

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The present paper presents issues regarding the role of local authorities in the development of a community. In the first section, the concepts of economic development, economic growth and local development are analysed; the determining relationship between economic development and local development is presented, specifying the role of local public administration in creating well-being in the community.

Keywords: local administration, citizens, economic development, local development, competitive advantage.

1. Introduction

The state is the entity which endeavours for the well-being of its citizens and oversees the aspects leading to its attainment. Its role is to develop and implement policies leading to economic development, an aspect that is reflected by a high living standard of its inhabitants, by a superior quality of life. It is well known that public policies aim at creating the optimal framework for citizens' well-being.

It should be underlined that citizens, the main beneficiaries of the entire activity of the local public administration, do not show an increased interest in the administrative, bureaucratic mechanisms or the efforts made by the authorities to achieve an objective, they want to see the assumed objectives reached, with the observance of the principle of decision-making transparency. [3]

In order to reach their goals, public authorities must aim at economic development, a process that has concerned economists over time, starting with Adam Smith. It is multifaceted [1], belongs to long-term movements and requires extensive and pertinent analyses.

When we discuss economic development, it is imperative to consider aspects of economic growth because the relationship between the two is of the part-to-whole type.

Economic growth refers to the change in the quantitative dimensions of an economy, dimensions that can be analysed through macroeconomic indicators, such as GDP, unemployment rate, inflation.

The data on which economic growth is based include: [2]

- Production per capita;
- Physical capital per worker;
- Rate of return on capital;

- Physical capital to production ratio;
- Percentage of labour and physical capital in national income;
- Production and its growth according to the analysed economy.

All the above are influenced by government actions and economic conditions.

Economic development, however, also requires qualitative changes, which are finally reproduced by the broad, complex change rendered by the degree of involvement in the community, change of mentality. All this is reflected in a life quality in terms of high life expectancy, broader access to services of various categories, consumption of cultural goods on an upward trend, etc.

According to other authors, economic development can be achieved by increasing the share of the secondary sector, but also of the tertiary sector within an economy [7].

In order to implement the concept of economic development, an analysis is required through the prism of several aspects such as:

- the policies considered at the national level
- the policies established by the European Union
- the area's resources, analysed from a demographic point of view, of soil and subsoil
- the geographic positioning
- the road, rail and sea connection etc.

Based on the concepts of economic development, regional development and local development, we can see the determining relationship between them as follows:



Fig. 1. The relationship between economic development and local development

It is essential for the state to develop impactful public policies, but we need to go down to the territory, in the various administrative-territorial units (UATs), to see what is happening at the local level. If we previously stated that it is necessary to consider the resources of the area, Shearer believes that an exaggerated attention to the dynamics of human behaviour risks to lead to the failure of "traditional" economic theory [8].

From the national level, we go down to the regional level and a concept that needs to be defined is that of regional development.

Regional development aims at boosting and diversifying economic activities, stimulating investments in the private sector, meant to lead to a drop in the number of unemployed. [10]

For the development of a region, we can consider several aspects:

- the possibility of creating clusters (according to M. Porter's theory)
- application of theories at the level of the region and/or the community (theory of the 3Ts)
- leveraging the competitive advantage of the region and/or community under analysis.

All this can be implemented successfully only if, beforehand, one carries out the SWOT or PESTLE analysis of the environment in which it is to be applied.

Local development may aim to include urban and rural areas, but also peri-urban areas - those rural areas with an urban footprint [9].

The literature shows that partnerships between various social actors, individuals and other categories of stakeholders represent success for the development of a community. The local public administration (APL) is the main stakeholder, but the support of the other interest groups is also needed in order to set in motion the whole mechanism that aims to increase the welfare of citizens.

Local development under community responsibility (DLRC) is a notion that the European Commission uses as it sees the development policy from the bottom up, thus reversing traditional policies, in this case the population has an important role through the realization and implementation of an integrated strategy. [11]

DLRC is related to social inclusion, social innovation, but also the creation of synergies to achieve the proposed objectives. [11]

Local development should absolutely include competitive advantages such as the tourist potential of the analysed area, the specialized bodies, those in culture and science, elaborating various strategies to combine the activities necessary to support the mentioned fields. [4]

Another advantage of local development is the existence of a university in the region and for the region. It represents a knowledge core, brings vitality to the community, helping the authorities to implement more easily the theory of Florida's 3Ts: talent, technology, tolerance. At the same time, universities play an essential role in training the skills required by the labour market [6], as it is well known that a well-trained workforce leads to economic prosperity [5], and ultimately to a developed community.

2. Methodological Aspects and Research Results

In this paper, the working method used was the exploratory research, the variables within the study having a multidimensional aspect.

Following the centralization and presentation of the theoretical aspects regarding the topic addressed, we proposed the following research questions:

RQ1 – Did the local authorities sufficiently access the cohesion funds in order to eliminate the discrepancies between the regions?

RQ2 – What influences do local authorities have on changing the perception of citizens regarding their interest in the welfare of the locality?

RQ3 – What is the level of citizens' involvement in terms of local events and how do they influence their well-being?

The tool used in the study was the questionnaire, applied through the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire included 29 questions, 24 of which being content questions, and 5 being questions for identifying the respondent. The content questions offered respondents predefined options for answers, or used a 5-point Likert scale to quantify them. The sample studied included 220 respondents, the questionnaire administration period being September - October 2024. The selection of respondents was carried out randomly, with no preconditions for completing the questionnaire..

In order to carry out the survey and to answer the previously stated research questions, five objectives were proposed, each of which associated with a series of questions in the questionnaire:

O1. Assessing respondents' perception of APL's abilities to access European funds.

O2. Assessing the impact of APLs on local development.

O3. Analysing the impact of citizens' participation in community events.

O4. Assessing respondents' perception of the area's competitive advantage

O5. Identifying the resources of the analysed area
Analysis of the sample structure

Based on the recorded data, most respondents are female (66.4%), the share of male respondents being only one third (33.6%). When it comes to the age category of the respondents, half belong to the 18-25 years old group, 18.2% are over 45, 16.4% are aged between 36 and 45, whereas 15.5% are from the 26 -35 group.

A percentage of 56.4% of the respondents have university education, 22.7% are high school graduates, and 17.3% completed postgraduate studies. A percentage of 3.6% is allocated to those with post-secondary education.

As regards the residence milieu, of the 220 people who answered the questions in the questionnaire, the majority come from the urban environment (72.7%).

As for the status on the labour market, most respondents are employed in the public sector (40%), 37.3% are school pupils or students, 15.5% belong to the private sector, the rest of the respondents being entrepreneurs, unemployed or belonging to other categories.

3. Results and Discussions

Homogeneity and representativeness of responses

The first research question proposed in the study was the following: Have local authorities sufficiently accessed cohesion funds in order to eliminate discrepancies between regions? (RQ1).

In order to be able to analyse the perception of the subjects regarding this topic, we wanted to study, in the first phase, the perception of the respondents regarding the number of projects implemented by APL.

A little over 1/3 of the respondents (36.4%) state that APL has implemented a very high number of projects, 39.1% are of the opinion that the number of projects was high, and 23.6% lie the middle when it comes to the analysed subject. An insignificant percentage is allocated to those who believe that APL has implemented very few projects.

Regarding the respondents' perception of the most important social stakeholders for local development, the results obtained at this question confirm the hypotheses derived from the study of the literature, according to which the local public administration represents the most important stakeholder in local development (54.5%). At the same time, citizens identify the County Council as an important stakeholder (37.3%). Individual stakeholders are ranked last (19.1%), given their limited power to bring together interested parties and implement certain projects.

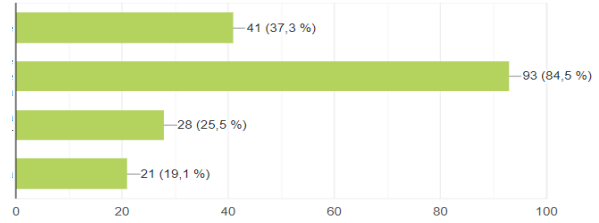


Fig. 2. The importance of social stakeholders in the community

When asked to what extent they believe that universities contribute to the development of the local community, most respondents consider that universities contribute to a high extent (43.6%) and to a very high extent (33.6%) to local development. Those who believe that the impact of universities is neutral are 21.8% and only 1% believe that they play a low part in local development.

RQ2: What influences do local authorities have on changing the perception of citizens regarding their interest in the well-being of the locality?

A question correlated to RQ2 is whether citizens believe that the localities where local authorities are involved benefit from sustainability, a more dynamic labour market, more lively economy, social cohesion.

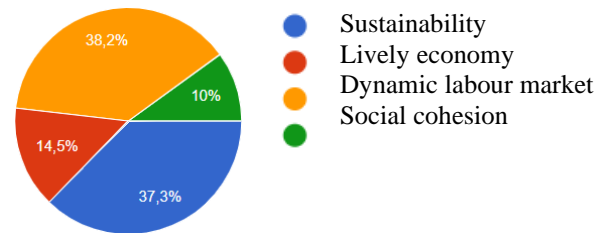


Fig. 3. The effects of the local authorities' involvement in the community

Respondents opted in roughly equal percentages between a more dynamic labour market (38.2%) and sustainability (37.3%). Certain respondents (14.5%) believe that a locality where the local authorities are involved has a more lively economy, while 10% are of the opinion that, through the involvement of the authorities, the idea of social cohesion is strengthened.

Another question refers to Florida's theory of the 3Ts: talent, technology, tolerance, and the extent to which it applies to the localities (towns or cities) where a university operates.

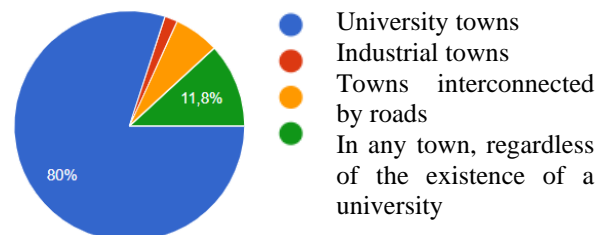


Fig. 4. The impact of the 3Ts in various communities

Following the analysis of the answers collected, the 3Ts can be found much more easily in the university towns and cities, according to the overwhelming majority of the subjects interviewed (80%). 11.8% believe that this theory applies whether or not there is a university in the locality. A low percentage is represented by those who believe that this theory can be found in towns and cities interconnected by the road infrastructure (7.3%).

Another question related to RQ2 refers to investors and their contribution to community development. The answers obtained confirm the theories in the field: attracting investors is an important condition for the development of the community because it leads to the creation of new jobs, which means income reflected in the increase in demand for products and services.

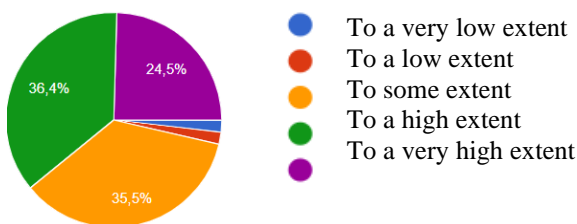


Fig. 5. Respondents' perception of the extent to which investors participate in community development

The subjects believe that investors contribute to local development to a high extent (36.4%) and to a very high extent (24.5%). More than a third of the respondents (35.3%) believe that, to some extent, investors lead to local development, very few (1.8%) are those who do not consider that investors have a role in local development.

Also as regards the identification of the citizens' perception regarding the interest of the authorities for the welfare of the community, the respondents were asked if they think that the APL supports all segments of the population in the community.

Thus, most subjects (35.8%) reckon that the authorities, through the implemented projects, do not address all citizens, 29.5% are of the opinion that the projects only target certain categories, 23.9% think that certain segments are totally neglected. The remaining 10 percent is represented by those who believe that the disabled, the elderly, the persons from disadvantaged areas, as well as children do not benefit from enough projects implemented by the authorities.

RQ3: What is the level of citizens' involvement with local events and how do they influence their well-being?

A developed community also implies an increased sense of belonging, being thus able to determine various individual social stakeholders to complement or help to achieve the projects targeted by the APL.

The feeling of community belonging is essential, local authorities must develop and establish clear strategies and projects in this regard, because a citizen

who feels involved, appreciated by the community will not be indolent to its needs and will be willing to offer support through various activities, including volunteering. Thus, we may say that there is a positive relationship between transparency, APL's involvement and creating a sense of belonging to the community.

Most of the respondents (64.5%) declare that they often participate in events organized in the community, 20% participate only sometimes, and 9.1% rarely. Only 1.3% declare that they always participate, and 5.1% state they never participate.

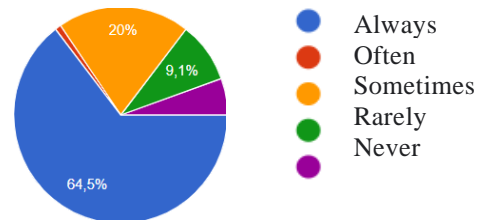


Fig. 6. Degree of citizens' participation in local events

At the same time, the respondents declare that they are willing to get involved in activities carried out for the community to a very high extent (46.4%) and to a high extent (43.6%). 8.2% of the subjects would get involved in the activities carried out for the community to some extent (8.2%), and the others would not get involved at all or would get involved very little.

In this respect, it is necessary to pay more attention to the opinion of citizens and their involvement in various types of activities. This will lead to an increased sense of belonging to the community, which is essential for a developed community.

4. Conclusions

The welfare of the citizens is the primary objective of any state, and hence of the central and local administration.

The well-being of citizens is based on social actors and partnerships between stakeholders, because only these can lead to progress.

The triple helix model, i.e. universities, industry, government, is essential for economic development because:

- ✓ The universities bring about the research component, which leads to innovation, they contribute with the know-how that is the basis of progress, they can create the think-tanks necessary to identify solutions to various problems in the field of administration. At the same time, these institutions educate the future workforce and offer training courses for the human resource already engaged in the labour market mechanism;

- ✓ The industry will shape the products or create the fixed capital necessary for the optimal realization of the services;

✓ The government represents the authority that develops public policies and supervises their implementation in the territory.

The creation of clusters that, according to Michael Potter, lead to the development of a region through industries that support each other, through public-private partnerships, is another way of achieving local and regional development. In this sense, institutional stakeholders can learn from regions with experience in this regard.

Identifying the competitive advantage of the area or region is imperative, because it can “put on the map” a certain region.

Creating and developing a sense of belonging to the community is another pillar that underlies the good operation of a community.

The analysis of these aspects, the identification of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats, along with local initiative, contribute to the reaching of the goals set at the local level.

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