

Local government action and happiness. Case of Romania

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Abstract

People are pursuing happiness, they want to experience happiness, which is a matter of intense debate in philosophy, psychology and even economics. This paper, however does not fit into this type of analysis, being a very pragmatic approach to local development priorities and objectives setting by local governments based on development strategies.

Research is based on the assumption that people want to be happy, and local governments have the skills and resources to contribute to this desideratum, and traditionally local development goals set by local public authorities focus on items perceived as issues, not on the sources of happiness for the population.

This paper aims to identify a method for local development objectives setting based predominantly on the sources of people's happiness and the specific objectives are: to present the competences\powers of the local public administration in Romania, to conduct a questionnaire based survey to identify the sources of happiness for the people in the Bucharest-Ifov metropolitan area over which the local public administration can intervene, comparing the expectations of the investigated target group with the actions and development objectives proposed by the local public authorities.

Keywords: local public administration, local development, development objectives.

1. Introduction

Numerous researches on happiness have brought to the forefront the non-financial component and the fact that elements such as loyalty, civic involvement or intrinsic motivation are important for people (Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer, 2002). Friends and health seem to be the main sources of happiness (Phillip Inman, 2016)... But things differ significantly depending on gender, age, ethnicity (see WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2017). This finding, as well as the sound studies of economists on the factors that make people happy (... seeking the best economic measures to find

people's happiness – Dixon, 1997) have brought for the debate the possibility of changing public policies by reference to the elements which make people happy (Richard Layard, 2005): public policy of happiness (Bhutan state) or public policies that take into account those elements that make people happy.

- While from an economic perspective, there are many studies, debates, analyzes of the triggers of happiness, while public policy experts have studied the ways of combining them with the elements of happiness, public management has been less concerned with this issue. How public administration contributes to happiness is an area open for inquiry (Meynhardt, Timo, Strathoff Pepe, Brieger Steven A.,2015).
- Therefore, natural questions arise, to which we try to find answers by analyzing some administrative actions in Romania:
 - can public administration, especially at local level, contribute to people's happiness?
 - how, in what way is this contribution coming together?

2. Scope of action for the local public administration in Romania

Under the Romanian legal framework (Local Public Administration Law No. 215/2001, republished, art. 3), the local community means all the inhabitants of the administrative-territorial unit.

Public administration authorities embodying local autonomy in communes, towns and municipalities are the local, communal, municipal and city councils, as decision-making authorities, and mayors as executive authorities. The Local Council has the initiative and decides, under the law, on all matters of local interest, except for those that are assigned by law in the competence of other local or central public administration authorities.

Local public authorities provide public services at local level in the following areas:

- Local Taxes and Charges (Record keeping, Taxing, Enforcement, Collection, Foreclosure and Tax Inspection)
- Vital Records and Statistics Register
 - Agricultural Register, Land Fund and Cadaster
 - Land planning and urban planning
 - Emergency situations (including lifeguard and rescue)
 - Inclusive education and auxiliary services for education
 - Public health
 - Culture, cults, sports and leisure
 - Social assistance and guardianship
 - Water and sewerage
 - Public lighting
 - Sanitation and waste management
 - Production, transport, distribution and supply of centralized heating

- Authorization of local passenger transport
- Public order and peace
- Circulation on public roads
- Disciplinary construction and street display
- Environment protection
- Authorization, control of commercial activity
- Landscaping, management of green spaces, public parks and gardens
- Security of urban furniture
- Maintenance, repair, operation of public roads
- Organizing and functioning of farmer's markets
- Construction and operation of public car parking
- Administration of the housing stock
- Protection of stray animals
- Landscaping, maintenance and exploitation of lakes, public swimming pools and the rest and treatment spas/facilities
- The establishment, organization and operation of public baths, gyms and physiotherapy facilities, sports halls and sports fields, of skating rinks, ski slopes and ski cableway installations, camping sites;
- Thermal rehabilitation of blocks of flats

3. Sources of happiness for people in the Bucharest -Ilfov metropolitan area

Under this paper research framework, we selected four neighboring localities in the Bucharest-Ilfov metropolitan area, Romania: Popești-Leordeni, Jilava, Magurele and Bragadiru. For all four localities, I coordinated the development of local development strategies for 2015-2017. Overall, the four localities have a population of 60173 (source: National Institute of Statistics).

- The analysis involved the application of a questionnaire for 382 people (4.5% error at <https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>). The survey target group was structured by gender, age groups, and education level.

The survey aimed at identifying the sources of happiness and those that generated problems for the respondents in the four localities. These were correlated with the projects proposed by the public authorities through the local development strategies to find to what extent these strategies were underlined by the inhabitants sources of happiness (offensive strategies) or from local problems identified (defensive strategies).

In the four strategies, the proposed projects are structured as follows:

| Locality | Total number of projects proposed | No. of projects on local economic development | No. of projects on environmental protection | No. of projects on social development | No. of land-use and transport infrastructure projects | No. of projects on the development of public institutions | No. of education and training projects | No. of projects on culture, arts, sports and leisure |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Măgurele | 73 | 5 | 15 | 10 | 17 | 7 | 9 | 10 |
| Jilava | 66 | 4 | 11 | 9 | 19 | 9 | 9 | 5 |
| Bragadiru | 64 | 5 | 11 | 12 | 18 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| Popești-Leordeni | 61 | 4 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 8 |

Under the survey conducted, the sources of happiness for the inhabitants of the four localities have been identified as:

Which of the following is a source of happiness for you?

| | Very much | Quite | Rather | Little | Very little | Not at all | Do not know/ no opinion |
|--|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|------------|----------------------------|
| Help children in need | 53.04% | 34.25% | 8.29% | 2.21% | 1.10% | 0.00% | 1.10% |
| Support people with no income | 19.32% | 26.14% | 35.80% | 8.52% | 6.25% | 2.84% | 1.14% |
| Help the disabled | 36.36% | 35.80% | 21.02% | 3.98% | 1.70% | 0.57% | 0.57% |
| Help the elderly | 39.55% | 31.07% | 24.29% | 3.39% | 1.13% | 0.00% | 0.56% |
| Care for stray animals | 15.61% | 21.39% | 26.01% | 14.45% | 8.09% | 12.72% | 1.73% |
| Intervene in special circumstances, to help other people (in case of fire, calamity, etc.) | 36.57% | 37.71% | 16.57% | 4.00% | 2.29% | 1.14% | 1.71% |
| Attend classes to learn new things | 56.50% | 33.90% | 7.91% | 1.13% | 0.56% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Support ailing people | 31.25% | 37.50% | 23.86% | 2.84% | 3.41% | 0.00% | 1.14% |
| Go to the theater | 30.29% | 29.14% | 33.14% | 5.71% | 1.14% | 0.57% | 0.00% |
| Visit museums | 22.99% | 34.48% | 31.61% | 8.62% | 2.30% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Go to cinema | 26.74% | 33.14% | 29.07% | 8.72% | 1.74% | 0.00% | 0.58% |
| Visit exhibitions | 16.67% | 35.63% | 33.33% | 10.92% | 2.87% | 0.57% | 0.00% |
| Go to concerts, performances | 33.33% | 33.91% | 24.71% | 6.32% | 0.57% | 1.15% | 0.00% |
| Go to the church | 10.29% | 22.29% | 27.43% | 17.14% | 11.43% | 10.29% | 1.14% |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Walking /sightseeing | 21.05% | 38.01% | 30.41% | 7.60% | 2.34% | 0.58% | 0.00% |
| Walk in the park | 37.93% | 33.91% | 17.82% | 7.47% | 1.72% | 1.15% | 0.00% |
| Work out | 28.98% | 25.57% | 30.68% | 9.09% | 2.84% | 2.84% | 0.00% |
| Attend sport events | 16.18% | 21.97% | 25.43% | 17.34% | 10.40% | 8.67% | 0.00% |
| Take part in competitions | 9.20% | 20.69% | 33.33% | 18.39% | 8.62% | 8.62% | 1.15% |
| Ride the bike | 18.60% | 18.60% | 26.74% | 13.95% | 6.40% | 14.53% | 1.16% |
| Roller skating | 5.23% | 13.37% | 14.53% | 16.86% | 9.88% | 35.47% | 4.65% |
| Go to a picnic | 15.03% | 21.97% | 31.21% | 14.45% | 10.98% | 5.78% | 0.58% |
| Go to the swimming pool | 27.91% | 29.07% | 19.77% | 10.47% | 6.40% | 5.81% | 0.58% |
| Going out to clubs and restaurants | 9.83% | 21.39% | 34.68% | 12.72% | 10.40% | 10.40% | 0.58% |
| Play Backgammon, play cards | 8.09% | 11.56% | 33.53% | 20.81% | 10.98% | 14.45% | 0.58% |
| Read | 42.61% | 37.50% | 17.05% | 2.84% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Organize children activities | 20.23% | 28.32% | 27.17% | 9.83% | 5.78% | 6.36% | 2.31% |
| Protect people in difficulty | 25.86% | 40.23% | 27.01% | 2.87% | 1.72% | 0.57% | 1.72% |
| Get involved in civic activities | 21.84% | 33.91% | 36.78% | 5.17% | 0.00% | 1.15% | 1.15% |
| Gardening | 30.68% | 31.25% | 21.02% | 7.39% | 5.68% | 3.98% | 0.00% |
| Visit my relatives | 13.45% | 32.75% | 31.58% | 12.28% | 7.02% | 1.17% | 1.75% |
| Visit my friends | 19.65% | 46.82% | 25.43% | 5.78% | 1.16% | 0.00% | 1.16% |
| Go shopping | 22.81% | 28.07% | 30.41% | 11.70% | 2.34% | 4.09% | 0.58% |
| Chatting with the neighbors | 6.90% | 14.94% | 41.38% | 20.11% | 9.77% | 6.32% | 0.57% |
| Working | 32.57% | 37.71% | 24.00% | 3.43% | 0.00% | 1.71% | 0.57% |

Therefore, the main sources of happiness for the targeted group are:

- supporting children in need/people in difficult situations/people with disabilities
 - attend various forms of education and training
 - go to a park
 - reading
- going to concerts/shows

For the items identified as priorities, local public authorities in Romania may intervene with the following types of actions, according to the current legal framework:

| | Types of actions that can be performed by the local public administration (other than those established by mandatory rules such as child allowances, allowances for disabled people, etc., which are part of the current local public administration) | The extent to which these actions are found in local development strategies (number of proposed projects / actions) | | | |
|---|---|---|----------|------------------|-----------|
| | | Jilava | Măgurele | Popesti Leordeni | Bragadiru |
| - supporting children in need / people in difficult situations / people with disabilities | - organizing volunteer programs - concluding partnerships with NGOs - organizing voluntary service for emergencies - financial aid for different disadvantaged categories - setting up centers for the protection of categories in difficulty | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| - attend various forms of education and training | - organization of training, qualification, re-qualification training programs, either directly or in partnership - organizing job fairs | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| - go to a park | - parks landscaping - building new parks - organizing partnerships and volunteer programs for park maintenance | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| - reading | - organizing, endowing public libraries - online access to libraries | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| -going to concerts/shows | - construction of showrooms - organizing shows, concerts, theater plays - financing cultural activities | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

The sources of discontent for the population in the four localities are:

Which of the following is a source of discontent for you, or bothers you?

| | Very much | Quite | Rather | | Very little | Not at all | N/A |
|--|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|------------|-------|
| Paying local taxes and charges | 15.12% | 16.86% | 30.23% | 16.28% | 9.30% | 11.05% | 1.16% |
| Interaction with public administration | 24.42% | 26.16% | 28.49% | 9.30% | 7.56% | 4.07% | 0.00% |
| How we get our ID papers | 14.62% | 22.22% | 30.41% | 18.71% | 5.85% | 8.19% | 0.00% |
| Delaying the solving of land register issues | 26.74% | 24.42% | 25.00% | 8.14% | 2.33% | 3.49% | 9.88% |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| How long it takes to get a building permit | 37.43% | 26.32% | 11.11% | 7.02% | 2.34% | 1.75% | 14.04% |
| The number of documents required to get different permits, authorizations issued by the local governments | 53.49% | 24.42% | 9.30% | 4.07% | 2.33% | 0.00% | 6.40% |
| The attitude of the city employees | 34.68% | 30.06% | 21.39% | 5.78% | 4.62% | 1.73% | 1.73% |
| Clarity of the information received from the local government | 37.43% | 25.73% | 24.56% | 8.19% | 2.34% | 1.17% | 0.58% |
| The quality of education in the locality | 29.48% | 28.90% | 27.75% | 4.05% | 5.78% | 2.31% | 1.73% |
| The quality of local healthcare services | 48.26% | 27.91% | 16.86% | 1.74% | 4.65% | 0.00% | 0.58% |
| The quality of the drinking water | 37.43% | 24.56% | 21.05% | 4.09% | 6.43% | 4.09% | 2.34% |
| The parks in the locality | 22.41% | 14.37% | 28.16% | 14.37% | 10.92% | 8.05% | 1.72% |
| The sports facilities in the locality | 23.39% | 21.05% | 23.39% | 8.77% | 11.11% | 6.43% | 5.85% |
| Recreational areas in the locality | 25.58% | 21.51% | 26.16% | 8.72% | 8.14% | 2.91% | 6.98% |
| The state of public lighting | 22.22% | 18.13% | 27.49% | 14.62% | 8.77% | 7.02% | 1.75% |
| Garbage disposal and storage | 54.07% | 19.19% | 11.05% | 8.14% | 2.91% | 4.07% | 0.58% |
| The quality of public transportation | 53.80% | 19.88% | 12.28% | 4.09% | 3.51% | 2.92% | 3.51% |
| Time spent in traffic | 74.71% | 12.07% | 6.90% | 2.87% | 0.00% | 3.45% | 0.00% |
| Streets safety | 39.53% | 25.00% | 19.19% | 9.30% | 2.91% | 4.07% | 0.00% |
| The overall image of the locality (banks, trash cans... urban furniture etc.) | 36.26% | 25.15% | 23.39% | 8.77% | 4.68% | 1.17% | 0.58% |
| The noise | 33.14% | 26.16% | 19.77% | 8.72% | 6.98% | 4.65% | 0.58% |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| The air quality | 48.52% | 23.67% | 12.43% | 5.33% | 4.14% | 4.73% | 1.18% |
| Roads condition | 58.82% | 23.53% | 10.59% | 3.53% | 0.59% | 2.94% | 0.00% |
| Sanitation and maintenance of public areas | 47.95% | 29.82% | 14.62% | 3.51% | 1.17% | 2.92% | 0.00% |
| Parking lots | 66.27% | 15.98% | 8.28% | 2.96% | 2.37% | 4.14% | 0.00% |
| The space you live in | 18.24% | 9.41% | 24.12% | 12.94% | 10.59% | 21.76% | 2.94% |
| Cultural activities in the locality | 16.57% | 14.79% | 31.95% | 14.79% | 8.88% | 10.65% | 2.37% |
| The degree of people's involvement in community activities | 27.81% | 32.54% | 26.04% | 5.92% | 2.37% | 3.55% | 1.78% |
| The job | 9.52% | 12.50% | 23.81% | 12.50% | 14.29% | 20.24% | 7.14% |
| The income level | 17.16% | 21.89% | 21.89% | 14.20% | 8.88% | 12.43% | 3.55% |
| The health condition | 16.57% | 16.57% | 22.49% | 10.06% | 15.98% | 14.79% | 3.55% |
| The education level | 8.28% | 5.33% | 13.02% | 7.10% | 10.06% | 49.70% | 6.51% |
| The way you get along with your neighbors | 6.55% | 1.79% | 26.19% | 11.31% | 11.31% | 37.50% | 5.36% |
| People's prejudices | 26.90% | 16.96% | 22.81% | 9.36% | 8.19% | 13.45% | 2.34% |
| Loneliness | 15.98% | 11.83% | 15.38% | 10.65% | 14.79% | 28.40% | 2.96% |
| The education level of the people in the locality | 17.54% | 25.73% | 35.09% | 10.53% | 3.51% | 5.85% | 1.75% |
| Exterior appearance of the dwelling (if you live in an apartments building) | 15.48% | 10.12% | 25.00% | 8.93% | 8.93% | 17.86% | 13.69% |
| How garbage is collected | 31.18% | 14.71% | 27.65% | 11.76% | 8.82% | 5.88% | 0.00% |
| The state of the playgrounds in the locality | 19.88% | 19.88% | 28.07% | 12.87% | 7.60% | 7.02% | 4.68% |
| Access to markets and shopping centers | 14.12 % | 12.35 % | 30.00 % | 15.88% | 12.94% | 12.94% | 1.76% |
| Acts of vandalism (destruction of public goods) | 52.35% | 20.59% | 14.12% | 4.71% | 4.12% | 2.94% | 1.18% |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Drawings and scratches on the facades of buildings | 45.56% | 17.16% | 18.93% | 6.51% | 6.51% | 4.14% | 1.18% |
| Violence against people | 64.91% | 20.47% | 6.43% | 3.51% | 1.75% | 2.34% | 0.58% |
| Stray dogs | 46.51% | 20.93% | 18.02% | 5.23% | 4.65% | 3.49% | 1.16% |
| Sewage condition | 42.35% | 22.94% | 19.41% | 7.06% | 4.12% | 2.94% | 1.18% |

Therefore, the main sources of dissatisfaction among respondents are the:

- Long time spent in traffic
- Roads condition
- Parking places
- Number of documents required for issuance of for various permits, authorizations released by the local governments
- Vandalism (destruction of public goods)

For the items identified as priorities, local public authorities in Romania may intervene with the following types of actions, under the current legal framework:

| | Types of actions that can be performed by the local public administration | The extent to which these actions are found in local development strategies (number of proposed projects / actions) | | | |
|---|--|---|----------|------------------|-----------|
| | | Jilava | Măgurele | Popești Leordeni | Bragadiru |
| Long time spent in traffic | - conducting traffic studies - organizing the traffic system - mounting of traffic signs - have local police guide the traffic - Implementation of traffic management information systems organizing public transport - organizing the cycling infrastructure construction of over and underground passages, bypass routes, alternatives ways | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Roads condition | - build new local driveways and roads - repair, maintenance of local roads -ensuring local road cleaning | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Parking places | - the building, arrangement, maintenance, management of parking spaces | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Number of documents required for issuance of various permits, authorizations by the local government | - provision of on-line public services - administrative simplification - institutional reorganization - developing internal working procedures - Improving employee training | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
| Vandalism (destruction of public goods) | -operationalization, endowment of the local police -installation of video surveillance systems -holding civic education sessions | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|

4. Conclusions

Local governments have the skills and resources to intervene in areas considered by the population as sources of happiness. All items under review relate to the powers, competences and duties of the local public administration.

The topics, which make people happy, according to the questionnaire applied, are not necessarily at the heart of the local public administration's concerns. Moreover, such a topic, source for development projects, has not even been looked into by the four localities governments.

The projects, the actions proposed by the local development strategies in the four localities under review focus primarily on issues, sources of discontent for the population, sources unrelated to the topic of happiness.

The four strategies, however, do not completely ignore actions aiming at sources of happiness, but the projects, actions in this area are much fewer than those that address the local issues.

Therefore, the priorities set by the local public authorities, such as traffic congestions, roads condition, parking places (which we find in almost all Romanian localities) have nothing to do with what makes people happy.

With this finding as our starting point, we can appreciate that the local public administration can radically change the way they set their objectives, priorities and take action based on those elements that are a source of happiness for the population, which would imply that strategic actions planning be preceded by an inquiry into the sources of happiness.

But this approach would represent a radical change of the paradigm, of the working method and an understanding of the legal duties.

Therefore, local public administration can contribute to people's happiness, which implies a radical change in the local priorities setting process.

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