

PERCEPTIONS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OF THE CITY HALL STAFF ON LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

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Abstract:

This micro-research aims to analyze the state of reform at the level of local public administration by evaluating the perceptions of both the members of the local community and the human resources of the City Hall institution, with a particular focus on the Moara commune in Suceava county. The scientific approach carried out showed the fact that the perceptions expressed by the responding residents and those of the human resources of the City Hall regarding the process of public administration reform in the commune do not seem to differ considerably, although we would have expected larger gaps. Thus, it can be concluded that at the level of the Moara commune in Suceava county, the progress recorded regarding the reform of the public administration is satisfactory for both categories of respondents.

Key-words: *local public administration, the City Hall institution, the reform process, the inhabitants of the commune, staff interest in the reform, public services.*

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INTRODUCTION

Public sector reform consists of deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organizations to make them work better. Structural change may include merging or demerging public sector organizations, while process change may include redesigning systems, setting quality standards, and focusing on capacity building. (Public Sector Reform, International Center for Parliamentary Studies) The realization and implementation of public sector reforms can aim at either the allocation of public resources or the redistribution of public sector resources. In addition to reforming the supply of goods and services, on the one hand, or income redistribution transfer programs, on the other, there is also public regulation, which can be the target of reform through various deregulation schemes. (Lane, 2000, p. 143)

As stated in an official document, the aim of the reform in local public administration is to maintain and develop a democratically governed public sector with a solid basis for the continuous development of the welfare of society. (The local government reform – in brief, p. 8)

According to T. O'Connor, the reform in local public administration involves some issues, among which are: the granting of a general competence for local authorities to promote the interests of the local community, the distribution of greater power from the central administration to the local one, the assignment of additional functions reserved to local authorities by ministerial orders (O'Connor, 1993, p. 323).

The purpose of this micro-research is to analyze the stage of reform at the level of local public administration by evaluating the perceptions of both the members of the local community and of the human resources in the City Hall institution, with particularization at the level of the Moara commune in Suceava county.

To achieve the proposed goal, we formulate the following specific objectives of the research approach that we carry out:

- O1: identification of the current stage in the process of reforming the local public administration
- O2: ascertaining the extent to which the changes in the City Hall in which the staff participate coincide with the expectations of the residents
- O3: evaluation of the degree of satisfaction in relation to the public services provided to the local community by the institution of the City Hall

O4: determining the interest of City Hall staff in improving the quality of life of the residents
 O5: highlighting the degree to which public administration reform is a priority for the governance program.

THE POPULATIONS OF THE MICRO-RESEARCH

The populations participating in this research are the inhabitants of Moara Commune, but also the existing staff at the level of the City Hall institution from the same administrative-territorial unit.

According to the last census, the population of Moara Commune is 5932 inhabitants, distributed by age category (see Table no. 1):

Table no. 1. The resident population by age group at the level of Moara commune, Suceava County

Age group	Number of inhabitants
0-19	1.768
20-29	594
30-39	765
40-49	927
50-59	797
Peste 60	1.081
TOTAL	5.932

Source: own processing according to the data provided by the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Resident population by age group, by counties and municipalities, cities, communes, on December 1, 2021, available at <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-demografice/>, [accessed on October 10, 2023]

According to the State of functions, at the level of the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune, 32 people work in the following positions (see Figure no. 1):

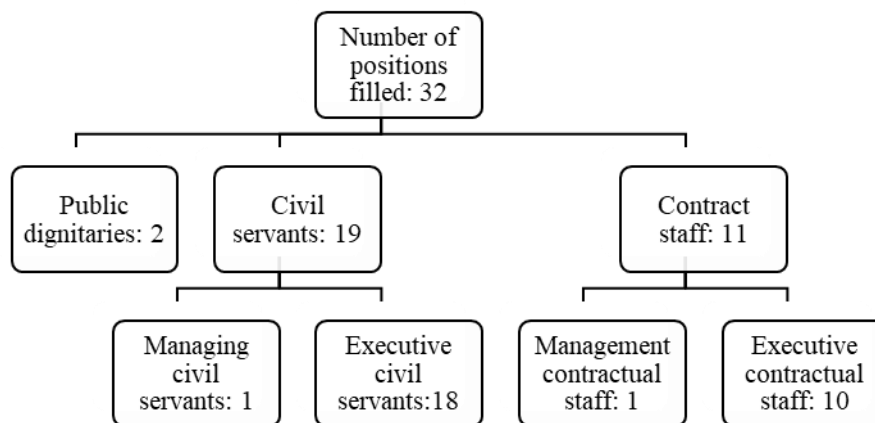


Figure no. 1. The staff of the City Hall of Moara Commune, Suceava County

Source: own processing according to the State of Functions of the City Hall of Moara Commune, Suceava County, available at <https://www.comunamoara.ro/stat-de-functii/>, [accessed on October 10, 2023]

The questionnaire addressed to the inhabitants of Moara Commune was applied randomly. After collecting the data we collected 172 valid instruments among this targeted category (see Table no. 2):

Table no. 2. Sample no. 1 consisting of the inhabitants of Moara Commune, Suceava County

Sampling base				Sample		
Crt. no.	Category	No.	Percent %	Category	No.	Percent%
1.	0-19	1.768	29.80%	0-19	35	20.35%

Sampling base				Sample		
Crt. no.	Category	No.	Percent %	Category	No.	Percent%
2.	20-29	594	10.01%	20-29	46	26.74%
3.	30-39	765	12.90%	30-39	50	29.07%
4.	40-49	927	15.63%	40-49	25	14.53%
5.	50-59	797	13.44%	50-59	11	6.40%
6.	Peste 60	1.081	18.22%	Peste 60	5	2.91%
	Total	5.932	100%	Total	172	100%

The questionnaire addressed to the staff of the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune was applied at its headquarters. After collecting the data we collected 28 valid instruments among this targeted category (see Table no. 3):

Table no. 3. Sample no. 2 formed by the staff of the Moara Commune City Hall, Suceava County

Sampling base				Sample		
Crt. no.	Category	No.	Percent %	Category	No.	Percent %
1.	Public dignitaries	2	6.25%	Public dignitaries	2	7.14%
2.	Managing civil servants	1	3.12%	Managing civil servants	0	0%
3.	Executive civil servants	18	56.26%	Executive civil servants	17	60.72%
4.	Management contractual staff	1	3.12%	Management contractual staff	1	3.57%
5.	Executive contractual staff	10	31.25%	Executive contractual staff	8	28.57%
	Total	32	100%	Total	28	100%

THE CURRENT STAGE OF LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM ACCORDING TO THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED BY THE TWO CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS

To the question To what extent do you consider that the public administration in the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune is subject to a reform process?, among the local residents surveyed, a percentage of 63% (51%+13%) declared that the reform process is being carried out to a large and very large extent measure. At the opposite pole, only 14% (10%+4%) of resident respondents believe that the administration in their locality is subject to reform to a small or very small extent. The rest of the members of the local community (22%) are not fully convinced that the reform is taking place, choosing the answer option neither small nor large (see Figure no. 2a).

Regarding the existing personnel at the level of the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune, all respondents claim that the public administration is, to a large extent (50%) and to a very large extent (50%), subject to the reform process. This result was expected, human resources being rather subjective as they know more closely and face directly what the reform entails in the public system of which they are a part (see Figure no. 2b).

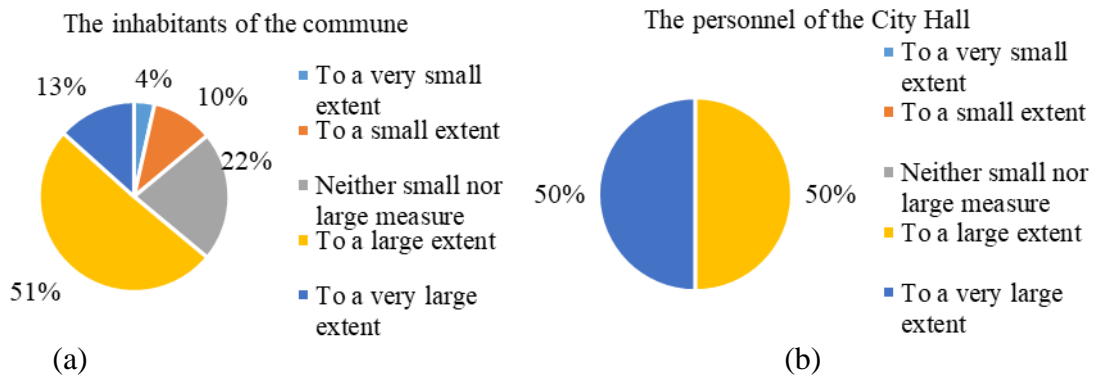


Figure no. 2. Reform at the level of the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune

The recorded answers to the question *To what extent do you consider that the reform of the public administration in the institution of the City Hall of the Moara Commune implies changes and improvements, both in the structure of the administration and at the level of the techniques and working methods used?* shows the fact that the majority of the inhabitants (71%) agree with this statement to a great extent (58%) and to a very great extent (13%), in contrast to only 2% of the members of the local community who support the opposite (see Figure no. 3a).

To the same question, all the human resources surveyed (100%) stated that, to a great extent (43%) and to a very great extent (57%), the public administration reform requires some changes and improvements, both at the level of structure, techniques and methods work used by them in the city hall. It is as predictable as possible that the workers in the administration have such a perception, and this time their subjectivity is present, since they themselves must bring the necessary improvements from the position they occupy within the respective public institution (see Figure no. 3b).

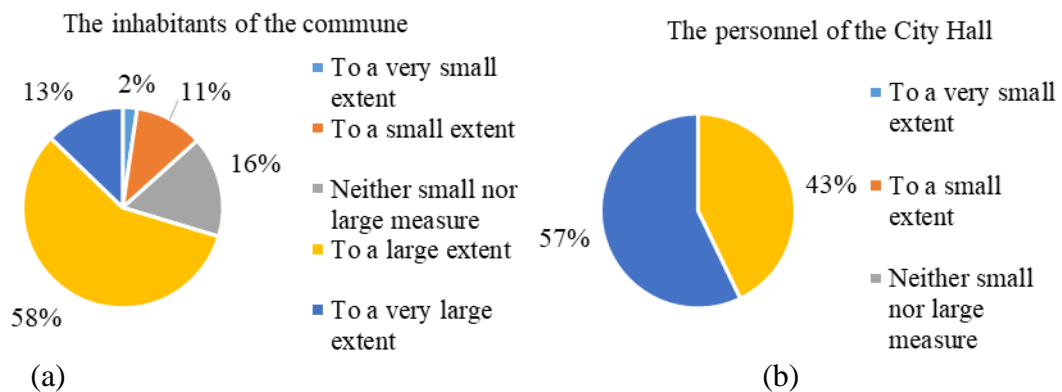


Figure no. 3. Changes and improvements both in the administration structure and in the techniques and work methods used

The extent to which the changes made at the level of Moara Commune coincide with the residents' expectations, respectively the extent to which City Hall staff from the same administrative-territorial unit participated in these changes can be visualized in the following diagrams (see Figure no. 4 a, b):

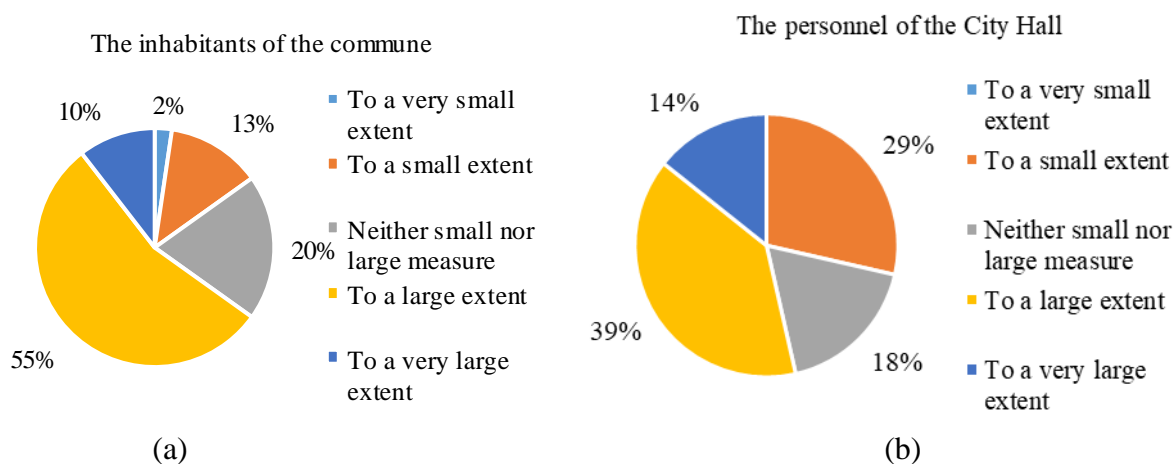


Figure no. 4. Changes - expectations and participation in the reformation process

Being asked *To what extent the changes that have taken place so far in the Moara Commune coincide with your expectations?*, the majority of residents (65%) affirm the fact that, to a large extent (55%) and to a very large extent (10%), the transformations produced match their expectations, in contrast to only 15% (13%+2%) who declare the opposite, the progress recorded so far not being enough for the members of the local community to say that it coincides with their expectations (see Figure no. 4a).

The answers received from City Hall staff to the question *To what extent have you participated in the changes that have taken place so far at the level of Moara Commune?* shows the fact that over half (53%) of them declare that they were involved to a great extent (39%) and to a very great extent (14%) in the transformations that took place in the local administration. It should be highlighted that over ¼ (29%) of the human resources state that their contribution to the changes produced at the level of the commune is low (see Figure no. 4b).

The degree of satisfaction of the respondents with reference to the public services provided by the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune can be visualized in the following graphs (see Figure no. 5 a, b):

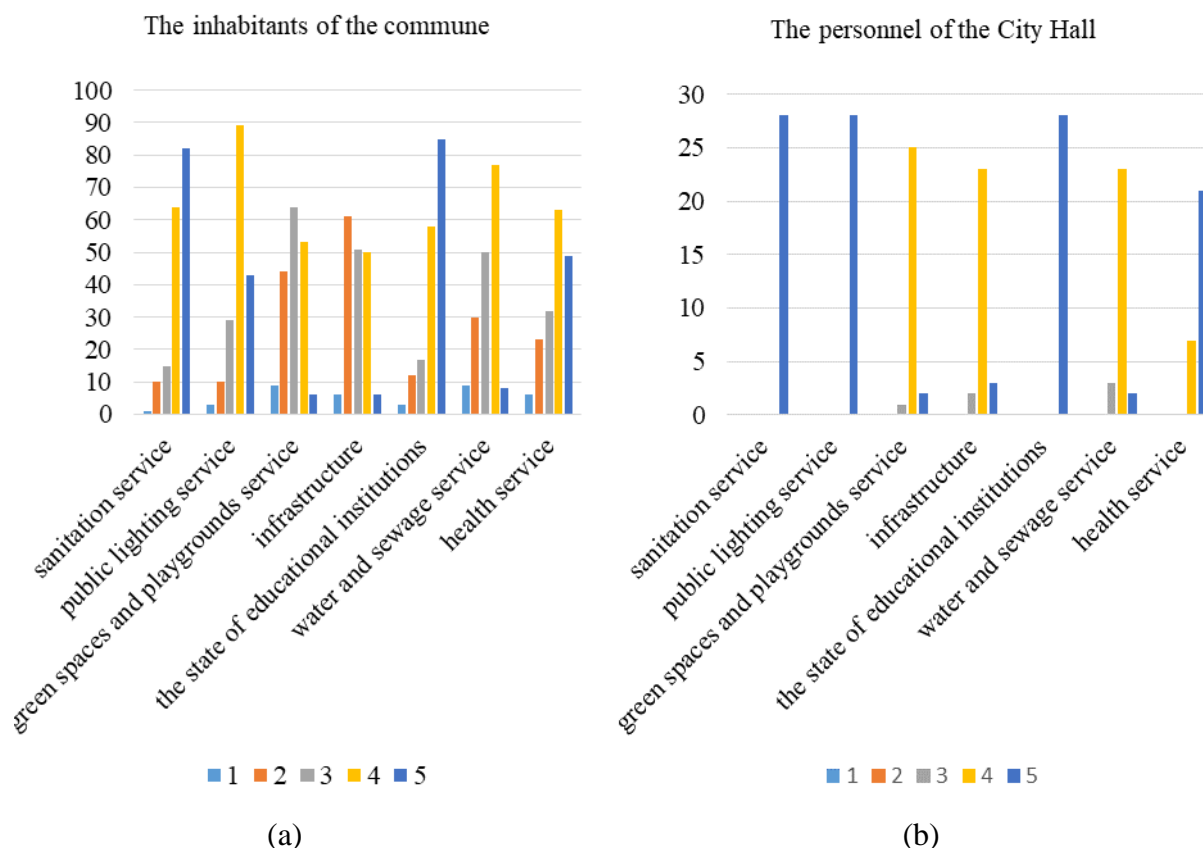


Figure no. 5. The degree of satisfaction of the respondents in relation to the public services provided

To the question *On a scale from 1 to 5 (1-very dissatisfied, 5-very satisfied), how satisfied are you with the services provided by the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune?*, the residents declare themselves very satisfied with the sanitation service and the condition of the education, while the services with which community members are dissatisfied are green spaces and playgrounds, respectively infrastructure (see Figure no. 5a).

Staff perception to the corresponding question *On a scale from 1 to 5 (1-very dissatisfied, 5-very satisfied), how satisfied do you think the residents of Moara commune are with the services provided by the institution where you work?* is that members of the local community are satisfied with all the public services offered (see Figure no. 5b).

THE PRIORITY OF LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN THE VIEW OF BOTH SAMPLES OF RESPONDENTS

The answers given by the two categories of respondents to the question *On a scale from 1 to 5 (1-total disagreement, 5-total agreement), how much do you agree with the statement according to which the reform of the existing public system at the level of Moara Commune aims to create an efficient public administration?* can be viewed in the following graphs (see Figure no. 6 a, b):

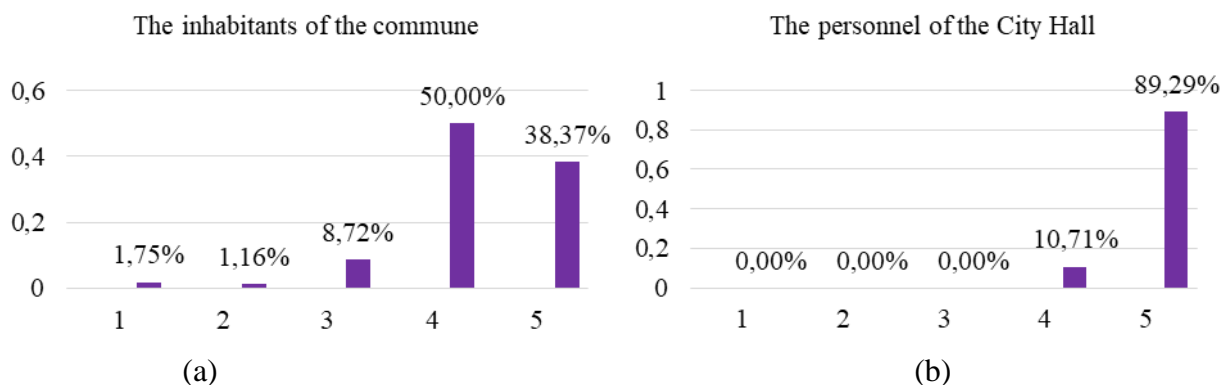


Figure no. 6. The aim of the reform is to create an efficient public administration

As can be seen, the largest share of resident respondents (88.37%) agree to a large extent (50%) and to a very large extent (38.37%) with this assertion, the rest of only 11.63% opting for the other answer options (see Figure no. 6a).

Among the staff of the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune, there is a percentage of 89.29% who declare that, to a very large extent, the creation of an efficient public administration is aimed at (see Figure no. 6b).

The opinion of the inhabitants regarding the interest of the staff of the Moara Commune City Hall in improving the quality of their lives and the extent to which human resources appreciate that they contribute to this process can be identified in the following diagrams (see Figure no. 7 a, b):

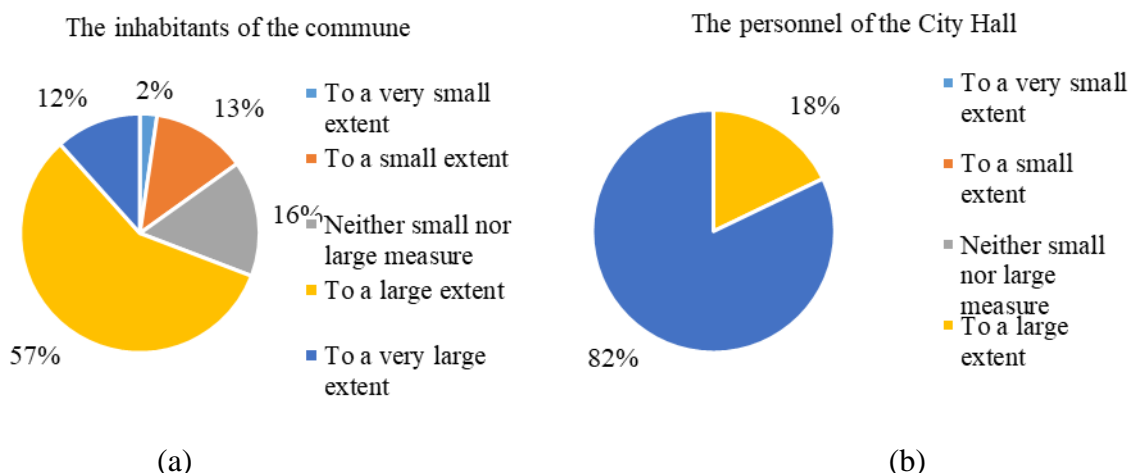


Figure no. 7. The staff's interest in improving the quality of life of the residents

Asked *To what extent do you consider that there is interest on the part of the employees of the City Hall of the of Moara Commune in improving the quality of life of the inhabitants?*, the majority of the inhabitants have a positive perception, declaring in a percentage of 69% that it exists to a great extent (57%) and to a very great extent (12%) , compared to a percentage of only 15% stating that the interest is low (13%) and very low (2%) (see Figure no. 7a).

Correspondingly, to the question *To what extent do you consider that through the activity you carry out you contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants of Moara Commune?*, as expected, and this time, all the human resources questioned declare themselves highly involved (18%) and to a very large extent (82%) in increasing the standard of living in this administrative-territorial unit (see Figure no. 7b).

The extent to which the inhabitants of the commune consider that the reform of the public administration is a priority for the government program and the extent to which tasks related to the reform of the public administration are among the duties of the city hall staff can be identified in the following graphic representations (see Figure no. 8 a, b):

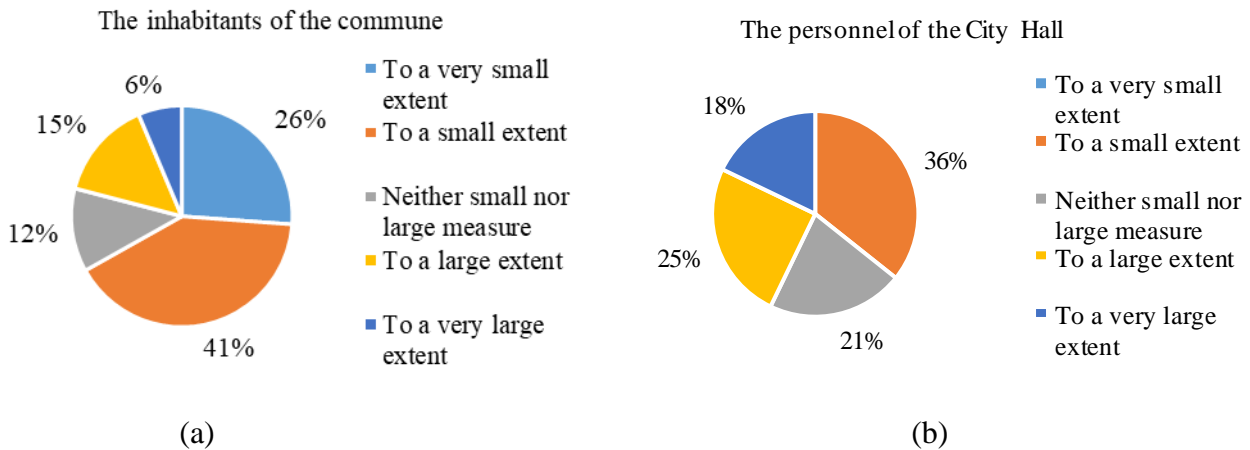


Figure no. 8. The priority of public administration reform within the governance program

Being asked *To what extent do you consider that the reform of the public administration is a priority for the government program?*, most of the inhabitants (67%) are of the opinion that there is no interest in this direction, the reform of the public system being addressed mainly by the authorities government to a small (41%) and very small (26%) extent (see Figure no. 8a).

The responses of human resources from the Moara Commune City Hall to the question *To what extent are among your duties tasks related to the reform of the public administration?*, highlights a rather weighted balance between the respondents (43%=25%+18%) who declare that they have responsibilities in the field of improving the public sector, compared to the staff who say the opposite (36%) (see Figure no. 8b).

The level of satisfaction of the two categories of respondents with reference to the activity of the main actors involved in the public administration reform process can be visualized in the following graphs (see Figure no. 9 a, b):

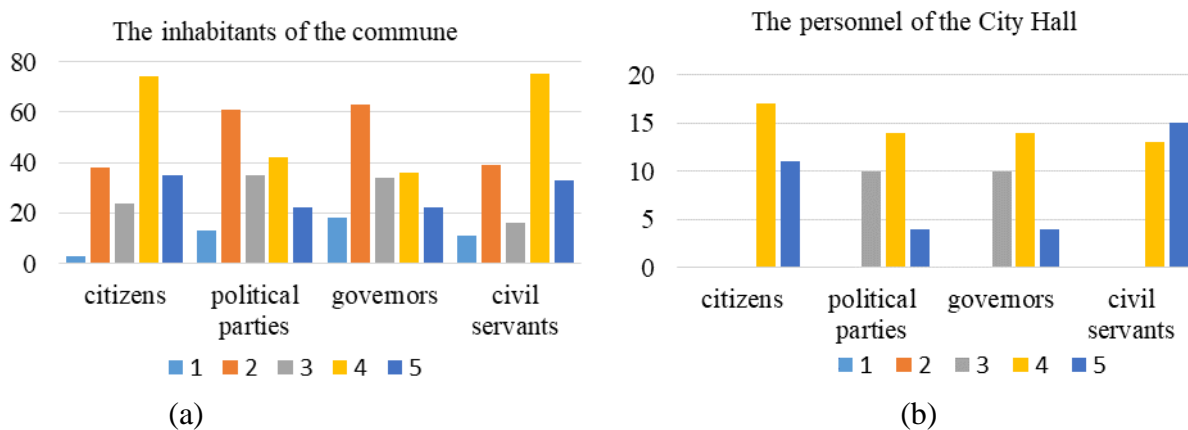


Figure no. 9. Actors involved in the public administration reform process

Thus, to the question *On a scale from 1 to 5 (1-very dissatisfied, 5-very satisfied), how satisfied are you, in general, with the activity of the main actors involved in the public administration reform process?*, the surveyed residents show satisfied with the involvement of citizens and civil servants, respectively, they declare themselves dissatisfied with the activity of political parties and governors (see Figure no. 9a).

On the other hand, to this question, the staff from the institution of the City Hall of Moara Commune are satisfied with all the actors involved in the process of reforming the public administration, with the citizens and civil servants in the first position, followed by the political parties and the governors (see Figure no. 9b).

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of what has been presented in the previous pages, we can conclude that through the action taken it was possible to fulfill the proposed goal consisting in analyzing, from the perspective of the perceptions of the members of the local community and of the human resources in the institution of the City Hall, the state of reform at the level of the local public administration in the commune Moara, Suceava county.

With reference to the actuality of the reform of the public administration in the institution of the City Hall, both the inhabitants of the commune and especially the staff declare that the reform process is being carried out to a large and very large extent. It is obvious that this second category of respondents are rather subjective in expressing their opinion, themselves being part of the public administration system and thus attributing a positive connotation to the activity they carry out.

The analysis of the opinions expressed in relation to the extent to which the changes produced at the level of the public administration in the commune, in which the City Hall staff participate, coincide with the expectations of the residents reveals slightly different results. If for most members of the local community, the progress recorded so far at the level of the commune is satisfactory, only a little over half of the human resources questioned declare that they have been involved to a large and very large extent in the transformations that have taken place in the local administration.

As expected, the degree of satisfaction with public services provided at the level of the commune is perceived differently by the two categories of respondents: members of the local community declare themselves satisfied with certain public services (sanitation, education) and dissatisfied with other public services (green spaces and playgrounds, infrastructure), while City Hall staff are of the opinion that all public services provided satisfy local needs. The answers of the latter certainly do not completely reflect the reality, because there are certainly dissatisfactions on the part of the inhabitants of the commune with reference to certain public services, as we have shown previously.

Residents' opinions regarding the interest of City Hall staff in improving their quality of life and those of human resources regarding the extent to which they appreciate that they contribute to this process do not seem to be very different. If the majority of the members of the local community have a positive perception of the interest shown by the City Hall employees, as expected, and in this regard, all the staff surveyed declare themselves involved in increasing the standard of living in the commune.

In relation to the perception of the two categories of respondents regarding the priority of public administration reform for government authorities, we recorded different opinions. On the one hand, most of the inhabitants are of the opinion that there is no interest in this direction, on the other hand, we found a fairly weighted balance between the respondents who declare that they have responsibilities in the field of improving the public sector, compared to the staff who say the contrary.

Overall, the perceptions of local community members and City Hall staff regarding the public administration reform process do not seem to differ considerably, although we would have expected larger gaps. Thus, it can be concluded that at the level of the Moara commune in Suceava county, the progress recorded regarding the reform of the public administration is satisfactory for both categories of respondents.

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