

Local Initiatives of Sustainable Development Stimulation. Case Study

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Abstract

In the recent years, the local authorities within the EU are facing a series of socio-economic and political challenges which they must adequately manage such as to ensure the increase of the quality of life of the citizens they represent: adaptation to the common market, reduction of the exclusion degree, as well as of social and territorial inequity, adaptation to the pace and innovations brought by the new technologies or, recently, the increase of the number of immigrants with respect to whom the local authorities are responsible to identify integration solutions.

In this context, the local authorities have a key-role on the path of ensuring sustainable development, by means of local initiatives specific to each collectivity, depending on the interests, needs, resources and actors managing them.

The paper at hand presents the road map of a set of initiatives taken by the Bucharest Municipality, appreciated as sustainable development engine, through competitiveness, innovation and human capital.

The methodology used is preponderantly qualitative and it is based on the analysis of official documents, key information and case study.

Keywords: EU, decentralization and local autonomy, Bucharest municipality, local development.

1. Introduction

The modern administration model considered by the objectives of the reform process in Romania implies structural changes, especially with respect to its own characteristics and to the obligations due to it in what concerns the supply of public goods and services, in order to ensure the sustainability of public organizations, as well as of the public interventions performed by these organizations.

The public administration modernization approach has, however, two dimensions: on the one hand, effort and political will of the authorities and, on the other hand, the consolidation of the community's cultural "tissue" – factor which catalyzes the reaching of the sustainable development objectives of a local collectivity: *social equity, environment-related responsibility and economic feasibility.*

A viable solution for the local administration in Romania, on its way towards flexibilization, integration in society and, in general, towards improving its institutional performance, is the system of administrative decentralization and local autonomy, a constant, in fact, for the Romanian administration. Decentralization, from the theoretical-conceptual point of view, targets both *territorial decentralization*, which applied to the territorial collectivities, and the *technical (functional) decentralization* of public services.

Supplying these services to the local collectivities they represent in promoting and satisfying their specific interests constitutes the very reason for being of the local public administration. The local administration authorities enjoy decisional autonomy regarding the creation and organization of their own public services, according to their competences; more precisely, the *deliberative* local public administration authorities have the legal competence to decide on the establishment of public institutions, trading companies and public services of local interest.

In this context, an assessment of the impact of public service decentralization must be performed in the context of the economic sectors, and if we consider the most important, such as *education, health, culture, social protection, transport, utility supply public services*, the results reflect different local financing and management capacities, depending on the material, financial and staff possibilities, as well as, lately, on the possibility to access capital markets.

A recent study which aimed to make a summary of the achievements and failures of the 25 years of local autonomy in Romania (1991-2016) indicated that from the perspective of institutional efficiency at the territorial level, but also at the level of topics, a high level of this parameter is registered when the local administration exercises its competences in the *environment* sector, the environment thus becoming a *transversal presence(1) in the legislation, (2) in civil society's conscience and, to a large extent, (3) in the practice of the public services and in the concerns of the local administration* (Brie, 2016).

In addition, out of the 23 duties of the local public administration (according to Law no. 215/2001, art. 36 (6) g)), almost half are directly or indirectly involved in the *environment* issue, from the generic duty to “protect and restore the environment” to the direct impact of the 7 utilities (water, sewerage, cleaning, transport etc.) or to urban development and health (*Idem*, 2016).

2. Local public management. The City of Bucharest

A relevant example of local management which attempted and succeeded, not fully, but to a high extent, to not deviate from the objectives imposed by the Romanian administrative reform, is that of the local authorities in the City of Bucharest.

In support of this statement, for the paper at hand, we consider eloquent the presentation of several actions of the Bucharest City Hall in fields such as *health, social assistance, culture, urban mobility, immigration*, the local authorities having, without a doubt, other initiatives with a significant positive impact.

2.1 Health

In this sector of activity where, traditionally, the decisional levers related to the functionality of the hospital networks were subordinated only to the central administration, at the level of the city of Bucharest, a pilot-project was initiated in year 2008, with the goal of *decentralizing the hospitals to the local authorities*, project which became functional in April 2009 and determined these authorities to represent important actors in administering the hospital network.

Thus was institutionalized the mechanism of involving the local authorities in making decisions in all segments of the medical care system (except emergency medicine), at the same time achieving a closeness of the sanitary management to the tax-paying citizen.

The decentralization was grounded, in what concerns regulation, on the adoption of Government Ordinance no. 48/2010 *for the modification and completion of normative acts in the field of health and in view of decentralization*, as well as of Government Decision no. 529/2010 *for the approval of the List of hospitals for which the medical care management is maintained or transferred to the local public administration authorities and to Bucharest City Hall*. Also in year 2008, the *Bucharest Administration of Hospitals and Medical Services* (in original, ASSMB) was established through the Decision of the General Council of the City of Bucharest (in original, HCGMB) no. 378/09 Sept 2008, entity ensuring also at the present time the management of the hospitals under the subordination of the Bucharest municipality.

In 2009, initially 18 hospitals, later, in 2010, an additional 3, were transferred from the Ministry of Health, at present, the municipality having 19 hospitals, since 2012 (two were dissolved through Government Decision), the majority (all but five) being “university clinics”.

In what concerns the financing mechanism of these hospitals, it is of *dual* type, on the one hand, financed from the *National Health Social Security House* (in original, CNASS) for the patients they treat, and, on the other hand; financed from the *local administration* for certain expenses, especially administrative, such as payment of the utilities, of the cleaning or guarding services, services previously financed by CNASS.

Thus, by means of the local authorities taking over these expenses, the hospitals can redirect their own incomes towards medicines and sanitary materials, significantly improving the care process.

2.2 Social assistance

In order to ensure sustainable development and in the absence of an integrating policy at the European, national and local level, in order to ensure the social inclusion of the *collectives with a risk of social exclusion*, the Bucharest municipality pays special attention to the proper management of the *homeless persons’* phenomenon.

In 2005, the number of homeless persons in Romania, living on the streets, in sewers, in public places or in night shelters was between 11 000 and 14 000 (Dan, A.N., 2005). Approximately 5000 of them were in Bucharest, while the number of beds in the night shelters was insufficient (Presidential Commission, 2009).

This phenomenon is generally combated without long-term positive effects, due to the lack of funds and lack of specialized staff within the local authorities. The social protection services supplied by the local authorities and destined to adult homeless persons can be grouped in *emergency services* (emergency shelters, street cantinas, social baths, primary medical care etc.), *day social centers and temporary shelters*, *transit housing or protected housing and protected jobs*.

In this context, the local policy of the City of Bucharest, in the field of social assistance, targets a series of measures destined to *combat social exclusion and to promote social inclusion, in a coherent system construction, with efficient management, aiming towards a permanent improvement of the different financial support measures destined for families, children, persons in a risk situation, as well as towards the consolidation and development of the social services network* (Report of the General Mayor, 2012).

The General City Hall, through the Social Assistance General Directorate of the City of Bucharest (in original, DGASMB), exercises a role of methodological coordination, monitoring and control. A DGASMB report from 2011 reveals the fact that the institutions offering social work and services face a series of problems, among which the following stand out: *lack of legislative regulations necessary for certain social situations (for ex., the intervention is still limited in cases of domestic violence, even in cases of violence against the child), as well as the absence of the instruments/procedures necessary for the correct approach of the social cases*.

In Bucharest, in case of at least three categories, we see situations of homeless persons: *victims of domestic violence, homeless children and youngsters, drug users and immigrants/refugees* (Report of the General Mayor, 2011). In order to support the homeless, DGASMB concluded partnerships with the employment offices, non-governmental associations or different religious institutions for foreigners, thus ensuring the replacement of, or addition to, the services addressed to these beneficiaries within the social assistance directorates in the City of Bucharest.

We can mention here the partnership with Queen Mary Foundation by means of which, in 2011, the *Social Policlinic*, and in 2012, *Dristor Social Policlinic* were established. The *Social Policlinic* is a pilot –project which is part of the Bucharest City Hall's strategy to offer a wide range of medical and social and psychological assistance services to citizens temporarily in financial difficulties. The policlinic services are destined for homeless persons, to persons who do not benefit of medical insurance and to the co-insured persons.

2.3 Urban mobility

Mobility is a major topic of sustainable development, being considered a *collective right* which must be guaranteed to all citizens and which derives from art. 13 of the “Universal declaration of human rights” of 1948, at the level of the United Nations.

The dimension of this concept is much ampler than the meaning granted to the notions of “traffic” or “transport offer”, *which considers only the means of transport the citizens use, but also the reasons which determine them to travel, the facilities or difficulties they meet in their travels, the differences between the existing mobility models of different social communities, the correlation traveling activity –personal income or personal autonomy etc.* (Avellaneda Garcia, P., 2007).

The decentralization of the ground transport service in the City of Bucharest led to the increase of the number of actors participating in the elaboration process of the urban mobility policy, based on the supremacy of *proximity and accessibility over mobility and transport.*

The triple statute of the City of Bucharest (the largest *Urban Agglomeration* in the country, *European Metropole, European Capital*) and the development of the metropolitan area (with a surface of approx. 365 km²) impose an increasingly active involvement of the local authorities in solving urban mobility issues.

In 2014, Bucharest was considered the most crowded city in Europe from the viewpoint of the road traffic (GPS Tom Tom, 2014), with a double traffic degree than the national average, but comparable to that of Western Europe.

In Bucharest, the ground public transport service is provided by Regia Autonomă de Transport București (RATB – formerly state-owned public transport company), under the subordination of the General Council of the City of Bucharest, the local public service being provided both on the territory of the City of Bucharest and in the neighboring county - Ilfov.

Even though the City of Bucharest benefits of a consistent set of strategic urban development documents (*General Master Plan for Urban Transport Bucharest, the Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035, the Integrated Urban Development Plan*), they have not been consistently applied.

The need to ensure the sustainable dimension of urban mobility, but also to align to the European and national regulations for mobility and transport, impose the adoption of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, considered a municipal strategy, which is based on the existing planning practices and which takes into account the principles of integration, participation and assessment and involves the citizens in the planning process.

The Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (in original, PMUD) for the 7 growth poles in Romania and the Bucharest-Ilfov agglomeration will be drafted on the bases on an

agreement concluded between the Government of Romania and the European Reconstruction and Development Bank. These plans will become the support framework of the urban transport projects which are going to be financed through the Regional Operational Program for period 2014-2020, with the aid of the European Regional Development Fund.

PMUD will be correlated with the national transport plan, with the general urbanism plan (in original, PUG), with the local urban development strategies, as well as with the sectorial strategies for social services, health, education, job-creation and economic development and will represent an *eligibility condition in view of submitting projects under ROP*, priority axes 3 (3.2) and 4 (4.1), with respect to supporting sustainable urban development.

At present, for the central area of the City of Bucharest there is an *Integrated Urban Development Plan "Bucharest Central Area"* (in original, PIDU) adopted through H.C.G.M.B. no. 103/2012, a strategic document targeting the increase in the quality of life, the rehabilitation of the urban infrastructure, the improvement of the urban services, including the social services, as well as the development of the business-supporting structures. *PIDU* is a development planning document for an urban action area, implemented by means of individual projects, financed via the European funds.

In May 2015, the City of Bucharest, together with several administrative-territorial units in the neighboring county, Ilfov, decided to cooperate and to associate together and established the *Bucharest Metropolitan Transport Association* (in original, ATMB), for the purpose of ensuring a unitary coordination and a strategy aimed at integrating the public transport services at the level of the Bucharest-Ilfov metropolitan area, by providing common programs of infrastructure development, expansion, modernization and a better rate policy.

2. 4 Culture

Together with the three classical dimensions of sustainable urban development (environmental, economic and social inclusion), culture is considered its fourth pillar (UCLG, 2010), successful key-factor of the urban regeneration actions promoted by the local public administration authorities.

The citizens' right to culture forces the local authorities to enforce a set of administrative, financial a.s.o. measures, in view of observing and guaranteeing the full exercise of these rights, and, to an equal extent, of the *result obligation*.

In this sense, the local authorities must facilitate *Community empowerment* for the consolidation of the local identity, enhancing the citizens' feeling of belonging to the collectivity, the transformation of citizens from simple spectators in co-authors of the cultural productions being one of the major challenges of the mandate of the local elected officials.

The Bucharest local authorities transformed the cultural policy into a protagonist, professional policy benefitting from a budget increase, based on the paradigm of the

“*entrepreneurial city*” and rethought the cultural policy of the City of Bucharest, conferring it an entrepreneurial orientation triggering urban regeneration through culture. In the period 2011-2015, for example, the cultural sector benefited of an increase of funding in the Capital’s budget from 2.6% to 6.2% and the Bucharest authorities decided to continue to increase this percentage.

Until year 2016, the City of Bucharest did not have an independent cultural strategy, but benefited, and still does, of a consistent set of urban development strategic documents, such as, for instance, the *Bucharest Strategic Concept 2035* or the *Integrated Urban Development Plan*.

Bucharest Strategic Concept 2035 is a visionary strategic document proposing a development model for Bucharest, taking into account its influence area, a unitary, platform-type strategic document for the individual sectorial strategies, including for the cultural strategy of the City of Bucharest, which has a well-defined role.

In 2014, concomitantly with the approval by the General Council of the City of Bucharest (in original, CGMB) of the *submission of candidacy of the City of Bucharest for the title of European Cultural Capital in year 2021 (CEaC 2021)*, the elaboration of the city’s cultural strategy also began, a difficult process which had to take into consideration the progress and Bucharest’s new special status achieved in 2015.

We refer to obtaining the status of *participative city of the Council of Europe*, the accession to the *Intercultural Cities network*, at the invitation of the Council of Europe, the need to implement the *Bucharest-Ilfov Urban Mobility Plan*, the establishment of the *Association for the promotion and tourist development of Bucharest - Bucharest Convention & Visitors Bureau* (partnership with representative entities from the tourism industry) a.s.o.

Practically, the cultural strategy started to be “seen” with other conceptual lenses, those of culture and the diversity ethics, and was approved in year 2016, being presented to the European jury assigned to analyze the candidacy files of the cities selected for the second stage of the CEaC 2021 competition, given that Bucharest was one of the cities to pass, in December 2015, the pre-selection stage for the adoption of the short-list of cities candidates for the CEaC title.

Bucharest’s candidacy for the title of “European Culture Capital” benefited from the support of all political parties, being unanimously voted and carefully monitored by the specialty commissions of the CGMB and of the General Mayor’s specialty staff.

Even though Bucharest did not receive the title of European Culture Capital, the title being won by Timișoara, the entire process of preparing the candidacy contributed significantly to the awareness of its inhabitants, this exceptional, integrating instrument of the European Commission bringing to the City of Bucharest and its influence area a

major benefit related to urban regeneration, namely, social innovation and international cultural cooperation, as well as a repositioning on the “map” of European cities.

2. 5 Immigration

Solving the problems emerging from the internationalization and Europeanization of the EU member states and their collectivities, such as the issue of migration, has become for the Bucharest authorities one of the most important topics of their public agenda. The highest number of immigrants in Romania live in Bucharest-Ilfov, in Bucharest existing approximately 27,000 registered immigrants (out of which approx. 20,000 are third country citizens).

An important role towards integrating immigrants in the local collectivities is played by the European Union itself, which, in its attempt to promote the economic and social benefits brought by immigrants to the local collectivities, encouraged the exchange of good practices at the level of local immigration policies, for the facilitation and integration of the entrepreneurial initiative of migrants, such as those promoted by the European project “Diversity in economy and local integration” (DELI). The DELI Project (2014-2015) represents a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission in matters of diversity and was run at the level of ten European pilot-cities, among which; the City of Bucharest, the project being financed by the European Union through the *European Integration Fund*.

The running of this project demonstrated the existence of numerous barriers of legal, linguistic, cultural nature, as well as limited integration offers on the labour market, especially for training immigrant women.

The project objectives aimed to elaborate a *local platform, between the public authorities and the immigrant communities* in order to facilitate their access to the economic life and the support of the local authorities in their action to elaborate and *implement local policies and strategies* according to the principles of equal chances, social inclusion and diversity management.

In order to reach these objectives, the project was executed in five multi-level, multi-sectoral stages, which included several stakeholders, having the following activities: *data collection & mapping, development of quality management standards, diversity & economy roundtables, development of on-line assessment tools, self-assessment review*.

Throughout the project running, a series of general problems in the matter of immigration were noted, falling under the competence of the local public authorities in the City of Bucharest, namely: *the weak involvement of the Bucharest local public authorities and institutions; the non-existence of a local policy of the City of Bucharest in the matter of immigrants; communication deficiencies between the authorities and the immigrants; the absence of the information single desk for immigrants; the absence of a section for immigrants on the portal of Bucharest City Hall (in original, PMB), in a language of international use (preferably, English); the lack of transparency regarding the running of the public procurement process performed by PMB; the low number of clerks in the*

Public relations Office (PMB) with linguistic competence in a language of international use; the weak cooperation of PMB with the immigrants' business environment; high costs for the counseling service provided to immigrants.

Taking into consideration the vulnerability situations pertaining to immigrants, namely, housing, health, education, *three main actions directions for granting assistance* by the Bucharest authorities have been identified: educational, health and personal development and institutional. Special importance has been given to the need to consolidate the *training policy for immigrant women*, and equal focus being placed on social and family integration.

The project implementation received positive feedback and, even though; at present, the number of immigrants is still low among the Bucharest inhabitants, its local authorities must ensure for the future a consolidation of the immigrants' economic and social inclusion, focusing on observing the social rights of immigrants and, implicitly, of immigrant women: adequate housing, sanitary assistance, proper level of living etc.

3. Conclusions

The experience, benefits, failures, expectations, as well as barriers derived from presenting the different initiatives of the Bucharest authorities in the activity sectors selected for this article show us that the City of Bucharest is one of the large urban territorial collectivities in Romania which, in spite of the numerous socio-political and economic challenges it faces, exhibits a continuous and sustained desire and effort towards improving the quality of life.

The good practices implemented by the City of Bucharest indicate the fact that the local authorities redefine their priorities regarding its current and future policies and that, in spite of the difficulties they face, they were able to diminish them, by means of an increased integration of the citizen participation and control mechanisms with respect to making political, economic and social decisions. This leads to a reduction of the bureaucratic procedures, as well as to an increased degree of flexibility and adaptability of the public services.

Therefore, we can conclude that Bucharest is not only the area of national policies and national identity, but also the geometric place of the *own interventions of its local administration* and of the civic initiatives within the space of the future Bucharest – Ilfov metropolitan area, the space of *development of a local collectivity identity, by means of collective responsibility*.

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