local administration process is quite low, with over half (53%) of the respondents declaring that they are involved to a small (38%) and very small (15%) extent, compared to only 9% (6%+3%) of community members stating the opposite. It should be noted that a consistent percentage of respondents (38%) adopts a neutral position, ticking the answer option *neither small nor large extent*.

The analysis of the opinion expressed by members of the local community in relation to the variable *request for the services offered by the public administration authorities* in the locality indicates high percentages (77%) for respondents who declare that they use these services often (60%) and very often (17%) (see Figure No. 3):

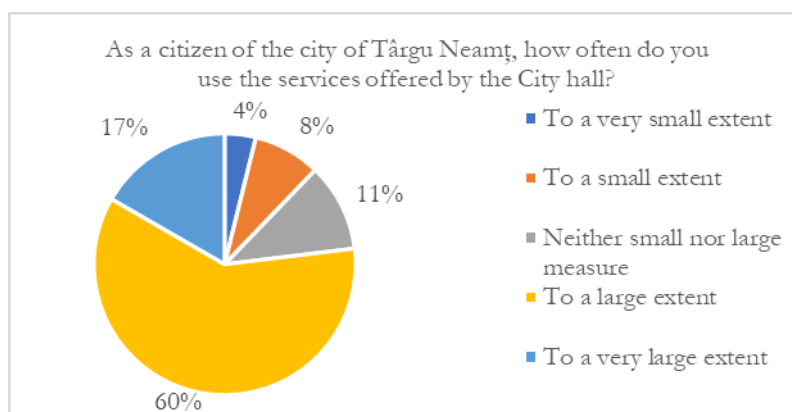


Figure no. 3. The request for public services offered by the City Hall

A possible explanation for these results could be that, to meet their needs, local residents, like any of us, need public services provided by local government authorities. In other words, there is no point in asking what it would mean for each member of the community to individually create the public services they need. It is the administration that succeeds, to a greater or lesser extent, in responding to these common public needs.

Being questioned about *the reaction of City Hall employees when they were approached*, the analysis of the responses of local community members reveals a positive attitude (see Figure no. 4):

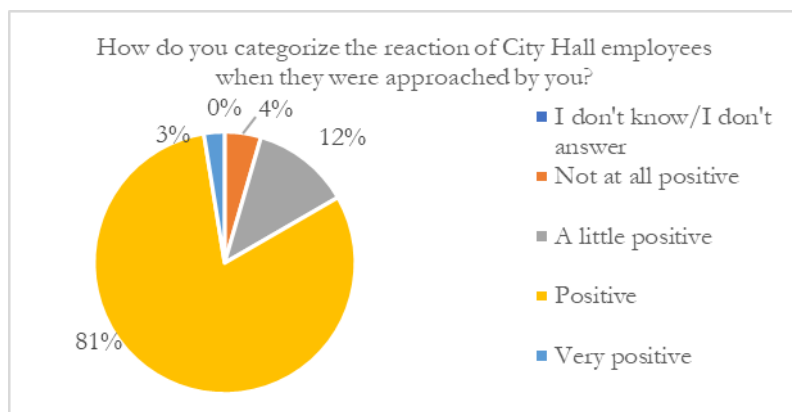


Figure no. 4. The reaction of City Hall employees when they are approached by citizens

The data listed in the figure above are somewhat surprising, since when it comes to how public sector employees react to contact with citizens, as a rule, the latter declare themselves rather dissatisfied, not infrequently criticizing an attitude even hostile. The fact that the majority of respondents (84%) categorize the reaction of City Hall employees as positive (81%) and very positive (3%) proves that at the level of the city of Târgu Neamț, the aforementioned are not confirmed.

5. THE PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN DECISION-MAKING REGARDING PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND SERVICES

The answers given by the locals to the question *In which of the following public affairs at the level of the city of Târgu Neamț do you consider that you have a say as a citizen?* are represented in the following figure (see Figure no. 5):

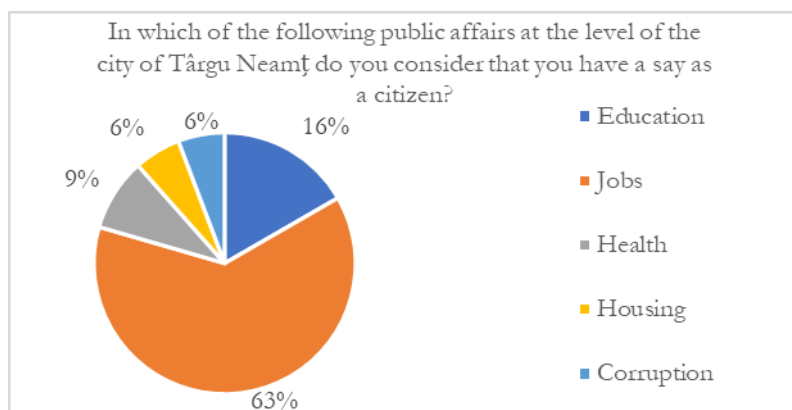


Figure no. 5. The participation of citizens in decision-making on local public affairs

Viewing the graph above shows that one of the most important issues in which members of the local community want to have a say when a public decision is adopted is that of jobs, with a percentage of 63% of respondents who support this. The result does not surprise us, given that the problem of jobs affects society in general and each community in particular, representing at the same time a real cause of the low standard of living. The recorded results also indicate a preoccupation of the community members for education (16%), health (9%), housing (6%) and corruption (6%), also arousing the respondents' interest in participating in public decision-making in these areas.

Regarding the variable *improving public services through citizen participation*, the results obtained are recorded in the following figure (see Figure no. 6):

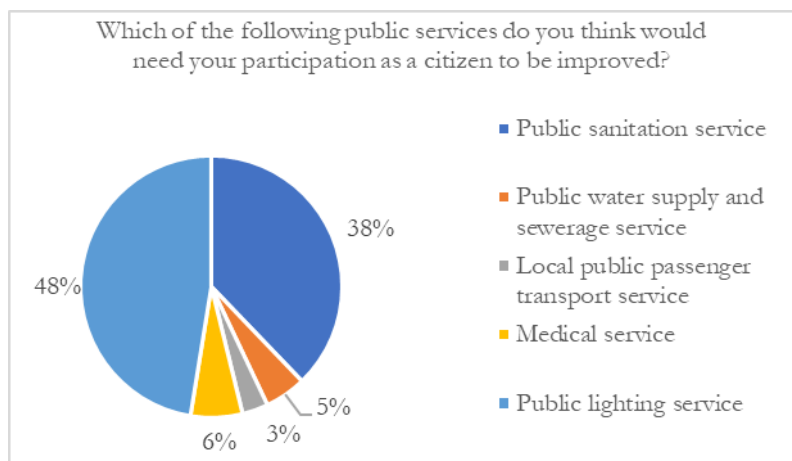


Figure no. 6. Improving public services through citizen participation

As we can see in the previous graph, almost half (48%) of the members of the local community are of the opinion that the public lighting service needs their participation to be improved. Also, a considerable percentage (38%) of the respondents indicated that the sanitation service also needs remediation. For the other public services on the list – the public water supply and sewerage service, the local public passenger transport service and the medical service, lower percentages were recorded (5%, 3%, 6%), a situation which indicates that at the level of the city of Târgu Neamt, these services seem to work efficiently.

6. THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS' TRUST IN LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITIES

Local residents' perception expressed as a percentage to the question *As a citizen, do you trust that the decisions made by local authorities follow the public interests of the community you belong to?* can be found in the following diagram (see Figure no. 7):

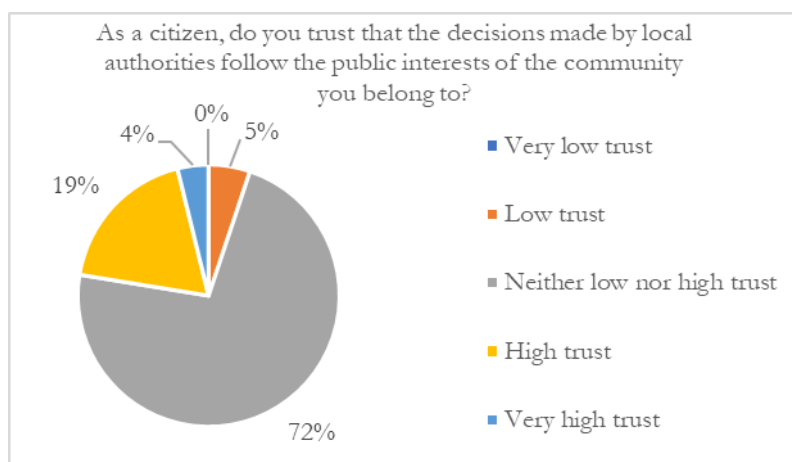


Figure no. 7. The level of trust in local public administration authorities

From the analysis of the data summarized in the graph above, it follows that the largest share of respondents (72%) declare that the trust they show towards the authorities is average, they ticking the answer option neither low nor high trust. It should be noted that for almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the community members who were questioned (23%), trust is high (19%) and very high (4%), compared to the percentage of only 5% that declares the opposite.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above, we can conclude that this micro-research allowed the fulfillment of the advanced goal, namely *the examination of the opinions expressed by the members of the local community in relation to their participation in the local administration process, with applicability at the city of Târgu Neamț*.

The analysis of the answers expressed regarding *the importance of the relation with public institutions* showed the fact that for the majority of respondents, such a relation is extremely important, which could highlight a possible collaboration between the local community and the City Hall in the locality.

The data recorded in relation to the variable of *citizens' involvement in the local administration process* revealed considerable percentages for respondents who declared to get involved a little, respectively who ticked the answer option neither to a small nor to a great extent. These results were predictable, as the respondents, as members of the community, believe that they cannot get involved in a process that does not necessarily depend on them and that they cannot influence.

With reference to *the request for the services offered by the public administration authorities in the locality*, the analysis of the responses demonstrated that, in order to satisfy their needs, the members of the local collective, like any of us, need these services, with the majority of respondents declaring that they use them to an extent large and very large.

We find surprising the results obtained regarding *the reaction of City Hall employees when they are approached by citizens*, the latter declaring themselves satisfied, in the sense that they say, in a majority opinion, that the staff of the institution shows a positive attitude. This view seems to be at odds with the belief that public sector employees behave unfriendly.

The responses of the local residents regarding *the decisions regarding the public affairs in which they want to participate* demonstrated the fact that one of the most important problems is that of jobs. The members of the local community in the city of Târgu Neamț want to have a say when a public decision is adopted regarding jobs in the locality, this problem being a rather general one, at the level of society as a whole, not just at the level of a community, in special.

Regarding the variable *improving public services through citizen participation*, consistent shares were recorded for public lighting and sanitation services. This denotes the fact that at the level of the city of Târgu Neamț the two public services do not correspond to the expectations and needs of the local residents, requiring optimization measures from the local public administration authorities, based on the participation of the community.

The analysis of the data regarding *the level of trust in the local public administration authorities* demonstrated the fact that this level is an average one, with almost 3/4 of the members of the local community stating so. The registered result is beyond expectations, considering the fact that, universally, the intention of public sector authorities to truly serve the public interest, but rather their own interests, is questioned.

Finally, we consider the fact that the opinions expressed by the members of the local community regarding their participation in the local administration process are reasonable. Thus, we can conclude that at the level of the city of Târgu Neamț, the locals want to get involved in public affairs that they believe can be remedied by their participation in decision-making in the respective fields.

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