ANALYSIS OF THE DEGREE OF THE RURAL POPULATION INVOLVEMENT IN THE DECISION MAKING ACT. CASE STUDY, CĂLĂRAŞI COUNTY, ROMANIA

Daniela CREŢU, Radu Andrei IOVA, Oana Roberta CREŢU, Elena LASCAR

University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Marasti Blvd, District 1, Bucharest, Romania. E-mails: danielacretu5@yahoo.com; iova.andrei@managusamv.ro; oanaroberta.cretu@gmail.com; lascar.elena@managusamv.ro

Corresponding author: danielacretu5@yahoo.com

Abstract

The public participation is seen as a political principle or as a public practice, and it is also recognized as a right of the citizens, with the aim at facilitating the involvement of the segment of citizens affected or interested in a public decision. The citizen's participation in making decisions regarding the community where he lives is an indicator of how everyone socializes, is involved in making decisions that concern him directly, regarding a new project of the local authorities. As the human resource is extremely dynamic, it is the one that highlights the other types of resources: economic, social and cultural, we elaborated a survey in four rural localities in Călăraşi county to capture the degree of citizens' participation/involvement from the rural area in the development decisions at the level of the community in which they live. The research was achieved using on the questionnaire-based survey method and the data were processed by the analysis and comparison method, using also the χ² test. The survey-questionnaire was used with a number of 7 items, to survey the opinion of the population, to which a number of 377 persons answered. The questions were structured on 2 levels, respectively, filter questions and grid questions. The answers in the questionnaire were analyzed according to 5 criteria, namely: by locality, by respondents' age, by level of education, by gender and by social status. The differences in the conception of participation in the decision-making act are different between the analyzed communes, even if overall 58.27% answered that the group participation is the best. The group activities are appreciated to the detriment of the individual activities, by those aged between 30 and 60 years old, by those with high school education, farmers, employees, without status and pensioners. From the analysis of the citizens' participation in the respective decision-making in a current way, occasionally or not at all, there is a significant and very significant differentiation at the commune level, age, studies and social status.

Key words: commune, questionnaire, rural development, rural area, rural population

INTRODUCTION

The participation in the decision-making processes is recognized and practiced at international level [20, 6]. The intergovernment organizations and European countries have adopted, through various documents, rules to strengthen, guide and ensure the participation of the public and various civil society organizations in the adoption of their decisions [5]. Although some of these documents are not binding force, they set out a framework of clear rules in order to strengthen the legal framework and participatory practice [5, 6].
In Romania, too, a growing trend of interest in public participation has been found out in recent years, leading to a development of the institutional and non-institutional framework of the social dialogue and public consultation, subject to occurring since the 2000s, of the legislative framework that governs the public participation processes (information, consultation, transparency), but also against the background of the evolutions in the area of public administration reform, of the consolidation of the civil society and of the imperative to comply with the European and international standards [1, 13].
The perception is that the biggest obstacles are still, the lack of will on the part of the administration, but also the low degree of structuring and efficiency of public participation [2, 4]. Thus, there is a great lack of trust in the good intentions of public administration regarding the access to public

information and the organization of public consultations and the steps initiated by public authorities are seen as purely formal, the civil society perceiving a lack of authenticity of the framework of dialogue.

OCDE methodology for the notion of rurality leads to different figures, but it allows comparisons with other Member States [11].

Thus, it is found that the territory of Romania is in accordance with this definition 59.8% rural, 39.4% intermediate and only 0.8% urban [8]. Regarding the distribution in the territory, Romania population has a fairly high level of rurality, the share of rural population in Romania reflects its higher incidence compared to other EU countries, where rural settlements are less populated and on a smaller scale, as an alternative to urban concentrations. Many of these rural communities contribute, to a small extent, to economic growth but retain their social structure and traditional way of life [18].

In relation to the data Eurostat of 2017, 45.5% of the population is in rural area, 43.9% in intermediate regions and 10.6% in urban area [17, 18]. The surface of Călărași county has 5,088 square km, respectively, 2.1% of Romania territory, being ranked 28 of the 42 counties. Regarding the population, Călărași county has 308.6 thousand inhabitants (1.64% of the country population) [16]. Regarding the areas of residence, 61.55% of the country inhabitants live in the rural area and 38.45% live in the urban area.

Research shows that there is a contemporary trend of changing the rural lifestyle into an urban one, but this process is relatively new in history, it is an exclusive characteristic of modernity [12].

Modernization in this sense is seen as a global trend of societal transformation, initiated by deliberate efforts of political, economic leadership, oriented towards objectives such as: industrialization and related forms of economic development; qualitative change of the educational process; extending participation in the decision-making act; increasing the role of the media [7, 6].

In the contemporary specialized literature, in research centers, in university centers of the world, valuable theories were developed regarding the modeling of rural communities through co-participatory actions and through self-organization actions. The model is given by the study of Kenneth P. Wilkinson, which is rich in the issues addressed and his bibliographical references [15]. It starts from the "power structure" identified by: "community leaders"; "Social forces" and "group performances" and the concept of social process is briefly analyzed as "relations between actors and the activities between them", which materialize through action program, events, etc. and through which the community evolves.

In our country it is appreciated that the community development is a social innovation, meaning to participate in solving social problems, to fight poverty, to open the way to certain resources depending on the community ability to organize and mobilize, a rediscovered social innovation [1, 4, 12, 17].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Starting from the hypothesis that citizen participation is an important indicator in rural development, we made a survey based on interviews in four rural localities in Călărași county to capture the degree of citizen participation/attraction in the community regarding the involvement in rural development decisions at the level of the community in which they live. The research was based on the questionnaire-based survey method and χ^2 test. The survey - questionnaire with a number of 7 items was used to survey the opinion of the population, to which a number of 377 people answered. The questions were structured on 2 levels, respectively, 4 filter questions and 3 grid questions, with 3 or 4 predefined answers, regarding the citizen's participation/consultation by the local authorities in making decisions for economic and social development of the community.

The answers from the questionnaire were analyzed according to 5 criteria, namely: by locality, by respondents' age, by level of education, by sex and by social status.

The 377 respondents were distributed as follows: by locality: Borcea 99 respondents,

Manastirea 100 respondents, Modelu 99 respondents, Independenta 79 respondents; by age: up to 30 years 65 respondents, between 31-40 years 107 respondents, between 41-50 years 102 respondents, between 51-60 years 52 respondents, over 61 years 51 respondents; by level of education: 12 respondents have primary school, 82 respondents have secondary school, 201 respondents have high school and 82 respondents have higher education, by sex: 227 men respondents and 150 women respondents; by social status: farmer 52 respondents; employees 2111 respondents; registered unemployed 14 respondents; unregistered unemployed 13 respondents; without status 53 respondents, pensioners 34 respondents.

The concordance test χ^2 ("hi-square") is a general test, which can be applied to any statistical distribution to which we can calculate the cumulative distribution function. The χ^2 test is applied to grouped data (or frequency data) and aims to associate the columns and rows of a table with two inputs, crossed frequencies concerning discrete or discretized variables and is calculated after making some contingency tables, in which the data are classified according to one, two, or more segmentation variables [10].

The steps taken in evaluating the results of the questionnaire using the χ^2 method are the following: formulating the null hypothesis H0, which states that there is no causal link or association between the two variables-questions; choosing the level or threshold of significance α and calculating the number of degrees of freedom of the table, according to the formula (r-1)*(c-1); based on which, its value, χ^2 theoretically, is taken from the distribution table χ^2; comparison of the obtained results [9, 19]. for which there are the following situations: if the null hypothesis is rejected and therefore there is an association or potential relation between variables or if the existence of a null hypothesis is admitted and therefore there is no association or potential relation between the studied variables; calculation of the contingency coefficient C, which has the role of measuring the degree of association between the variables of the contingency table. Compare χ^2calculated with χ^2theoretical for different probability thresholds. The Pearson coefficient is calculated regardless of the variables nature (continuous or discrete) and regardless of the nature of their distribution (normal or not), within the research population, according to the mathematical model proposed by the statistician Karl Pearson [14]. The closer the value of C is to *1*, the more closely the variables are correlated. In the present study, the questionnaire was completed by 377 people, from four representative communes of Călărași county.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The citizen's participation in making decisions regarding the community where he lives is an indicator of how everyone socializes, is involved in making decisions that concern him directly, regarding a new project of the local authorities.

Participation can be active, when community members discuss with their elected officials or with the administration and passive, the community members participate in a public meeting, only to be informed of the decisions already made [3].

At the question: *Have you been consulted in decision making at the community level?,* which reflects the way in which the elected officials in the local communities are concerned with the education of the inhabitants but also with the creation of a support in the execution of the decisions, we find that the answers are significantly differentiated at the level of the communes (Table 1). Thus, not at all 68 respondents from Borcea commune, 44 from Manastirea commune, 35 from Modelu commune and 39 respondents from Independenta commune appreciated, which as percentage represents 49.08% **of the total answers, for** χ^2 theoretical of 12.59.

Because of those who respond, just a few have always been consulted, it results that the local elected officials have a group of acquaintances who are always called to fulfill the formality in elaborating minutes of the citizens' meetings, in making decisions.

Table 1. Correlation between the participation in decision making and respondents domicile

Commune	UM	Have you been consulted in decision making at the community level?			Total	
		a. Always	b. sometimes	c. not at all	No	%
Borcea	No	5	26	68	99	26.25
Manastirea	No	15	41	44	100	26.50
Modelu	No	13	51	35	99	26.25
Independenta	No	6	35	39	79	21.00
Total	No	39	153	186	377	100
	%	10.50	40.42	49.08	100	X
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	8.56	10.64	12.59	16.81	22.46
CHIINV (Chi calculated)	27.47					***

Source: own calculations.

To the question: *What do you think are the ways to involve the citizen in decision-making at the local level ?*, The form of participation, individually or in groups, shows the degree of respondent understanding to how he sees this participation. The differences in the conception of this participation is different (very significant), between the analyzed communes, even if on the whole 58.27% answered that the group participation is the best (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between the modalities of respondents involvement in making decisions and commune of residence

Commune	UM	What do you think are the ways of citizen involvement			Total	
		a. individual	b. group	c. I do not know	no	%
Borcea	no	18	71	10	99	26.25
Manastirea	no	25	56	19	100	26.50
Modelu	no	41	50	8	99	26.25
Independenta	no	18	43	18	79	21.00
Total	no	102	220	55	377	100
	%	27.03	58.27	14.70	100	X
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	8.56	10.64	12.59	16.81	22.46
CHIINV (Chi calculated)	24.73					***

Source: own calculations.

From the analysis of the citizens' participation in the decision-making, at the commune level, a very significant differentiation is found between the studied communes. The current participation is very low, respectively by 18 persons in Modelu commune, 14 persons in Manastirea commune and only 8 persons in Borcea commune. The occasional participation is higher in Modelu commune 50-persons, in Manastirea commune of 49

persons and the lowest in Borcea commune, of only 27 persons, with a total percentage of 42.26%. (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation between the frequency of participation in local decision making and studied communes

Commune	UM	Participation in local decisions			Total	
		a. currently	b. ocasionally	c. not at all	no	%
Borcea	No	8	27	64	99	26.25
Manastirea	No	14	49	38	100	26.51
Modelu	No	18	50	31	99	26.25
Independenta	No	9	32	36	79	21.00
Total	No	49	159	169	377	100
	%	13.12	42.26	44.62	100	X
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	8.56	10.64	12.59	16.81	22.46
CHIINV (Chi calculated)	24.14					***

Source: Own calculations.

Non-participation represents 44.62% of the answers of 169 interviewed persons. By age categories, participation in local decisions is different (distinctly significant), being large differences, depending on the age of community members.

Analyzing the correlation between the ways in which respondents are involved in decision-making and the respondents' ages, it is found that the answers between the different age categories are significantly different.

Table 4. Correlation between the ways of respondents' involvement in decision making and the respondents' age

Age	UM	What do you think are the ways to involve the citizen			Total	
		a. individual	b. group	c. I do not know	No	%
Up to 30 years old	No	13	41	11	65	17.32
Between 31-40 years old	No	34	60	13	107	28.35
between 41-50 yeas old	No	36	55	11	102	27.03
Between 51-60 years old	No	11	33	8	52	13.65
Over 61 years old	No	8	31	12	51	13,65
Total	No	102	220	55	377	100
	%	27.06	58.35	14.59	100	X
CHIINV (Chi calculated)	14.72		*			

Source: Own calculations.

Thus, the age categories between 31 years and 50 years old appreciate the group activity (115 respondents) and individual (70 respondents) and only 24 answer 'I do not know' (Table 4).

The age groups under 30 and over 60 years old mainly appreciated the group participation. Analyzing the same question according to the respondents training, we find a very significant differentiation of answers, in the sense that the citizen's involvement in the group is appreciated by respondents with high school education (124 persons), followed by those with higher education (44 persons) and high school (47 persons) (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation between the ways of respondents involvement in decision making and the respondents training level

Last school graduated	UM	What do you think are the ways for citizen involvement			Total	
		a. individual	b. group	c. I do not know	no	%
Primary	No	1	5	6	12	3.41
Secondary	No	16	47	19	82	21.78
High school	No	54	124	23	201	53.02
Higher education	No	31	44	7	82	21.78
Total	No	102	220	55	377	100
	%	27.06	58.62	14.32	100	x
CHIINV (Chi calculated)	23.18					***

Source: Own calculations.

The participation in group or individual participation of those with high school and higher education confirms the finding that with advancing age or transition to a high social status, the persons become members of associations [20, 3]. By professional groups, the respondents answered very differently (significantly significant), being preferred group activities of over 50% by farmers, employees, without status and retirees (Table 6).

Table 6. Correlation between the ways to involve the respondents in decision making and the respondents' professional status

Professional status	UM	What do you think are the ways to involve the citizen			Total	
		a. individual	b. group	c. I do not know	No	%
Farmer	No	11	32	9	52	13.79
Employee	No	65	128	18	211	55.97
Registered unemployed	No	4	7	3	14	3.71
Unregistered unemployed	No	4	3	6	13	3.45
No status	No	14	29	10	53	14.05
Pensioner	No	4	21	9	34	9.03
Total	No	102	220	55	377	100
	%	27.05	58.35	14.60	100	X
CHIINV (Chi calculated)	28.01			**		

Source: Own calculations.

Of course, the citizen participation is effective when community members gather to discuss future public administration decisions [3]. The participation of the community members helps the members of the governing bodies to make better decisions, to understand more comprehensively the citizens' problems, to train the community members to achieve the decisions at the community level.

To the question: *What were the main forms of collaboration with the local decision makers you participated in?,* the respondents had four pre-established answer options, respectively: *a. Meetings at the request of the local decision makers; b. meetings on its own initiative; I participated, but I am interested if they asked me; d. I did not participate and I am not interested.*

The analysis of Table 7 shows that a number of 178 respondents, namely 46.7%, actually participated in decision-making, of which 77 respondents, 20.2%, on their own initiative. Also, a number of 122 respondents would have participated if they were asked, which represents 32%.

Regarding the respondents participation according to age, we notice very big differences between the respondents' answers. Thus, if we add up the respondents who participated in the decision-making within the communities with those who intend to participate, we find that the respondents answered in the affirmative as follows: 87.9% those between 31-40 years old, 85.4% those between 41 -50 years old, 72.7% those up to 30 years old, 67.3% those between 51-60 years old and 65.3% those over 61 years old. From the analysis of the answers, depending on the level of studies, it is found that there are very significant differences between the respondents' answers. Thus, the respondents who participated in the decision-making within the communities and those who intend to participate, answered as follows: 38.4% those with primary education, 61.4% those with secondary education, 82.6% those with education high school and 92.7% those with higher education (Table 8).

Table. 7 Correlation between the involvement in local decision making and the respondents' age

Age	UM	What were the forms of collaboration with the local decision makers you participated in?				Total	
		a.	b.	c.	d.	no	%
Up to 30 years old	no	18	9	21	17	65	17.25
Between 31-40 years old	no	25	22	48	12	107	28.38
Between 41-50 years old	no	37	22	29	14	102	27.05
Între 51-60 de ani	no	16	8	11	17	52	13.79
Peste 61 ani	no	5	16	13	17	51	13.53
Total	No	101	77	122	77	377	100
	%	26.80	20.42	32.36	20.42	100	X
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	15.81	18.55	21.03	26.22	32,9	
CHIINV (Chi calculated)		38,40				**	

Source: Own calculations.

Table 8. Correlation between the involvement in local decision making and respondents training level

Last school graduated	UM	What were the main forms of collaboration with the local decision makers you participated in ?				Total	
		a.	b.	c.	d.	no	%
Primary	no	1	2	2	7	12	3.41
Secondary	no	6	16	29	31	82	21.78
High school	no	49	38	80	34	201	53.02
Higher education	no	45	21	11	5	82	21.78
Total	no	101	77	122	77	377	100
	%	26.51	20.21	32.02	21.26	100	x
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	12.24	14.68	16.92	21.67	27.88	
CHIINV (Chi calculated)		84,10				****	

Source: Own calculations.

We can mention that the participation and interest for collaboration with the local decision makers is directly proportional to the level of education of the respondents.
From the analysis of the answers regarding the main forms of collaboration with the local decision makers in which they participated according to the respondents gender, it was found that there are no significant differences between the answers. Thus, the gender responses for those who participated in the community decision-making together with those who intended to participate were 79.9% for men respondents and 79.3% for women respondents (Table 9).

Table 9. Correlation between the involvement in the local decision making and respondents' gender

GENDER	UM	What were the main forms of collaboration with the local decision makers you participated in ?				Total	
		a.	b.	c.	d.	no	%
Male	No	52	45	84	46	227	60.10
Female	No	49	32	38	31	150	39.90
Total	No	101	77	122	77	377	100
	%	26.51	20.21	32.02	21.26	100	x
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	4.64	6.25	7.81	11.34	16.27	
CHIINV (Chi calculated)		7.14	*				

Source: Own calculations.

Table 10. Correlation between the involvement in local decision making and the respondents' professional status

Professional status	UM	What were the main forms of collaboration with the local decision makers you participated in?				Total	
		a.	b.	c.	d.	no	%
Farmer	No	19	15	11	8	52	13.91
Employee	No	71	43	69	28	211	55.64
Registered unemployed	No	2	0	7	5	14	3.67
Unregistered unemployed	No	3	1	3	6	13	3.41
No status	No	4	9	23	17	53	54.00
Pensioner	No	2	9	9	14	34	9.19
Total	No	101	77	122	77	377	100
	%	26.51	20.21	32.02	21.26	100	X
CHIINV (Chi theoretical)	≥	19.31	22.31	25.00	30.58	37.70	
CHIINV (Chi calculated		55.45				***	

Source: Own calculations.

The analysis of the answers regarding the main forms of collaboration with the local decision makers they participated depending on the respondents' social status shows that there were significant differences between the answers. Thus, we find that among those who participated effectively in decision-making, the answers according to the social status are as follows: registered unemployed 14%, no

status 24%, unregistered unemployed 30%, pensioners 31%, employees 53% and farmers 64% (Table 10).

CONCLUSIONS

The respondents' participation in the form of organization, of involvement in decision-making is different by commune, age, education and social status. The group activities are appreciated compared to those face to face, of over 50% by those from Borcea commune, by those aged between 30 and 60 years old, by those with high school education, farmers, employees, no status and pensioners.

From the analysis of the citizens' participation in the respective decision-making in a current way, occasionally or not at all, there is a significant and very significant differentiation at the commune level, age, studies and social status.

Overall, the current participation is only 13.12%, respectively of those with secondary and higher education, of those in the age category 41 years old to 60 years old and of those with the social state of farmers and employees.

We find that a number of 300 respondents, namely 79.5% of respondents have a proactive attitude of participation, which is a very good aspect, thus proving that the respondents' answers in this questionnaire can be treated responsibly.

Analyzing the answers to the question depending on the degree of professional training, we find that there is also a very significant difference between the answers at the level of communes, at the level of training, at the level of the socil status. It was also found that those who belong to employed categories are not consulted in very large proportions: employed persons, registered unemployed, unregistered unemployed and pensioners.

The analysis of the answers to the question regarding the main forms of collaboration with local decision makers found that there are very significant differences in education and social status, distinctly significant regarding municipalities and age and insignificant regarding gender.

It should be noted that of the respondents a percentage of 26.5% participated in (a) meetings at the request of local decision makers; (b) in meetings on own account 20,2%; (c) did not participate, but they are interested if they were asked 32.02%; and (d) I did not participate and I am not interested in, 21.2%. The percentage of those who participated or are interested is very high of 78.8%, demonstrating the respondents interest to collaborate with the decision makers.

Every citizen should be informed and given the opportunity to be consulted during the elaboration of the normative documents, with a focus on the groups potentially aimed by the future regulation. The participants' selection (citizens or NGO representatives) must be done in an open manner and based on predefined criteria, in order to ensure the credibility of the process. The participation should be ensured equally for all stakeholders, facilitating the involvement of the disadvantaged groups.

The civil society organizations can play an important role in this process - by facilitating public involvement, representing the interests of stakeholders and informing them about the results.

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