

THE FUNCTIONALITY OF LOCAL AUTONOMY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: PERCEPTIONS FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CITY HALL

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Abstract:

This micro-research aims to analyze the degree of autonomy identified at the level of local public administration by comparative investigation of perceptions from within – the human resources in the city hall, but also from outside – the local population, with particularization at the level of the Cornu Luncii commune in Suceava County. The study revealed a systemic disconnect between the opinions of the city hall staff and those of the citizens, marked by discrepancies regarding the level of autonomy, institutional trust, administrative transparency and citizen satisfaction. The interpretation of the research results revealed a paradox of autonomy: citizens attribute to the City Hall a great decision-making power and financial resources that the institution declares it does not have, thus generating unrealistic expectations and pressure on the staff. Although the human resources are considered competent, this expertise does not translate into satisfaction for the residents, who remain skeptical and feel alienated from the decision-making process. In addition, the correlation analysis confirmed the existence of positive and statistically significant direct relations between the level of local autonomy and the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems, between the level of administrative transparency and the degree of need for expanding decision-making autonomy at the local level, as well as between the level of financial autonomy and the level of satisfaction with the quality of life in the locality. Overall, the research showed that although decision-making and financial autonomy are crucial for the quality of life, its success depends on increasing transparency to transform administrative expertise into public trust.

Key words: local autonomy, institutional trust, administrative transparency, citizen satisfaction, perception gap, Spearman's rho correlation coefficient

JEL classification: H70, H72, H77, H83

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of an increasingly complex world, local autonomy becomes the vital mechanism through which public administration adapts to the specific needs of each community, where centralized solutions fail. The true power of a local administration lies not in the letter of the law, but in the administrative and financial freedom to transform the needs of citizens into immediate realities. In concise terms, the meaning of local autonomy seems to be explained comprehensively by A. Ladner et al., from whom we learn that it represents "a cornerstone of effective governance and democratic participation" (Ladner et al., 2025).

This micro-research aims to analyze the degree of autonomy identified at the level of local public administration through the comparative evaluation of perceptions from within - of the human resources in the city hall, but also from outside - of the residents, taking as a practical benchmark the administrative-territorial unit of the commune of Cornu Luncii in Suceava County.

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

O1: assessing the level of local decision-making autonomy perceived by the human resources of the city hall and by the local population

O2: analyzing the degree of trust, perceived by both groups, in the institution's capacity to solve community problems by exercising the prerogatives of autonomy

O3: determining the perception of both categories of respondents regarding the level of administrative transparency

O4: identifying the degree of necessity perceived by both groups regarding the extension of decision-making autonomy at the local level

O5: measuring the level of financial autonomy of the City Hall according to the opinions expressed by both human resources respondents and the respondents who are residents of the commune

O6: analyzing the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality according to the perception of both groups of respondents

O7: identifying the statistical correlations between the level of autonomy, institutional trust, administrative transparency, and citizen satisfaction.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is a relatively large amount of literature on local autonomy, but a “mirror” approach to this issue, which would put the city hall staff and the local population face to face, is less debated in specialized studies, although it is precisely this intersection of perspectives that reveals the discrepancy between the vision of the elected officials and the needs of the community. Overcoming this shortcoming, several studies can be identified that are based on surveys or interviews applied to the two groups of respondents in order to empirically examine the extent to which there is or is not a real alignment of perceptions between the decision-making elites and the voters.

In a study using surveys of thousands of Canadians, both politicians and citizens, C. Breton, J. Lucas and Z. Taylor investigate whether there is a consensus between these two groups on increasing the power of local governments. The analysis reveals a striking contrast: politicians are firmly in favor of expanded autonomy, while public support is nuanced and conditioned by political orientation and level of education. A critical finding of the research is that municipal elected officials fail to accurately understand the attitudes of the citizens they represent. (Breton, Lucas, Taylor, 2023, p. 1263)

In another study conducted in Switzerland, N. Keuffer and K. Horber-Papazian state that although most general studies report that local autonomy is relatively high, its degree varies depending on the canton, size and public policy applied. Such studies have been criticized as being too theoretical, so the authors have a bottom-up approach, using the interview method, which highlighted a large difference between formal and effective autonomy (Keuffer, Horber-Papazian, 2020, p. 306).

From another perspective, researchers M. A. Strebel and D. Kübler studied data from a population-based survey of eight Western European metropolitan areas in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom to see what makes people want more autonomy for their locality. Their conclusion is simple: the more attached a citizen is to the place where they live and the more involved they are in their community, the more they will want their locality to have its own decision-making powers, without too much central intervention. Basically, if you love your locality and are connected to your neighbors, you will want your city hall to be as autonomous as possible (M. A. Strebel, D. Kübler, 2021, p. 191).

Showing how fragile autonomy is when it depends solely on the will of the center, the study by Fessha and Kirkby states that although central African governments began, starting in the 1990s, to formally transfer power to regions to stimulate democracy and development, this process was often a facade, hiding a “shadow” recentralization. The analysis of six countries shows that local political and financial autonomy is nullified through indirect mechanisms, with the center often choosing to strengthen small administrations to counter the influence of large, independent regions. (Fessha, Kirkby, 2008, p. 248)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the assumed purpose and objectives, we propose for validation/invalidation the following research hypotheses:

H1: The higher the level of local autonomy perceived by the two groups (City Hall staff and local population), the higher the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems.

H2: As the level of administrative transparency increases, the degree of perceived need (by both groups) for the expansion of decision-making autonomy at the local level also increases.

H3: If the level of financial autonomy of the City Hall (the capacity to manage its own resources without central intervention) is perceived as high, then the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality is also evaluated more positively by both populations.

To achieve the purpose, the specific objectives, as well as to test the hypotheses, the empirical approach is based on two distinct questionnaires, addressed to the following categories:

- Questionnaire A – addressed to the staff of the City Hall institution in Cornu Luncii commune, Suceava county
- Questionnaire B – addressed to the residents of the same administrative-territorial unit: Cornu Luncii commune, Suceava county.

Since the research methodology involves the application of these two questionnaires, it is necessary to investigate two populations, appropriately defined:

- The population comprising the staff of the City Hall institution in Cornu Luncii commune, Suceava county (see Table no. 1)
- The population comprising the inhabitants of the same administrative-territorial unit: Cornu Luncii commune, Suceava county (see Table no. 2).

Table no. 1. The micro-research population representing the staff of the Cornu Luncii commune City Hall, Suceava county

Crt. no.	Staff category		Employees no.	Percent %
1.	Public dignity functions		2	5.56
2.	Public functions	management	1	2.77
		execution	14	38.89
3.	Contractual functions	management	2	5.56
		execution	12	33.33
4.	Positions according to art. III para. 2 of GEO no. 63/2010 (exempt from the maximum number of positions – <i>Education, Health, Insurance and Social Assistance</i>)		3	8.33
5.	Local Police Department		2	5.56
	Total functions in the institution		36	100%

Source: own elaboration based on the Organization Chart of the Cornu Luncii Commune City Hall, available at <https://www.comunacornuluncii.ro/primaria/organigrama/> [accessed on 2.04.2026]

Table no. 2. The micro-research population representing the inhabitants of Cornu Luncii commune, Suceava county

Crt. no.	Age group	People no.	Percent %
1.	Under 20 years	1562	25.29
2.	Between 20-29 years	636	10.30
3.	Between 30-39 years	643	10.41
4.	Between 40-49 years	953	15.43
5.	Between 50-59 years	847	13.71
6.	Between 60-69 years	666	10.78
7.	Over 70 years	870	14.08
	Total	6,177	100%

Source: own elaboration based on data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, 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 3.04.2026]

Given the contrasting sizes of the two investigated groups, the sampling strategy is adapted to the specifics of each. As for the City Hall staff, given the small size of the reference population ($N = 36$), we opted for an exhaustive investigation (census type), requesting the participation of the entire specialized apparatus to guarantee the accuracy and depth of the internal analysis. For the local population ($N = 6,177$) at which level we are going to carry out the external analysis, we resorted to a stratified sample of 162 people, the criterion according to which we perform the stratification being the “age group” of the respondents (see Table no. 3).

Table no. 3. Composition of the Sample defined for the residents of Cornu Luncii commune, Suceava county

Crt. no.	Sampling base local population			Local population sample		
	Age group	People no.	Percent %	Age group	People no.	Percent %
1.	Under 20 years	1562	25.29	Under 20 years	41	25.31
2.	Between 20-29 years	636	10.30	Between 20-29 years	17	10.49
3.	Between 30-39 years	643	10.41	Between 30-39 years	17	10.49
4.	Between 40-49 years	953	15.43	Between 40-49 years	26	16.05
5.	Between 50-59 years	847	13.71	Between 50-59 years	22	13.58
6.	Between 60-69 years	666	10.78	Between 60-69 years	17	10.49
7.	Over 70 years	870	14.08	Over 70 years	22	13.58
	Total	6,177	100%	Total sample	162	100%

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. THE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE CITY HALL AND THE COMMUNE POPULATION

The answers recorded to the question *To what extent do you consider that the City Hall where you work/in your locality has the freedom to act independently of decisions made at the central level (Government/Ministries)?* show a major discrepancy in perception between the “inside” and the “outside” of the city hall institution. Human resources declare a pessimistic perception, the overwhelming majority focusing on the answers *To a small extent* (42.42%) and *To a moderate extent* (51.52%). They feel that autonomy is low or at most average. Only a negligible percentage (6.06%) sees minimal autonomy (*Not at all*). On the contrary, the local population has a surprisingly optimistic perception. All their answers focus on the answers *To a large extent* (54.32%) and *To a very large extent* (45.68%), with resident respondents considering that the city hall has a large or total freedom of action with respect to the center (see Figure no. 1):

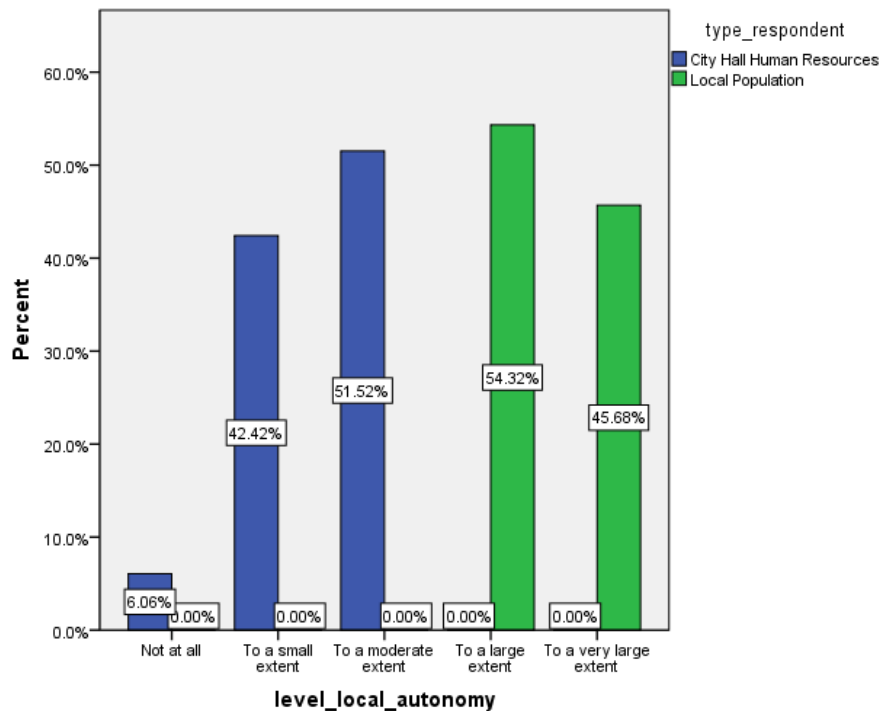


Figure no. 1. The level of local autonomy perceived by the two groups of respondents

Source: own elaboration

These results could be explained by the fact that: on the one hand, citizens tend to believe that the city hall has full powers, probably because they see the final result (works, local decisions) and are not aware of the bureaucratic or legislative constraints at the central level, and on the other hand, administrative staff, being directly involved in legal and financial processes, feel much more acutely the dependence on the Government or ministries. They know that, without central approvals or funds, freedom of action is limited.

When asked about *the degree of confidence in the institution's capacity to solve community problems*, the analysis of the answers of the two groups reveals a situation opposite to that of the previous question: this time, the city hall staff is much more optimistic than the local population. Human resources have high confidence in their own capacity to solve problems, with over 90% choosing the answers *To a large extent* (54.55%) and *To a very large extent* (36.36%). They consider that the city hall has the necessary expertise, which is natural, considering that they are the ones who directly handle the administrative instruments. Only a very small percentage (9.09%) has moderate confidence (the answer *To a moderate extent*). Citizens have a much more reserved perception, being at the opposite pole, with all the population's answers stopping at the answers *To a small extent* (49.38%) and *To a moderate extent* (50.62%) (see Figure no. 2):

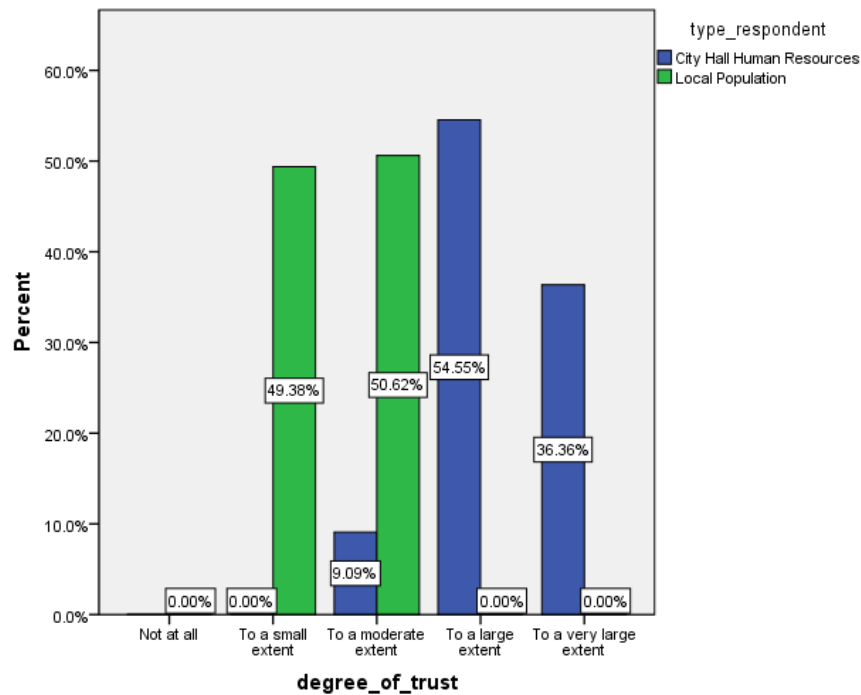


Figure no. 2. The degree of confidence in the institution's capacity to solve community problems

Source: own elaboration

The recorded data, as well as the visualization of the graph, show that there is a discrepancy between what employees *know* they can do (positive self-assessment) and what citizens *see* or *feel* is happening in reality (negative external assessment). The local population may not be aware of the real expertise of the staff or of the budgetary limitations that prevent the use of that expertise, evaluating the institution strictly through the lens of unresolved problems.

The investigation of the perception of *the level of administrative transparency* presents a new major discrepancy, this time in favor of transparency perceived from within. The city hall staff evaluates transparency at a level of excellence, almost 94% giving the answers *To a large extent* (42.42%) and *To a very large extent* (51.52%) and only a tiny percentage (6.06%) declaring a moderate opinion (the answer *To a moderate extent*). From the administrative perspective, the processes seem to be completely visible and explained. Human resources, being the creators of the decisions, understand their logic and consider that this is obvious to others as well. Citizens have a much more critical and limited view of transparency, the majority of the answers being *To a small extent* (38.89%) and *To a moderate extent* (50.62%). There is a group of 10.49% who consider transparency to be minimal (the answer *Not at all*) (see Figure no. 3):

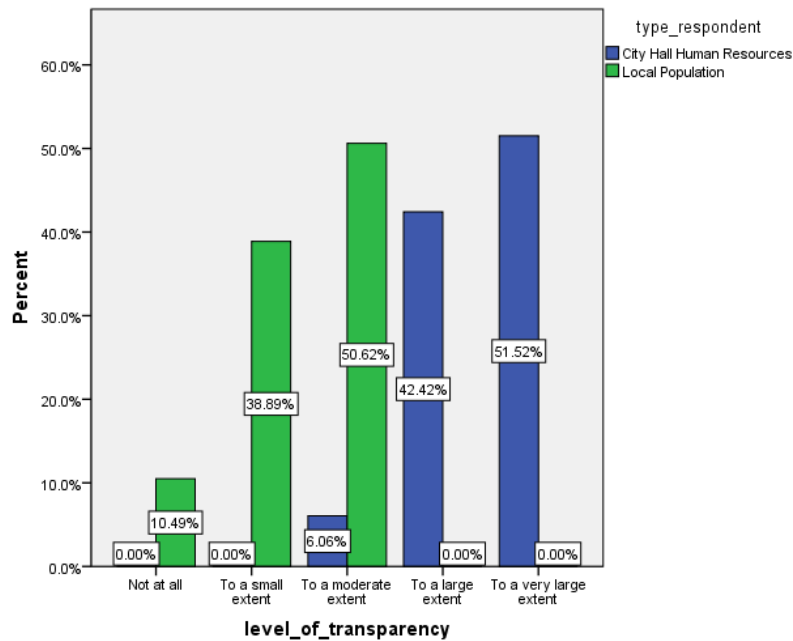


Figure no. 3. The level of administrative transparency

Source: own elaboration

The analysis of the responses therefore reveals that there is a difference between publishing a document (what city hall staff considers transparency) and making the content understandable to the public (what citizens expect).

A major difference of opinion between the two groups is also observed regarding *the need to expand the decision-making autonomy* of the City Hall. Human Resources almost unanimously agree, with a massive 90.91% considering this to be *Very necessary*, the remaining 9.09% opting for the answer *Necessary*. In the case of the local population, opinions are much more divided and reserved. Only 48.77% (less than half) consider the measure *Very necessary*, a significant percentage of 40.74% consider it only *Slightly necessary*, and almost 10% do not consider it *Not at all necessary* (see Figure no. 4):

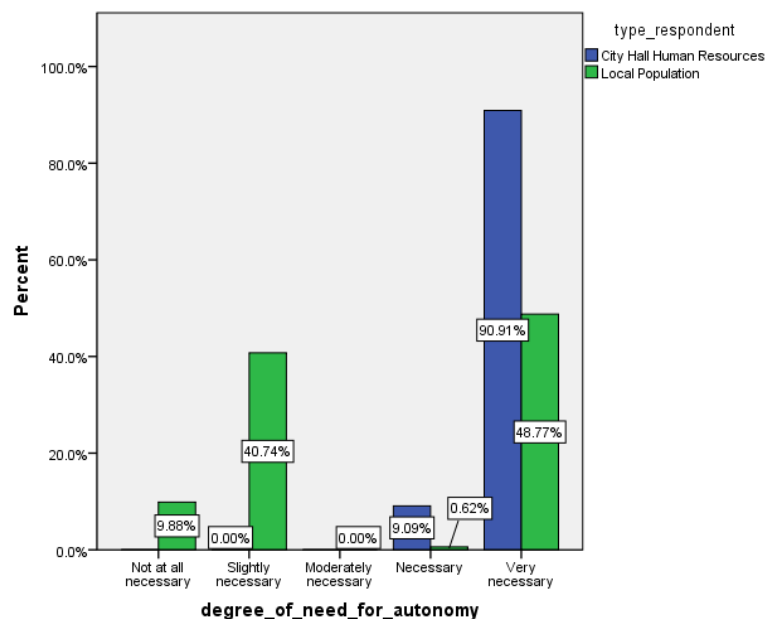


Figure no. 4. The degree of need perceived by both groups regarding the expansion of decision-making autonomy at the local level

Source: own elaboration

The recorded results attest to the fact that there is a strong internal consensus in the City Hall for expanding autonomy, while the local community is much more skeptical or cautious about this idea.

Studying the answers regarding *the level of financial autonomy of the City Hall* shows an interesting reversal of perspectives compared to the previous question. If before the City Hall wanted more power, now it is much more skeptical than citizens about its own resources. A percentage of 42.42% of the city hall staff believes that the institution cannot rely at all (*Not at all*) on its own resources for investments, and the remaining 57.58% believe that this is possible only to a small extent (*To a small extent*). Citizens seem to have much greater confidence in the capacity of local taxes to support development. Almost half of them (49.38%) believe that the City Hall can rely on its own resources to a large extent (*To a large extent*), while the remaining 50.62% opt for the answer *To a small extent* (see Figure no. 5):

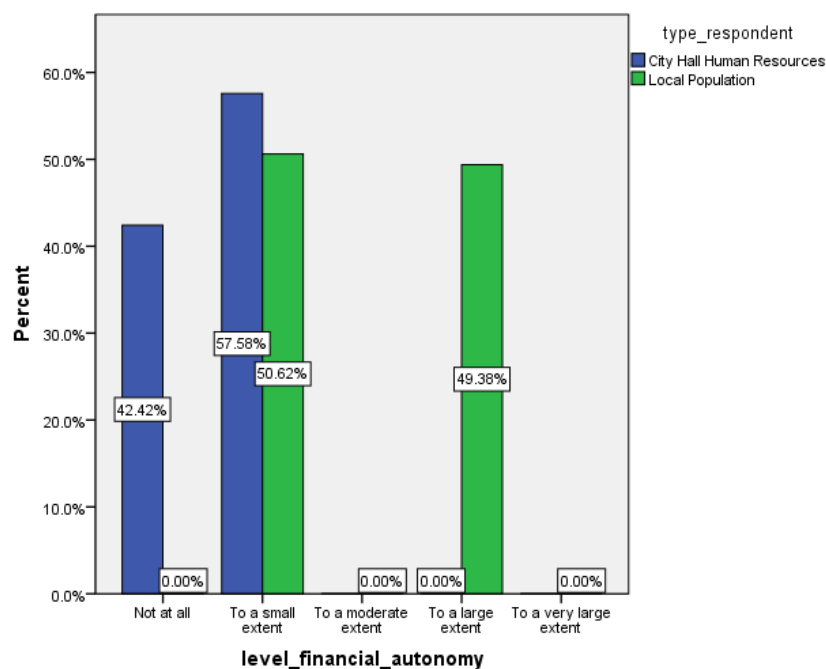


Figure no. 5. The level of financial autonomy of the City Hall

Source: own elaboration

The recorded data shows that, although both groups admit a financial dependence on the center, the local population is more optimistic, overestimating the financial power of local taxes, while the administrative reality, known to human resources, confirms a chronic dependence on government allocations.

The analysis of the answers expressed to the question *To what extent do you consider that citizens are satisfied/ are you as a citizen satisfied with the quality of public services and local infrastructure in relation to the resources available to the locality?* highlights a total polarization of opinions, what the City Hall believes about citizens' satisfaction differs from what they feel in reality. The institution's staff is extremely optimistic. They are convinced that citizens are Satisfied (51.52%) or even Very satisfied (48.48%) with the services offered. The responses of the local population completely refute the expectations of human resources in the City Hall. The overwhelming majority of citizens declare themselves only Slightly satisfied (51.85%) or Moderately satisfied (48.15%) (see Figure no. 6):

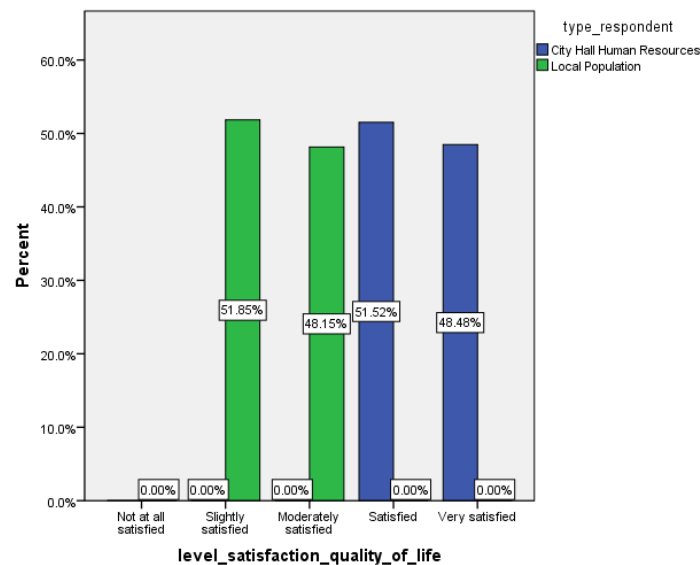


Figure no. 6. The level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality

Source: own elaboration

The recorded results highlight the fact that the institution not only does not provide services at the level of expectations, but does not even realize that citizens are dissatisfied, which blocks any attempt to improve infrastructure or public services.

4.2. THE CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS BETWEEN RESEARCH VARIABLES

Based on the descriptive analysis, we proceeded to empirically test the three formulated hypotheses, using a methodology focused on the correlation between the identified variables.

To verify *the research hypothesis H1*, we correlated the items referring to the variables *the level of local autonomy* and *the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems*, according to the results recorded at the level of the two groups of respondents. The analysis of the Spearman's rho correlation coefficients and the corresponding Sig. values shows that the variable *the level of local autonomy* correlates directly positively and with a strong intensity with the variable *the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems* (at the level of human resources in the city hall: $r_s=0.782$, $p < 0.01$; at the level of the local population: $r_s=0.906$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table no. 4):

Table no. 4. The correlation between the level of local autonomy and the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems.

Correlations				
City Hall Human Resources			level_local_autonomy	degree_of_trust
Spearman's rho	level_local_autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.782**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	33	33
	degree_of_trust	Correlation Coefficient	.782**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	33	33
Local Population			level_local_autonomy	degree_of_trust
Spearman's rho	level_local_autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.906**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	162	162
	degree_of_trust	Correlation Coefficient	.906**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	162	162
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own elaboration

City hall staff who tend to perceive a high level of local autonomy tend to have higher levels of trust. Among citizens, the connection is even closer than among city hall human resources. The more autonomy the population perceives at the local level, the higher the level of trust increases directly proportionally. These results **confirm the research hypothesis H1** according to which increased local autonomy is associated with a high level of trust, both among city hall staff and among citizens.

In order **to validate/invalidate H2**, we continued with the correlation of the items regarding the variables **the level of administrative transparency** and **the degree of need for expanding local decision-making autonomy**, according to the responses expressed by both the staff of the city hall and the inhabitants of the commune. The effect of **the level of administrative transparency** on **the degree of need for expanding local decision-making autonomy** is shown by recording a positive direct correlation in these two variables (at the level of human resources in the city hall: $r_s=0.480$, $p = 0.005$ below the threshold of 0.01; at the level of the local population: $r_s=0.971$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table no. 5):

Table no. 5. The correlation between the level of administrative transparency and the degree of need for expanding decision-making autonomy at the local level

Correlations				
City Hall Human Resources			level_of_transparency	degree_of_need_for_autonomy
Spearman's rho	level_of_transparency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.480**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.005
		N	33	33
	degree_of_need_for_autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	.480**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.
		N	33	33
Local Population			level_of_transparency	degree_of_need_for_autonomy
Spearman's rho	level_of_transparency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.971**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	162	162
	degree_of_need_for_autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	.971**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	162	162
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own elaboration

For the city hall staff, the correlation is of moderate intensity, as the institution becomes more transparent, the desire for more autonomy also increases, but the link is not decisive. There are other factors (probably of a legislative or political nature) that influence this need. Among citizens, the correlation is extremely strong (almost perfect), transparency and the need for autonomy being inextricably linked. The more open and transparent they perceive the city hall to be, the more convinced they are that it deserves and needs extended decision-making autonomy. Based on these results, **the research hypothesis H2** according to which as the level of administrative transparency increases, the degree of perceived need (by both groups) for the extension of decision-making autonomy at the local level also increases **is confirmed**.

Research hypothesis H3 is verified by correlating the items referring to the variables **the level of financial autonomy** and **the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality** in accordance with the perceptions expressed by both human resources respondents and residents of the commune. Continuing the correlational analysis, we observe that there is a direct positive relation between these two variables (at the level of human resources in the city hall: $r_s=0.833$, $p < 0.01$; at the level of the local population: $r_s=0.951$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table no. 6):

Table no. 6. The correlation between the level of financial autonomy of the City Hall and the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality

Correlations				
City Hall Human Resources			level_financial_auto nomy	level_satisfaction_qu ality_of_life
Spearman's rho	level_financial_a utonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.833**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	33	33
	level_satisfaction _quality_of_life	Correlation Coefficient	.833**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	33	33
Local Population			level_financial_auto nomy	level_satisfaction_qu ality_of_life
Spearman's rho	level_financial_a utonomy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.951**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	162	162
	level_satisfaction _quality_of_life	Correlation Coefficient	.951**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	162	162

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own elaboration

For the city hall staff, the connection is very strong, showing that they are convinced that financial autonomy is the engine of citizen satisfaction. They believe that when the city hall has the freedom to manage its money, citizens “see” this in the quality of services and infrastructure. In the case of citizens, the correlation is almost perfect, the extremely high value indicating that they associate the success of the community (quality of life) almost exclusively with local financial power. In their eyes, a city hall that “has the money in hand” is a city hall that offers a better life. These results **confirm the research hypothesis H3** according to which if the level of financial autonomy of the City Hall is perceived as high, then the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality is also evaluated more positively by both populations.

Following the data analysis and interpretation of the results obtained, all **three hypotheses were validated**, thus confirming the proposed causal relations and demonstrating the vital role of local autonomy in increasing institutional performance and public satisfaction. The validation of these hypotheses attests to the fact that a city hall that manages resources and decisions independently and transparently manages not only to streamline the administrative act, but also to strengthen the bond of trust with its citizens, directly reflected in the positive perception of the quality of life in the community.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted in the above pages allows the formulation of relevant conclusions regarding the central role of decisional and financial autonomy in consolidating a public administration oriented towards the needs of beneficiaries. From such a direction, we can conclude that the present scientific approach made it possible to achieve the purpose, analyzing from a comparative perspective – inside the city hall: human resources / outside the city hall: citizens – the degree of autonomy at the level of local public administration in the commune of Cornu Luncii in Suceava County.

As a result of *the descriptive analysis* of the perceptions of human resources in the City Hall and the commune's population, the research revealed the following:

The study of opinions expressed in relation to the variable *the level of local autonomy* showed that, while the city hall staff feels conditioned by the "center", citizens attribute to the local institution a much greater decision-making power than that exercised in reality. This discrepancy can generate unrealistic expectations from the population and unjustified pressure on the human resources of the local administrative apparatus.

Regarding the variable *the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems*, the analysis revealed a role reversal with respect to the perception of autonomy explained previously. Thus, if we make the connection with the level of perceived autonomy, it is found that although the population believes that the city hall is autonomous (has power), it does not trust that the city hall also has the capacity to use that power. While the administrative apparatus is convinced of its competence, citizens do not feel this expertise in solving concrete problems. This discrepancy suggests that, although the city hall "handles the tools", the final result does not meet the expectations of the population, generating a deficit of external trust.

The results recorded in relation to the variable *the level of administrative transparency* highlighted the fact that, on the one hand, human resources know the procedures so well that they find it impossible for them not to be clear to anyone else, and on the other hand, citizens feel alienated from the decision-making process, although they can see the results, they do not understand *how* and *why* certain decisions were made, which causes a decrease in trust (previous data).

The investigation of the perceptions expressed regarding *the need to expand local decision-making autonomy* has again revealed a divergence between the vision of the administrative apparatus and that of the citizens, namely a massive internal consensus in contrast to a significant external hesitation. Although employees want a "free hand" to work efficiently, citizens do not seem willing to grant more power to an institution in which (according to previous data) they do not trust and which they perceive as opaque. For the citizen, more local autonomy without transparency and clear results could only mean weaker control over local power.

Regarding *the level of financial autonomy*, the analysis carried out showed that there is an underestimation of resources by the administrative apparatus in opposition to an overestimation of them by the citizens. While the City Hall sees itself as chronically underfunded and dependent on external allocations, the citizen considers that local resources are sufficient. This misunderstanding of the revenue structure explains why the population is demanding: they believe that the City Hall has the money, but (according to previous data on transparency) they do not see where it goes or how it is managed.

The study of perceptions expressed in relation to the variable *the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality* revealed a critical lack of real feedback. The city hall operates under the false premise of success, being completely disconnected from the dissatisfaction of the citizens. This disconnection of the public institution is dangerous, because it blocks any attempt at reform or improvement: if the staff believe that everything is "very good", they will not see reasons for change, while social frustration continues to grow, with the inhabitants expressing a generalized dissatisfaction.

As a result of *the statistical analysis performed using the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient*, the research highlighted the following:

The research hypothesis H1 according to which *The higher the level of local autonomy perceived by the two groups, the higher the degree of trust in the institution's capacity to solve community problems was validated*. A strong correlation was found in the case of city hall staff ($r_s=0.782$, $p < 0.01$) and a very strong/almost perfect correlation in the case of the local population ($r_s=0.906$, $p < 0.01$). Although both groups have high scores, the difference of 0.124 between the coefficients can be explained by the following: human resources know the "internal kitchen", knowing that autonomy comes with bureaucratic responsibilities, lack of funds or political pressures, so their trust is tempered by direct experience with the difficulties of the system; for citizens, local autonomy is often synonymous with visible results (asphalt, parks, fast services), so if they see that the city hall "can do things" without depending on the center, their trust increases explosively.

The research hypothesis H2 according to which *As the level of administrative transparency increases, the degree of perceived need (by both groups) for the extension of decision-making autonomy at the local level also increases* **was confirmed**. A moderate intensity correlation was recorded in the case of human resources in the city hall ($r_s=0.480$, $p = 0.005$ below the threshold of 0.01) and a very strong/almost perfect intensity correlation in the case of commune residents ($r_s=0.971$, $p < 0.01$). The difference of 0.491 between the two groups suggests different perspectives on control mechanisms: for the city hall staff, transparency is a procedure (e.g., publishing decisions), while the need for autonomy is a work necessity (e.g., being able to hire people or allocate budgets without approval from the center), for them, autonomy is necessary regardless of how transparent the institution is, therefore the correlation is weaker; the population conditions autonomy with transparency, if the city hall "plays with its cards on the table", citizens become supporters of expanding decision-making power at the local level, on the other hand, without transparency, they fear corruption, but high transparency eliminates this psychological barrier.

The research hypothesis H3 according to which *If the level of financial autonomy of the City Hall is perceived as high, then the level of satisfaction regarding the quality of life in the locality is also evaluated more positively by both populations* **was validated**. From the analysis of the correlation coefficients and the corresponding Sig. values, it was found that there is an inter-group consensus: human resources believe that financial autonomy brings satisfaction to citizens ($r_s=0.833$, $p < 0.01$), and citizens confirm this through their own correlation ($r_s=0.951$, $p < 0.01$). This "agreement" between the two groups of respondents strengthens the validity of the research and solidly argues the need for local autonomy. At the level of human resources, although the correlation is very strong, they are aware of budgetary limitations even under conditions of autonomy (e.g., inflation, maintenance costs). The city hall staff knows that money doesn't solve absolutely everything, which is why the correlation is slightly lower than for the local population. For the citizen, financial autonomy immediately translates into asphalt, lighting, schools and hospitals, etc. Since these elements define "quality of life", the statistical connection is close to the theoretical maximum of 1,000.

Overall, the research revealed a systemic disconnect between the administrative apparatus and citizens, defined by diametrically opposed perceptions of the level of autonomy, institutional trust, administrative transparency, and citizen satisfaction. The scientific approach demonstrated that local, decision-making and financial autonomy is the central pillar of the commune's development, but the perception of it is fractured: while the city hall staff wants to expand autonomy to eliminate central blockages, citizens are reluctant, conditioning any additional power on concrete results and decision-making clarity. There is a major discrepancy in terms of resources: the administration feels financially constrained and dependent on the center, while the population overestimates the local budget, generating constant pressure for investments that the institution considers impossible to support from its own revenues alone. Validation of the statistical hypothesis H3 confirmed that financial autonomy is perceived as the direct source of quality of life (correlations of 0.833 and 0.951), with a rare consensus between human resources and citizens: the more control the city hall has over its own money, the more satisfied the community is. According to the study, we concluded that expanding autonomy is not just an administrative necessity, but a condition of trust; however, for this increased power to be legitimized by citizens, it must produce a visible change in solving local problems, going beyond the simple management of bureaucratic tools.

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