# 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-Ilfov 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 nonfinancial 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	number of projects	No. of projects on local economic development	1	projects on social	No. of land- use and transport infrastructure projects	projects on the	No. of education and training projects	No. of projects on culture, cults, 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:

Whiteh							Do not
	Very	Quite	Rather	Little	Very little	Not at all	know/
	much						no opinion
Help children							opinion
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	06.0604	25 0004	04.000/	0.000/	1 500/	0 5 5 0 (	0 5 5 0 (
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	37.3370	51.0770	21.2770	5.5770	1.13 /0	0.0070	0.5070
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,		27.710/	16 570/	4.000/	2 200/	1 1 4 0 /	1 710/
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	30.3070	33.9070	7.7170	1.1370	0.5070	0.0070	0.0070
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		0.7		10.055	0.070		0.0001
exhibitions	16.67%	35.63%	33.33%	10.92%	2.87%	0.57%	0.00%
Go to concerts,	22.220/	22.010/	24 710/	6.2204	0 5 7 0 (	1 1 50/	0.000/
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%
chuich	10.2970	22.2970	27.43%	1/.1470	11.4370	10.2970	1.1470

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

147 11 1		1	1		1	1	
Walking	21.050/	20.010/	20 410/	7 ( 00/	2 2 4 07	0.500/	0.000/
/sightseeing	21.05%	38.01%	30.41%	7.60%	2.34%	0.58%	0.00%
Walk in the park	37.93%	22.010/	17.82%	7 4 7 0/	1.72%	1 1 5 0/	0.000/
Work out	28.98%	33.91%		7.47%	2.84%	1.15%	0.00%
	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			0 = = = 70				010070
swimming	27.91%	29.07%	19.77%	10.47%	6.40%		
pool	_///		171770	10117 70	011070	5.81%	0.58%
Going out to						0.0170	010070
clubs and	9.83%	21.39%	34.68%	12.72%	10.40%		
restaurants	1.0070		0 1100 / 0		10.1070	10.40%	0.58%
Play						1011070	010070
Backgammon,	8.09%	11.56%	33.53%	20.81%	10.98%		
play cards	0.0970	11.5070	55.5570	20.0170	10.9070	14.45%	0.58%
Read	42.61%	37.50%	17.05%	2.84%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Organize	12.0170	37.3070	17.0570	2.0170	0.0070	0.0070	0.0070
children	20.23%	28.32%	27.17%	9.83%	5.78%		
activities	20.2370	20.3270	27.1770	5.0370	5.7070	6.36%	2.31%
Protect people						0.5070	2.5170
in difficulty	25.86%	40.23%	27.01%	2.87%	1.72%	0.57%	1.72%
Get involved						0.0770	1.7 2 70
in civic	21.84%	33.91%	36.78%	5.17%	0.00%		
activities	21.0470	55.7170	30.7070	5.17 /0	0.0070	1.15%	1.15%
Gardening	30.68%	31.25%	21.02%	7.39%	5.68%	3.98%	0.00%
Visit my	50.0070			1.3770	5.0070	5.7070	0.0070
relatives	13.45%	32.75%	31.58%	12.28%	7.02%	1.17%	1.75%
Visit my					<u> </u>	1.1/70	1.7 3 70
friends	19.65%	46.82%	25.43%	5.78%	1.16%	0.00%	1 1 6 0/
	22.81%	20.070/	20 / 10/	11.70%	2240/	4.09%	1.16%
Go shopping	22.81%	28.07%	30.41%	11.70%	2.34%	4.09%	0.58%
Chatting with	6.90%	14.94%	41.38%	20.11%	9.77%	( 220/	0 5 70/
the neighbors						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:

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

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

How may be a billing permit building permit The number of documents required to get different permits, authorizations issued by the local governments $24.42\%$ $9.30\%$ $1.11\%$ $9.30\%$ $7.02\%$ $4.07\%$ $2.34\%$ $2.33\%$ $1.4.04\%$ $4.07\%$ The author authorizations issued by the local governments $34.68\%$ $30.06\%$ $21.39\%$ $21.39\%$ $5.78\%$ $4.62\%$ $4.62\%$ $1.73\%$ $1.73\%$ $1.73\%$ The attitude of the city employees $34.68\%$ $30.06\%$ $21.39\%$ $2.73\%$ $5.78\%$ $4.05\%$ $4.62\%$ $1.17\%$ $1.73\%$ $1.73\%$ The quality of tocal healthcare the local local government $29.48\%$ $28.90\%$ $27.75\%$ $21.57\%$ $4.05\%$ $4.05\%$ $5.78\%$ $2.31\%$ $2.31\%$ $2.34\%$ $1.73\%$ $1.73\%$ The quality of tocal healthcare the drinking the local local healthcare the drinking the drink	How long it							[]
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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       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       36.26%       25.15%       23.39%       8.77%       4.68%       1.17%       0.58%								
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disposal and storage         54.07%         19.19%         11.05%         8.14%         2.91%         4.07%         0.58%           The quality of public         53.80%         19.88%         12.28%         4.09%         3.51%         2.92%         3.51%           transportation         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%						-		
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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%		74.71%	12.07%	6.90%	2.87%	0.00%	3.45%	0.00%
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image of the locality (banks, trash cans urban furniture etc.) 36.26% 25.15% 23.39% 8.77% 4.68% 1.17% 0.58%	-	39.53%	25.00%	19.19%	9.30%	2.91%	4.07%	0.00%
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	The noise	33.14%	26.16%	19.77%	8.72%	6.98%	4.65%	0.58%

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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	The extent to which these actions are found					
	performed by the local public	in local development strategies					
	administration	(number of proposed projects / actions					
		Jilava	Măgurele	Popesti Leordeni	Bragadiru		
Long time spent in traffic	<ul> <li>conducting traffic studies</li> <li>organizing the traffic system</li> <li>mounting of traffic signs</li> <li>have local police guide the traffic</li> <li>Implementation of traffic</li> <li>management information systems</li> <li>organizing public transport</li> <li>organizing the cycling infrastructure</li> <li>construction of over and</li> <li>underground passages, bypass</li> <li>routes, alternatives ways</li> </ul>	4	5	6	5		
Roads condition	<ul> <li>build new local driveways and roads</li> <li>repair, maintenance of local roads</li> <li>ensuring local road cleaning</li> </ul>	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, authorizati ons by the local government	<ul> <li>provision of on-line public services</li> <li>administrative simplification</li> <li>institutional reorganization</li> <li>developing internal working</li> <li>procedures</li> <li>Improving employee training</li> </ul>	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
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#### 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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