



# **MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN URBAN MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Citizen Participation in Timisoara**

### **Case study of Neighbourhood Consultative Councils**

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**To Cristina**

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## **Argument**

The notion of democracy is characterized by a considerable vagueness from a theoretical as well as practical point of view. It lacks an unambiguous definition therefore it is open to a number of alternative interpretations. It has also been argued that “democracy does not exist in practice”. According to this standpoint, democracy is an ideal, and democratic institutions should be judged by how closely they approximate it.

There are at least two different ideals of democracy that correspond to two main traditions: direct democracy, characterized by the involvement of citizens in collective decision making about public affairs, and representative democracy in which the popular rule is achieved through the mediating agency of elected representatives.

But public participation is a necessary condition for any democratic policy. Representative democracy must be based on public participation as a continuous process of exchange between the state and civil society. Olsen (1982) posits that all individuals should have the opportunity to participate in collective decisions, that participation should include a wide variety of activities beyond voting, and that responsibility for collective decision making should not be limited to officials and experts, but should be dispersed to include all people affected.

Public participation can have numerous forms that vary from society to society according to the historical, political and socio-economic background of the respective countries. For instance, developed democratic societies no longer prove high voting rates but participation is stronger in what concerns the membership in non governmental organizations, lobbying or campaigning. On the other hand, people from countries that are only consolidating their democracies rely on casting their votes rather than other forms of public participation.

This paper is focused on a country that falls under the second category. Ex-communist country from the Eastern Europe, Romania is still undergoing a transition process with deep changes within the context of society. After almost sixteen years from the collapse of communism, public participation is starting to show some results, but there is much yet to be accomplished. Both government and citizens are increasing their understanding of the power and potential of democracy in Romania but there might be long way to go until we can talk about proper citizen participation.

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## **Chapter 1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Problem Statement

The twin challenges of urbanization and globalization present an obvious opportunity for city governments to fundamentally rethink how they function and how they intend to develop their localities. A 'business as usual' approach is a recipe for disaster in the medium to long-term and will cause a collapse in the functioning of the core systems of cities and towns.

Public participation is a key ingredient in the recipe for democracy. Public participation increases transparency in the decision-making process. If citizens are involved in the policy development, they will be able to make government officials more accountable for their decisions. Therefore, individuals must be involved in the decision-making process because their input can help create useful solutions to problems, such as community housing or education, which are an integral part of their every day lives.

All the above are reasons to consider that **a deep analysis of the way cities develop and implement policies for increasing citizen participation is crucial for developing and strengthening an effective democracy that is able to learn and benefit from the public participation.**

During the last decade, many countries in Eastern Europe have been undergoing major changes, both in their political and economic systems. Among the challenges that these countries have been facing is the issue of incorporating citizens into the decision-making process. Very often citizens do not understand their rights and responsibilities and therefore are not able to express their opinions and concerns. Even though the process is slow and tiresome, the countries of this region are making great efforts to strengthen their democratic systems.

Another important issue for the Eastern European countries is the lack of trust on the part of the citizens towards the political and administrative sphere. This is why the core of democratic development in this region is the need for people to believe that the politicians they elect to represent them are addressing their concerns and best interests in improving the welfare and "quality of life". This is increasingly **important at the municipal government level where the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery is more acute and where the lack of accessibility of citizens and transparent decision-making fuels corruption, inhibits good governance and decreases the likelihood for social and economic improvements.**

In the pursuit of more effective and efficient government service delivery, several local government bodies and representatives of civil society throughout Eastern Europe are taking active approaches through the implementation of a number of citizen participation mechanisms. This is also the case of Romania where initiatives for incorporating people in the decision making process have started to be implemented. This process may be lacking coherence and even consistency sometimes, but it is nevertheless an important step forward.

While some policies concerning citizens' participation have been implemented in a few cities of Romania, most of them did not appear as a result of a local initiative, but through the involvement of different international organizations. But there are yet some cases where



forms of citizen participation occurred due to local concerns. The most developed and relevant one is the city of Timisoara, which is the subject of this research. The need for a better relation with the citizens and the inspiration from the city of Mulhouse, France, a town with which Timisoara has twinning relations, convinced the municipality of Timisoara of the utility and importance of involving the citizens in the administrative life of the town beyond the regular vote cast in local elections. The implications, efficiency and problems of this initiative are to be thoroughly looked into in the following chapters.

## **1.2. Research Objective**

The broad goal of this paper is to assess the extent to which the citizen participation initiatives and projects are developed in Romania and to provide an insightful analysis of one of the most developed forms of citizen participation to the decision making process, the Neighborhood Consultative Councils formed by the municipality of Timisoara.

Several major perspectives have been considered in order to achieve this objective. The literature review on the subject matter of democracy and citizen participation provides a good understanding of the concept of public participation in general and of the “ingredients” that form it. Further on, the study of the political, legal and social context of Romania is meant to design the framework in which the citizen participation initiatives are developed. At the same time, a proper understanding of this general context proves helpful when it comes to a more in depth analysis of any of the policies developed as far as citizen participation is concerned..

This leads to the more specific objectives of this paper, which are giving insight into the relation between the Neighborhood Consultative Councils and the municipality of Timisoara, providing a strengths and weaknesses analysis and identifying the possible elements that can lead to a more efficient functioning of these councils.

## **1.3. Research Methodology**

This part is meant to present the research methodology used, providing at the same time a complete overview of the whole analysis process. Through the course of this chapter I shall justify and further explain the methods that I used in order to conduct my case study and to draw the conclusions. Information on data collection techniques and on the way I processed my findings is also provided.

The chapter is structured into four sections, each of them dealing with the separate stages necessary in order to reach the final conclusions.

- Research Strategy

The questions of this paper are:

1. To what extent citizen participation initiatives and projects were or are developed in Romania?
2. What is the level of citizen’s awareness of Neighborhood Citizens Committees (NCC) as a new policy to increase participation?

3. What is the reason why the NCC established by the Local Government of Timisoara, Romania were developed, how they work, are they effective and have they met their purposes?

The first issue mentioned is very important with respect to understanding the general Romanian context of citizen participation. In order to meet this objective I made use of **secondary research**, approaching the phenomenon from a historical, legislative and quantitative point of view. To this purpose I consulted the respective Romanian legislation of the past 15 years, visited the web sites of a number of local municipalities and reviewed the already existing studies that approach this issue. The context in which these initiatives and projects were developed was analyzed mainly by studying the data from the Public Opinion Barometer (**BOP**) from the last 6 years. The BOP is a national research prepared each semester containing dates and analysis regarding Romanians feelings towards various issues like democracy, corruption, political parties etc. as well as demographic data.

The second issue mentioned, the awareness, has a particular relevance in an environment which benefits from the development of a new tools of participation. Like any new policy, it is extremely important that people are aware of its existence and of its purposes and therefore I measured the level of awareness by including specific questions in the questionnaire. The final purpose is to have a comprehensive view and to isolate the specifics of society in order to have a sound framework for the third question posed, namely the analysis of the Timisoara Neighborhood Citizens Committees (NCC) initiative.

The method used in this respect is the **case study**. This method is preferred in order to cover the specific contextual particularities that are crucial to the phenomenon studied. The research is at the same time explanatory and can tackle the theoretical and local specific issues regarding the citizen's participation process.

In order to support this strategy I used several data collection techniques. The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, survey and observation. The secondary data was gathered through the consultation of a number of documents (e.g. local legislation, transcripts of the City Council and NCC meetings, local press).

All the data collected in the first two stages was further collated and considered in order to meet the final objective of the research. A SWOT analysis of the NCCs was developed to this respect.

- Research Plan:

Stage 1 - Conduct a review of the literature on citizen participation in general and on the Romanian context in particular. A critical approach of the related literature is crucial in order to narrow down the focus of the research study. Assimilating the relevant theoretical models and the particular Romanian features is considered to be of high importance.

Stage 2 – Describing the policies and the projects concerning citizen participation in Romania. In order to perform a competitive analysis of the process one needs to consider both the large national context and the local municipal features. An in depth study of the nation scale framework has to include the historical, social and legislative matters. This national

framework heavily influences the local initiatives for they operate in already existing pattern that grants them rules, rights and obligations.

Stage 3 – Analysis of the NCC in Timisoara. The main focus is be on the current organization of the NCCs, their practices, their place within the local decision making process and the way they are approached by both local representatives and citizens. The major problems and constraints are highlighted as well as the positive aspects.

Stage 4 – Conclusions and recommendations. After going through all these stages findings are used in order to draw the final conclusions. Using the method of extrapolation, the conclusions regarding the NCCs in Timisoara will be extended to a more general level, considering of course all the influential factors.

- Data Collection

The data necessary for the case study was collected in Timisoara following several steps

1. Consult the City Hall data base and legislative history to gather all the preliminary information. Main issues pursued:

- the regulations,
- number of initiatives and consultations on the part of the NCC,

2. Interview the mayor of the city, the vice-mayor as well as local councillors who were, or still are, involved in this project. These were semi-structured interviews, in each case considering the position of the subject in the decision making process. However, the main issues pursued in all the interviews were:

- the reasons why the Council has such a policy,
- the hardships encountered when implementing it,
- the capacity allocated,
- their expectations and attitudes towards it,
- the outcome so far.

3. Interview members and leaders of NCCs. The points tackled in the interviews were:

- why they have joined such an initiative,
- what are their expectations and hardships,
- what are the results so far,
- what is the level of participation,
- what is their influence in the decision making process.

There were 16 persons who were interviewed all of them representing different participating parties and different points of view: the mayor and the vice-mayor of the City of Timisoara, two local councilors, the General Director from the Citizens' Information Bureau, The public relations department representative, the Manager of the city hall department responsible for the NCCs, three NCCs presidents, six NCCs members. Each interview lasted on average 90 minutes. They were recorded and the data from the transcripts was classified, re-organized and analyzed in correlation with each other and with information that I had previously gather.

4. The next step was the development of a questionnaire to assess the awareness level and the impact of these NCC on the citizens. The analysis is based on 302 valid questionnaires, the subjects being chosen out of three neighborhoods using the seventh step method. The resulting sample is respecting the socio-demographic structure of the population according to the 2002 National Census. The questionnaire lasted for a maximum of 15 minutes, consisted of closed question only (open questions were avoided so that the data was easy to analyze and the non-answers avoided).

The questionnaire was structured in 4 parts – (1) civic and political participation, (2) interest in the local political and administrative matters and the information methods, (3) attitude towards NCCs and (4) soci-demographic data.

It was structured as follows:

- whether the subject is informed about the NCCs
- if the subjects knows about NCCs, what is his/her attitude towards it
- if the subject communicated with the NCC
- if the subject doesn't know about the NCCs what is his/her attitude towards these types of initiatives
- what other forms of participation has the subject been part of (e.g. voting, meetings, signing petitions, campaigning, NGO or political party membership)
- interest in the activity of the City Council (information methods used for that, frequency of information)
- interest in being part of the decision making process

- Data Analysis

The questionnaire data was coded and analyzed using SPSS software. All the results were used to complete a SWOT analysis.

#### **1.4. Relevance of research findings**

Citizen Participation is a subject that has been tackled by the Romanian analysts more from a theoretical point of view and less based on research findings. This study is giving both a general picture of the Romanian citizen participation habits and a particular analysis of one of the most developed policies in this respect. This is the first study that attempts to discover how the citizen participation policy in Timisoara works, if it is effective, why it was developed and if it might lead to an improvement in participation.

The research is important considering that there are few reliable data on citizen participation in Romania, and none in Timisoara. At the same time the learnings and recommendations of the research could be used as basis for a possible future implementation of such policy of citizen participation in Bucharest and other cities of Romania. At present there is no policy for increasing citizens' participation proposed or implemented by the Bucharest municipality, but studies like this might prove that the so far disparate attempts to involve the citizens in the decision making process can lead to an overall increased efficiency of the administration.

## **Chapter 2**

# **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Relevance of the theories reviewed**

Public participation is a compulsory clause for a democratic polity, despite of the mechanisms through which preferences are uttered and reconciled. Representative democracy has to be based on public participation as a permanent process of exchange between the state and civil society. According to Barbu (2001, p. 36), quoting Young, “citizens can only legitimately authorize representatives and hold them accountable if there are many avenues and institutions through which they engage with both each other and their representatives”. Olsen (1982) posits that all individuals should have the opportunity to participate in collective decisions, that participation should include a wide variety of activities beyond voting, and that responsibility for collective decision making should not be limited to officials and experts, but should be dispersed to include all people affected.

Over the last years Romanian local governments have assumed broad new responsibilities in a variety of areas and have attempted, in many cases, to carry out these new responsibilities with limited resources. But also during this period many local governments have realized the benefits of opening their decision making process, as much as possible, to citizen participation. This process has not only provided valuable information, opinions, and priorities from citizens to local elected officials, but it has also provided citizens with information concerning how their tax money is being spent. But before analyzing this process we need to understand the concepts that it is based upon.

Accordingly, this chapter has been centred on two main concepts: democracy and participation. The theories reviewed provide important tools for understanding the case of Romania, a country that is currently in the process of developing its democratic system and that still struggles with many of the communist era heritages, such as people’s expectations that the state is overtly protective and the lack of involvement in the decision making process on the part of the regular citizens.

### **2.2. The concept of Democracy**

The idea of democracy comes from the Greek demos (people) and kratos (power). The concept is characterised by a considerable ambiguity from a theoretical as well as practical point of view. It lacks a clear definition and is open to diverse interpretations. It has also been argued that democracy does not exist in practice. According to this point of view, democracy is an ideal, and democratic institutions should be judged by how much they approximate to it.

There are at least two different ideals of democracy that match to two main traditions: direct democracy, characterised by the direct participation of the community in collective decision-making about public affairs, and representative democracy, in which the popular rule is achieved through the action of elected representatives. As a consequence of the history and development of the concept of democracy, direct democracy became associated with a substantive view (i.e. democracy as a normative ideal, as an end in itself), while representative democracy has been linked to an instrumental interpretation (i.e. the practice of representative democracy, democracy as a means or method).

There are various ways of classifying different theories of democracy. In this respect, the following issues will be addressed:

- the relationship between direct and representative democracy
- the interplay between the state and civil society

### **2.3. The relationship between the direct and representative models of democracy**

It is realistic to state that the concept of public participation permeates the gamut whose extremes are represented by the models of representative and direct democracy. In this view, public participation can be conceived of as a way of action aimed at exercising a direct or indirect influence on collective processes of decision making through a series of different mechanisms. This position embodies the view that representative institutions do not unavoidably stand in opposition to direct citizen involvement, but require public participation to function. Representative democracy cannot be either realised or sustained without an active citizen body. Also, according to Barbu (2001, p. 124), “in large-scale mass society, representation and participation mutually require each other for politics to be deeply democratic”.

The reconciliation of the two key traditions of democracy is essential in the context of a system of local democratic governance. But, if it is to be effective, reconciliation must move from a critique of the dominant theory. Liberalism has historically provided both the foundations for, and a constraint upon, the functioning of contemporary democratic systems. In this respect, it is possible to argue that the ‘liberal orthodoxy’ has, in a certain sense, misappropriated the concept of democracy when it should be considered as a mere conception. The relationship between democracy and liberalism needs to be critically assessed.

Classical liberalism underlines the significance of individual rights and the limits on state power, whereas the idea of democracy puts more weight on popular control and political equality: although not in opposition, the underlying priorities are different (Pavel, 1998). Democracy is about collective decision making rather than individual choice. The question is how far can the constraints that liberalism has historically placed upon the process of democratization be overcome, without damaging the basis of democracy itself? Preda (2003, p. 111) takes a similar standpoint, arguing that the main problem with liberal democracy may “lie not so much in its being intrinsically incapable of extending forms of citizen participation, as in the complacency with which it claims to have met all legitimate democratic aspirations”.

### **2.4. The overlap between the state and civil society**

In the classical definition of democracy, state and society entirely overlap: the active and engaged citizen is committed to the state, and society coincides with the political community. The distinction between the public and the private corresponds to that between the domain of the household and the body politic. Rousseau’s theoretical analysis rests on the notion of individual citizen participation in collective decision making, and on a clear formulation of the idea of political community: “Each one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole” (Rousseau 1762/1968, p. 61).

By contrast, fundamental to the liberal tradition, from Locke onwards, is the separation between the state and society, and between the public and the private domains. The state, whose primary duty is to protect private property and individual rights, embodies the territory of the public and of the political. Civil society stands for the totality of relationships voluntarily entered into by self-determining individuals in the pursuit of their self-chosen goals.

Within the structure of the liberal separation between the state and civil society, it is possible to challenge the way in which the separation is defined. This entails a redefinition of the public and private areas and of their interrelationship but not the removal or erosion of every margin between them. The attempt to revise the strictly dichotomous framework characteristic of the liberal thought can be justified in terms of the crisis of the distinctions between state and civil society, and public and private (Cohen and Arato 1992). Both the equivalencies state = public and civil society = private need to be reconsidered in order to take into account the great fluidity of the categories concerned. On the one hand, the public realm cannot be only reduced to the state; on the other, the domain of social life outside the state cannot just be identified as private.

The boundary between the public and private sphere is vague. Drawing a clear-cut line between the two categories that constitute a dichotomy is not possible. Public and private are not self-sufficient and stable realms: their expansion and contraction is rooted in the attempt to capture a particular aspect of social reality. This is obvious if the broad diversity of ways in which 'public' and 'private' are used in current debates is taken into consideration. Not only are definitions of public and private tricky, civil society is an elusive idea, with a many-sided historical development and with various meanings derived from a whole series of different definitions.

The complexity and multidimensional character of civil society is exemplified by Sales' conceptualisation. Civil society is conceived of as Preda (1996, preamble Almond & Verba Civic Culture) quoting Sales:

- a place of association and social integration where mediations take place between individuals and groups, groups and social institutions, social institutions and political and economic institutions
- a place where social identities and new lifestyles are formed
- diversified, if not divided (a characteristic which is the key to its internal dynamics)
- the locus of public opinion formation and resulting struggles
- a reality primarily linked to the state, but also to the transnational economic system and, more and more, to the domestic or internal area of everyday life
- having fundamental ties with democratic systems as a condition for existence and development

Drawing on Habermas' view of the public sphere, society can be divided into four key components – the state, the market, the public and the private areas – that interact in diverse ways. Within this framework, civil society represents a sphere of dynamic and responsive public discourse between the state, the public sphere consisting of voluntary organizations, and the market sphere concerning private firms and unions.



By focusing on the character of the overlap between the state and civil society, it is possible to consider the two realms as different, but at the same time associated, aspects of social and political systems. Society and state act as two essential moments, separate but adjacent, distinct but interdependent. In other words, civil society is not and cannot be wholly enclosed within the framework of the state: rather, it is “created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization” (Cohen and Arato 1992, p. ix), and consists of a spontaneous order of social activities that are privately owned, market-directed and voluntarily run. At the same time, civil society does not exist in a vacuum. To admit that civil society retains a distinctive character to the extent that it is not under the direct control of the state does not preclude taking into consideration and exploring the different aspects of the processes of interaction. This interpretation is particularly valuable when analysing a system of governance.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The institutional forms of liberal democracy developed in the nineteenth century are not enough for and ineffective at dealing with a range of new issues and concerns, and also for accomplishing the central ideas of democracy, including facilitating involvement and forging consensus through dialogue (Fung and Wright 2001). Representation does not fatigue the inherent plurality of a democratic polity: the electoral process on its own is not sufficient, but must be supplemented by other arrangements and practices. The social, economic and political demarcation of society should be reflected in the differentiation of its democratic structures and processes. Only hybrid forms of democracy have the potential to integrate diverse modes of decision making and to break the dichotomy of state–civil society.

Public participation is an essential condition for a democratic polity, regardless of the mechanisms through which preferences are expressed and reconciled. Representative democracy must be based on public participation as a continuous process of exchange between the state and civil society. According to Barbu (2001, p. 36), quoting Young “citizens can only legitimately authorize representatives and hold them accountable if there are many avenues and institutions through which they engage with both each other and their representatives”. Olsen (1982) posits that all individuals should have the opportunity to participate in collective decisions, that participation should include a wide variety of activities beyond voting, and that responsibility for collective decision making should not be limited to officials and experts, but should be dispersed to include all people affected.

These reflections are particularly relevant in relation to local government and local democracy. If diverse conceptions of democracy have the potential to sustain and reinforce each other, this is all the more easily realized at the level of local government, due to its scale and nature. It is the local level that therefore provides the most suitable setting for investigating the relationship between representative democracy and different forms of public participation. Local government has been considered as an integral and essential part of democracy. Local government offers greater opportunities for citizens to engage in the praxis of democracy beyond the electoral mechanisms.

To conclude, it should be stressed that local democracy is not universal concept or trend. It is characterised by certain institutions, processes and values and, as such, should be understood within a specific context.

## **2.6. The concept of Participation**

There exists a vast amount of literature investigating determinants of participation. The most popular interpretations refer to the individual's resources and to "socialization for participation" by means of involvement in civic groups and initiatives. The first explanation assumes that those who have more resources, such as knowledge, money or time, are more likely to participate (Verba et. Al 1995), and it has been tested in the context of post-communist democracies, pointing to the lack of visible differences between them and established democracies. The latter approach points to the importance of "education" (de Tocqueville 1969) or "socialization" for citizenship. The most recent form of this argument has been articulated by Robert Putnam, for whom associational membership is the source of social trust: "social trust and civic engagement are strongly correlated; the greater the density of associational membership in a society, the more trusting its citizens. Trust and engagement are two facets of the same underlying factor - social capital" (Putnam 1995a: 73). Trust and membership are believed to be interrelated to such an extent, that they are sometimes used individually as sufficient indicators of social capital.

There are many different ways of linking citizens with the government and there are many forms how citizens can participate. Political participation in a broad definition is those acts by citizens that more or less directly aim at influencing the outcome of a political process (Verba et. Al 1978). The main focus has been for a long time on the basic forms of participation where people vote at elections. However, in the last years, more attention was given to other enhanced forms of participation, where citizens become involved in policy making and implementation. The two forms do not contradict each other. In democratic societies the only alternative to legitimize the actions of representative bodies is through elections and therefore basic forms are extremely important. From a certain dimension of the community there is a clear need for elected representatives and formal decision making processes. Nevertheless, basic forms of participatory democracy are insufficient in many cases. Therefore, other forms of citizen participation were included in many countries to improve civic commitment in local planning, decision making and implementation and to enhance governance.

## **2.7. Citizen Participation**

There are many definitions of participation process developed through the time.

"...Participation includes people in decision making processes, in implementing programs, their sharing in the benefits of development programs and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs. (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977)

"Participation is concerned with ... the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements to those hitherto excluded from such control." (Pearse and Steifel, 1979)

"Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a (development) project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance and other values they cherish." (Paul, 1987)

“Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions which affect them” (World Bank)

“The process of involving citizens in urban decision-making is an essential means to achieve the “Inclusive City”, a place where everyone, regardless of wealth, gender, age, race and religion, is enabled to participate productively and positively in the opportunities cities have offer” (UN-HABITAT, 2000).

The basic forms of (political) participation have some weaknesses. People are involved in the decision making processes only each three to five years, when they have to elect representatives. In-between elections the capability of citizens to influence the decision of politicians is limited. Responsiveness, accountability and transparency tend to be important especially in election periods. This can lead to the situation where politicians invest in highly visible projects on local level during election periods.

This is the reason why in the past years a growing number of concerns towards basic form of participation have grown and claims have been made to expand the concept of participation. In this sense participation is not only the election of people into representative bodies, but rather the more or less formal way to let people participate in and influence government activities (Lutz and Linder, 2000).

One of the major inconveniences in introducing new forms of participation is the mistrust of both sides, local leaders and the population. Local authorities often do not believe that the local population has the capacity to participate and contribute constructively in any stage of a policy-making process. In contrast some citizens might fear sanctions when they express opinions distinct from local leaders and authorities. In the same time citizens might fear that their opinions are not wanted and the local representatives do not want to share power of decision.

There are several difficulties in enhanced participatory processes which have to be taken into account (Sisk, 2001):

- Lack of government in adopting participatory approaches;
- Unwillingness of project officials to give up control;
- Lack of incentives and skills among project staff to encourage them to adopt participatory approaches;
- Limited capacity of the local level organizations and insufficient investment in community capacity building;
- Participation started too late;
- Mistrust between government and local level stakeholders.

## Box 2.1 Forms of participation<sup>1</sup>

Several enhanced forms of participation in a typical policy-making circle can be distinguished:

- i) Participation in a political agenda-setting. Representatives might not always be very much aware of the problems that are most important for citizens. This is a greater problem in highly centralised countries, like Romania, for national politicians, however in communities similar problems can occur depending on how close politicians are to their electorate. There are different forms of agenda setting involvement. Through some forms of direct democracy and petitions people can express their problems. It is possible to listen to the needs of the people in public consultation and hearings or by other forms of information gathering like surveys.
- ii) Participation in planning: people and groups can be included in planning processes. This will make sure that policy-planning might turn out according to the will and need of the beneficiaries. Planning concerns in general local development and identifies the most important areas.
- iii) Participation in decision-making: although binding democratic decision have to be made in representative bodies, some groups of people affected directly can be given some veto power in the decision making process.
- iv) Participation in implementation: it is not necessary that government institution or the administration implement all policies. NGO's, interest groups or the private sector might sometimes be more capable and/or effective to implement policies.
- v) Participation in evaluation and dispute resolution. In decisions not all effects of a new policy might be foreseeable and policies have to be evaluated. Evaluation will be important to find out whether a policy works as planned and whether the people accept a policy. Conflict resolution should be channelled into institutional boundaries.

There is however another difficulty regarding who should be allowed to participate in various processes and who decides upon this matter. The selection of participants is one of the most significant elements for making participation meaningful. It is important to integrate citizens and groups of citizens which are underrepresented in representative forms of decision making or have a special ability or legitimacy to be included in the participation processes.

In smaller communities it could be possible that each person who is concerned will have the chance to participate. Relying on self-determination it might leave out people who have some higher personal thresholds of participating than others. That is why it is vital to create incentives for underprivileged people. The other alternative is to permit organised groups (NGO's, interest groups or civil society organisations) to participate. But not all important interests are automatically organised in groups, (e.g. in Romania and generally in ex-communist countries the civil society is extremely weak and a very small number of people are part of an organised body). But in smaller communities there might not be any interest group at all. Building on civil society organisations in participatory processes would then signify that such first need to be founded. Therefore the level and form of participation decide the number of people that can be involved.

There are different levels of participation at different stages of a project, ranging from the lowest level -information to the highest level of involvement that is self-management.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Lutz and Linder, 2000

**Fig. 2.1 Levels of Participation<sup>2</sup>**

LEVEL	INCLUDE	REMARKS
information	information of the participants about their rights, responsibilities	doesn't involve channels to provide feedback or enter into negotiations
consultation	the opportunity of the participants to express their suggestions and	no assurance that their ideas and opinions will be used at all or as they intended.
Consensus -building	entailment of stakeholders' interaction in order to understand each other and arrive at negotiated positions acceptable	vulnerable individuals and groups tend to remain silent or passively agree to the negotiated
decision-making	collective decisions, this marks the initiation of the shared responsibilities for outcomes that	negotiations at this stage reflect different degrees of commitment exercised by individuals and groups
risk sharing	their results, which are a mix of beneficial, harmful and neutral consequences	accountability is fundamental at this stage, especially when those who commit the most may be those with the most at risk.
partnership	entailment exchange among stakeholders where all have equal status, towards a common goal.	context the equal standard refers to the balance of respect and not that of the form, structure or function.
self-manageme	stakeholders interact in learning processes which optimize the well being of all those concerned	highest level of participatory efforts

## 2.8. Tools of citizen participation

There is an increasing aspiration to engage the public in the decision-making process. In order that such involvement is not purely cosmetic, it is important that the way in which participation is managed results in the sharing of the decision making and possession of and responsibility for the solution.

The degree of public participation varies from just sharing of information to active commitment of citizens in the execution and management of projects and services. Tools to create various sorts of participation also range from stakeholder consultations and public hearings to community watchdog groups and public-private partnerships. The frequent thread that runs through the different tools, however, is the dedication of the local government to share information and engage the community in an open dialogue. The opinions of the

<sup>2</sup> Source: Shqipe, 2003

citizens must not only be heard but also seen in development decisions, hence making governments responsive and accountable to the community.

Public participation can take diverse forms. The structure of a community and its view of local governance will influence the level and the design of public participation. The elements highlighted below are not exhaustive, but are examples of means engaged in communities that have fought with transparency and corruption problems:

### Box 2.2 Forms of Citizen Participation<sup>3</sup>

- **Study Circles** – can be a useful format to discuss transparency strategies in urban governance. The approach involves channeling discussions through a series of stages. It enables participants to discuss alternative views to specific issues and to exchange ideas on, and experiences with, local government administration. The most important feature of study circles is the participation of a diverse group of individuals, representing different educational and professional backgrounds. As communities wrestle with corruption, particularly those in transition democracies, study circles can provide the framework to develop long-term goals for good urban governance.
- **Citizen Advisory Groups** – Generally structured around specific issues, such as economic development or housing, citizen advisory boards can be another effective form of public participation. Comprised of community volunteer residents, such boards provide local authorities with information and recommendations pertaining to local issues. Citizens get an opportunity to play a meaningful role within the government structure, through establishment of a working relationship with government employees and officials. Considering the level of independence with which the Citizens Advisory Boards operate, they can serve as a useful safeguard against corruption and help in establishing transparent decision-making practices.
- **Government Contract Committees** – Local government officials often play a large part in the award and administration of government contracts. With up to billions of dollars in government contracts available, it is incumbent upon governmental decision-making entities to establish a venue for citizen participation and oversight of such contracts. Whether through ad hoc selection committees or through permanent citizen oversight and compliance boards, such committees can shape the ethical culture of government contracting. Furthermore, this form of public participation can be an initial step or component in ensuring an open public procurement environment.
- **Public Hearings** – are fundamental to the operation of open, democratic government administrations. As local authorities deliberate over policies and other administrative matters, public hearings afford citizens an avenue to address policy makers on important local issues, particularly budgetary concerns. By the same token, it also allows public officials to request comments and information and access expert advice from the public. Public hearings mean public deliberation and debate and can hold the key to engendering transparent decision-making processes.
- **Public Watchdog Groups** – are community-based organizations or grassroots associations whose key role is civic activism and dissemination of information pertaining to government initiatives. Unlike citizen advisory boards, these groups have no formal relationship with government entities. Such groups monitor local government issues and policies, correspond with media and government authorities, attend public hearings and speak for or against public policy proposals. Human capital, more so than financial capital, drives the success and effectiveness of these watchdog groups. It is thus important that these groups generate visibility with government officials and entities, but maintain an independent spirit. In cities across the United States, public watchdog groups played a significant role in promoting local governance reforms and demanding stronger anti-corruption measures and laws.”

Another way of structuring the forms that participation can take is extracted from specific examples of what has been tried before and how certain methods could work in practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: UN-HABITAT’s Toolkit on Participatory Urban Decision-Making

**Fig 2.2 Tools of Citizen Participation<sup>4</sup>**

	1. Democratic public sphere	2. City-wide planning & coordination	3. Neighbourhood	4. Sectoral/ Programmatic	5. Project level
Tools:	-Advisory Committees -Citizen Juries -Citizen Charters -Municipal Score-cards -Focus Groups -Youth / Children's Councils	-City visioning exercises/ processes -City referenda -Information strategies -City consultations - <i>Concertacion</i>	Participatory diagnostics tools, e.g. force field analysis, mapping exercises -Participatory planning processes -Focus groups -Stakeholder assessment methods -Workshops to energise people and access local knowledge	-City consultations -Partnership protocols -Gender, disability, youth audits and panels -Agenda 21 processes -Strategic services planning -Stakeholder assessments -Partnership institutional framework, -Community priority setting -Participation audits -Participatory monitoring and evaluation processes	-Participatory budgeting techniques -Participatory project management techniques, e.g. ZOPP and other logframe derivatives -Participatory monitoring techniques -Workshops

Out of all these forms of participation stated previously in this chapter, I have selected the Citizen Advisory Groups for further detailing due to the fact that this is the tool of participation that the city of Timisoara has chosen to implement and therefore this is the subject of my case-study. Therefore this is also the subject for the next section.

## 2.9. Citizen Advisory Groups

Local governments in democratic systems often make use of citizens' advisory committees, commissions, or task forces to provide constant advice to city councils and municipalities on a variety of issues. I will refer to these groups as Citizens' Consultative Groups (CCGs). They are an important way for the Local Government to involve citizens in the governing process and to be in contact with changing public needs between elections. Such groups should be able to provide citizen advice and opinion on local issues. The desired result of the CCG, as a public participation method, can be outlined as follows:

- CCGs augment both the quantity and quality of citizen participation in local government, thus building those vital bridges of trust between the government and the governed, and strengthening civil society.
- For a government that desires to be transparent and fully democratic, they are real and highly visible means to reveal this commitment to the community.
- They are an instrument for bringing some of the technical know-how and views of the community to bear on solving local government problems.
- They offer an opportunity for people with different areas of knowledge and varying opinions to inform one another, and thereby improve the dialogue on the relevant issues in order to resolve conflicts.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Participatory Urban Governance, Urban management programme, E. Pieterse

- They boost communication between the legislative and executive branches of government, between government and the community, and between branches of local government.
- They are a spring of new insights, ideas and options for elected and appointed government officials, who may find creativity muffled by the pressures and complexities of everyday procedures.
- In communities that have deep political, social or ethnic separations, CCGs that are broadly representative of the composition of the whole community can help to neutralize tensions and depoliticize the process of governing.

## **2.10. Implications of citizen participation**

The value of the participation resides in the fact that it is ingredient to the very core meaning of democracy. Effective participation means that citizens have adequate and equal opportunity to express their preferences, to place questions on the political agenda and to articulate reasons for supporting one outcome after another. It is generally assumed that participation can respond best to the need of people. Also the distribution of the government resources is closest to their needs when citizens participate actively and can decide themselves what should be done.

Another practical outcome of participation is that it enhances the ability of self-government of citizens and especially of local leaders. Politically active leaders are more aware of both functioning of political structures and the political processes, which does enable them to care more about the effectiveness of higher-level politicians and the administration. People learn through participation.

Participation should not be seen as a self-sufficient activity. The process of participation should lead to a specific outcome (Lutz and Linder, 2000). It is doubtful that increased participation has a consistent reason in the case that it lacks the resources to decide upon. People need results and visible changes; therefore in the long run it is unlikely that participation works for its own sake.

Focusing on the citizens' consultative groups, it has to be said that they require strong political determination and effort to launch and sustain. They do not work well and are not sustainable unless their task is a needed and serious one, the public understands and supports the role of the CCG and their opinion is taken seriously. However, they are one of the most effective and least expensive means available for obtaining open-minded and educated citizen input into local government decision making process. Their propagation in local governments throughout the world's democracies has served to significantly fortify the civil society underpinnings of these democracies.



## **Chapter 3**

# **CASE STUDY**

### **3. Case Study**

#### **3.1. Regional context**

In transitional countries, the practice of democracy is relatively short, uneven and frequently frustrating. For an advance development of democracy in these countries, the "double democratization" is needed in the sense of democratization of the state and of the civil society, since they sustain each other, make each other possible, and also limit each other. (Z. Ploštajner, I. Mendeš, 2003)

Confronted with a set of new challenges in a globalized world, governments at all levels more and more comprehend that they will not be able to carry out and effectively implement policies if the citizens do not understand and support them. Therefore, they are looking at the new or superior models and approaches for better informing and involving their citizens in the policy-making process.

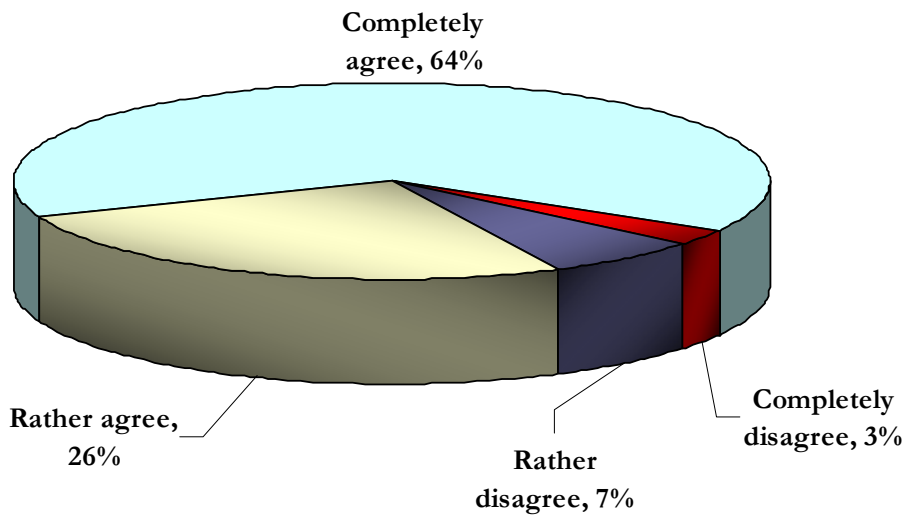
The place where these processes commence is the local community. Local governments in transitional countries face problems such as decentralization, fragmentation, underdeveloped mechanisms of public participation, a lack of high educated professionals and many others. However, in today's complex world it is only at this lowest level of democracy and autonomy that a straight dialogue between the citizens, their interest groups and politically elected decision-makers can be held. Effective local democracy is therefore critically significant for higher levels of democracy.

Each citizen in a local community should have a possibility to practice active citizenship and achieve the necessary experience for participation at higher levels and to increase democratic political culture. In that process, however, the citizens should be conscious that it is occasionally impossible to realize a compromise or consensus, because the willingness of the participants, their openness to other visions, varies a lot. But the public dialogue is also a school of democracy, where citizens learn through practical work to perform their citizenship roles.

The period of transition in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has brought severe problems to many communities and their citizens (Z. Ploštajner, I. Mendeš, 2003). Many local companies have gone broke, so there are not enough jobs, the infrastructure needs improvement, public services are failing, environmental problems are urgent, people are disappointed by the quality of life, they require better prospects for their children, etc. After the change of political and economic systems their hopes were high, but they have not been satisfied. Slowly, they have lost enthusiasm and concern in community affairs, and now they are mostly focusing on their own well-being and struggling to guarantee a decent life. Politicians, who make big promises before elections, disappoint them. From the viewpoint of citizens, politicians often make the situation even more difficult. While some politicians have access to financial, political, legal, and institutional or media resources, citizens do not. Many fall prey to the feelings of apathy, depression, hopelessness or helplessness; they say "nothing" and distance themselves from politics and community affairs. Many citizens doubt politics, local politicians and government officials, and do not believe that politicians really care about them and their needs.

Fig 3.1.1 Opinion on “those who rule the country”<sup>5</sup>

Those who rule the country do not care about what happens to me.



Due to the inheritance of the preceding political regime, citizens also need the experience of active citizenship in a democracy. For citizens to become motivated for involvement, they have to get a feeling that their voice counts, and that they can influence the situation and the course of action. They have to be provided with a chance to speak freely about everything that bothers them. Their opinions have to be treated with due attention.

### 3.2. Romanian case

#### 3.2.1. Romanian legal context for participation

The Constitution adopted and approved by a national referendum in 2003 provides for most of the basic rights for public participation.

Citizens as persons or as a group of persons have the right of expression, the right to information, the right of free meeting, the right of association and the right to petition.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2004

The Constitution guarantees the right of the community to gain access to information in the public interest and states that this right cannot be limited. It also forces public authorities to offer correct information related to public affairs, according to their competence (Art.31). According to these requirements, there is a general right to information, although this right is not specified in the above-mentioned article. But in the same time many efforts have been made by the local and national media to get information from different governments, including the national one, many of them without success. Even if this state of facts was presented by the media, things were not significantly changed. Therefore, even though the free access to information is granted by the Constitution, the reality shows that many officials are not yet prepared to change their behaviour and mentality.

The expression "public interest" which is used by law-makers is very broad in scope. It should therefore cover up all the fields of social life. The guarantee to provide information is significant provided this type of information has a bearing on personal interests. These legal provisions do not include either explicit items on the right to access information nor specifics about information providing.

The right of petition is set by the Constitution. Still, petitions can be written only in the name of the applicants, both those addressed by physical persons and legal persons. In practice this means that, for example, NGOs can draw up petitions only in the name of their members, which restricts the capacity for public support. The public authorities have to respond to petitions within terms and under conditions as established by law (Art.47:4) in a period of 30 days, as a rule. Normal citizens do not have the right to petition the Constitutional Court.

In Romania, it is not a habit to base legal actions directly on the Constitution. However, at this phase of development, when the legal structure for public participation is far from being developed, regularly this is the only base of reference to validate some basic participation rights (for example, access to information). However, citizens and NGOs often indirectly base their actions and activities on what are seen as basic individual rights, such as the right to free association and peaceful assembly, the right to information, freedom of expression and the right of petition and speech.

A considerable part of the legal framework for public participation is still absent in Romania, first of all because it has not been incorporated in formally adopted laws. The whole legal framework is changing and the laws in force before 1989 are in the course of being changed.

There are different beliefs as to whether the legal framework concerning public participation is observed or not. The authorities regard the legal framework as fully developed, as well as laws and regulations enacted before 1989, but not enforced. However, the public participation provisions are not actually taken into consideration, nor understood as they should be; maybe because, on the one hand, the existing mentality of the authorities is that involvement of the public might slow down the decision-making process and, on the other hand, the lack of participatory practice in general. Even if there are basic provisions for public participation (such as the right to information), frequently public authorities do not realize the significance of providing information actively because of a lack of practice, concrete procedure, explicit instructions for civil servants and the basic lack of education. At the same time, NGOs and the public who are involved in public participation practices consider that the legal framework concerning public participation is not completely developed, in spite of the existing basic rights which are guaranteed by the Constitution. There should be other legal

mechanisms for public participation (which can be implemented through the legal process) and concrete legal procedures.

There are few legal tools that the public or NGOs can use for public participation and the scarcity of information made available by the government (national or local) before decisions are taken is one more motive the public cannot participate efficiently. Due to the lack of the information and appropriate detailed conditions for public participation, however, a concise conclusion can be drawn by NGOs and the public: that what is not forbidden is allowed. Therefore, even if there are no particular public participation procedures in practice, the public/NGOs can "push" their beliefs and present their options using something other than legal tools and methods. These participatory paths are not prohibited and only depend on the influence of the NGOs or of the citizens.

In Romania, the NGO community has quickly developed in the last years. There are many NGOs using non-formal public participation methods to solve various problems, accumulating information and experience from Western NGOs and thus putting this experience into practice.

For the ordinary citizen, public participation as a process is something new and sometimes misunderstood, due to the lack of participatory traditions; citizen participation in individual forms is rather rare and the emphasis is usually on groups.

Although there are many NGOs in Romania, their structure is not very developed, few of them have built up professional expert base and most operate regionally or locally. There are only few large NGOs which have built up a national network, which means many groups concentrate on local problems. Many NGOs work as volunteers, but although some have started to work on a permanent basis and receive funds regularly, NGO groups lack staff prepared to devote all of their attention to projects.

Generally, most of the groups prefer to work on their own, although cooperation between NGOs has reached the level of national networking and annual meetings have been organized; mainly concentrating on experience exchanges, training and comments related to legislation. The relationship between the government and citizens/NGOs is rather weak since the Constitution has no institutional mechanisms of access to governmental officials at central level; cooperation between NGO experts and central level authorities tends to be on an ad hoc, personal basis. When NGO experts are invited to discussions or meetings, this is mostly due to their special expertise rather than as representatives of the public. At a local level, the relationship between NGOs/the public and authorities may be better than with the central authorities since elected officials (local counsellors) can be contacted and motivated more easily.

### **3.2.2. Citizen Participation in Romania**

The practice of associative life in Romania is quite mediocre. Up to 1918 the few associations established in the country were of philanthropic, cultural or religious character. A brief period of flourishing came to an end in 1939, when King Carol II imposed his dictatorship. The communists did not support a development of organizations. It would be incorrect to declare that civil society came to an end, although some prestigious analysts and politicians assert this to have happened. But since the state controlled all sectors and offered all social services

(social security, education, culture, healthcare, pensions), the mentality of total dependence on the state was largely encouraged.

In the immediate period after 1989, the civil society was producing a larger range of organizations, which would accomplish the hopes and preferences of the citizens. The “revolution” had as one of its consequences a “big-bang” for diverse forms of associations, some supported and inspired by Western funds and models, others reviving domestic traditions, and others yet desiring to meet the needs of the public exterior of political parties and professional groups.

Membership in voluntary associations and social trust have been identified as vital pre-conditions of a civic polity since Almond and Verba’s Civic Culture. The lack of interpersonal trust that is vital to supportive public activity has been identified as the main characteristic of soviet politics. Half century of social (i.e. directed towards fellow citizens) and political (i.e. directed towards the state institutions) distrust promoted by communist regimes is supposed to make post-communist countries particularly prone to political instability, especially when confronted with economic hardships (Putnam 1993). Overcoming the “inheritance of distrust” appears therefore nearly similarly important an objective as reforming bureaucracy or increasing gross domestic product.

In spite of accepted perception of East-Central Europe “revolutions” as resulting directly from the popular movements, the installation of democracy in the post-communist countries occurred largely as a consequence of elite bargaining, and its further development was strongly influenced by the exterior actors, such as the USA, NATO or EU. The introduction of democracy created the space for civic and political activism unknown under communism.

Citizen participation is supposed to be vital for the development of a strong, stable democracy, where the public’s interests are well represented in politics and officials can be easily held to the account. The levels of participation in post-communist countries in the mid-1990s were believed to be beneath what would be necessary for a new democracy to stabilize and consolidate. This shortage of activism in East-Central Europe after 1989 appeared in particular contrast with the mass movements in some countries before 1989 and citizens’ wide participation in the Communist party.

The main aspects causing low levels of engagement are supposed to be part of the communist legacy: low levels of social capital (interpersonal trust and membership in voluntary associations) and the anti-democratic customs and attitudes learnt through participation in the non-democratic system. In turn, low levels of participation are likely to hamper the consolidation of new democracies in East-Central Europe.

It has been argued that the project of a civil society as a mechanism to encourage the transition from the communist period to democracy has been led by dissident intellectuals. This affirmation is erroneous in Romania’s case, where dissidence was very weak and unorganized before 1989. Many analysts have shown the distinctness of the Romanian communist regime within the former block in terms of the strong grip of the state on the society. It is exactly because of this strong grip that a grown-up and authentic civil society has more difficulties than in other post-communist countries to successfully emerge by itself in Romania.

It is a widespread argument that the citizens in Romania lack power because “whatever power they have is given to them from above, under certain conditions (that the request meets some international demand, that the administration wants to take action and it happens that its efforts go in the same direction, that the leader of the NGO enjoys a national prominence, coming from some other source of authority and only in the last instance that the institutions are convinced that the group represented by the NGOs should be satisfied), and does not reside in people themselves” (Cernicova, 2001, p77).

The end of the totalitarian regime in 1989 marked the beginning of a new era in what concerns the relationship between the citizen, the public space and the state. If during the communist period the citizens were only present in the public space for propagandistic reasons, the beginning of the democratic society meant that the individual has turned from „puppet” to an active participant of the public life.

But after the effervescence of the first year of democratic society – marked by the registration of over 230 political parties, street manifestations against the government, strikes and even violent forms of protest – the Romanian citizens have slowly started to set aside the public space.

One of the most common indicators of the civic participation is the extent to which the individuals belong to structures specific to the civil society. From this point of view, the associative participation of the Romanians is rather low – only 26% of the population over 18 years old are members of some sort of an association (unions, NGOs, neighbourhood/professional/sports/cultural associations, political parties, etc) and only 5% are members of two or more forms of association (see table 3.1). Even though the number of the associations registered in Romania has boomed after the communist period (more than 10000 associations have been registered)<sup>6</sup>, the trend of this sort of participation is only slightly increasing over the past few years.

The preferred forms of association for the Romanians are trade unions (10% are members), neighbourhood associations (6.5%), political parties (3.6%) and professional, cultural and sports organizations (4.9%). The most frequent members of all these forms of association are persons between 35 and 54 years old, with high education and living in urban areas.

**Table 3.2.1 Associative Life in Romania<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Associative Participation %</b>	
<b>Population</b>	<b>Member of an Association</b>
<b>men</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>women</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>18 - 34</b>	<b>22%</b>

<sup>6</sup> [www.fdsc.ro](http://www.fdsc.ro)

<sup>7</sup> Source: Barometer of socio-humanistic resources for reform in Romania, June 2003

<b>35 - 54</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>55 +</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>max. 8 classes or professional school</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>high school or post high school</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>high education</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>low welfare</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>medium welfare</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>high welfare</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>no occupation</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>agriculture</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>worker</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>clerk, technical worker</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>high educated personal</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>business-man/woman</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>urban</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>rural</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Romanians</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Hungarians</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>București</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Muntenia</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Moldova</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Transilvania</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26%</b>

The low level of association is doubled by the fact that the people living in Romania believe that they cannot influence the decisions taken at the local level (79%) or the national level (83%).

All these data lead to the conclusion that the democratic society has grown a feeling of indifference and passivity among the Romanians, even though the majority of Romanians (89%) believes that democracy is the best form of government. The low rate of participation is also likely to be related to the dissatisfaction with their own life (financial security) and lack of trust in politicians and political bodies in general.

However, Romanians prove to be favourable to the idea of protest. 66% of the persons eligible to vote consider that it is good to sign petitions, 63% think that it is all right to participate in public manifestations or strikes. However, the protest is not considered to be desirable but acceptable among these respondents. A more positive attitude towards protest is that of the youth, the better educated and the urban dwellers.

This rather passive attitude of citizens is mostly due to the general feeling that no matter what they are left aside the decision making process. 90% of the persons over 18 years old believe that the politicians are only interested in people's opinions before the elections.



### 3.2.3. Citizens' Consultative Groups in Romania

It is significant to note that in Romania there is no legislation that regulates the CCGs' activities. According to the Romanian Constitution (2003), people have the liberty to get together and express their opinions. The initiative to create a CCG may come from either citizens or the local government or both. It is more logical to come from citizens, for example when they gather to solve a problem. However, the local government usually initiates such a group to assemble citizens' opinions and sometimes to get them implicated.

To maximize the outcome of setting up and getting a consultative committee equipped, there are some general issues on CCGs to be considered. A CCG can be established whenever the local government has a task to do that will profit from constant citizen consultation. The LGU habitually describes the task the CCG is responsible for, how many members it will have, how the members will be chosen, how long they will serve (commonly between one and five years) and sometimes other subjects such as how often the CCG will meet.

The local government usually supplies logistical support for the CCG, such as a meeting place and a staff assistant to arrange meetings, help with agendas, minutes and supplies, and ease access to city information.

Members of CCGs are typically volunteers. They may be chosen by the city or elected. Sometimes members self-select, they contact the city in reply to an announcement of a vacancy and say they are willing to serve. However, once they are chosen, members must be confirmed by a formal appointment from the city.

Various CCGs will have diverse types of schedules and workloads. For example, a CCG providing opinion on the city budget usually might meet on a monthly basis during the budget preparation period. But perhaps they would meet weekly during the intensive period when the budget is being finalized by the city administration and presented to, reviewed and approved by the local council. Other CCGs might meet once a month, but members do extra work outside the meetings. Some other CCGs meet only once a quarter and can expect to complete their work during the meeting times.

Generally, from the point of view of the period of existence, there are two types of CCGs: permanent and impermanent. Some CCGs are permanent and have enduring responsibilities that continue from year to year. Some examples of permanent CCGs are:

- Planning Commission
- Neighbourhood Consultative Councils
- Budget Commission
- Parks and Recreation Board
- Economic Development Commission
- Transportation Board
- Sanitation Commission
- Housing Commission
- Sister City Committee
- Neighbourhood Conservation

Other CCGs have precise time limited tasks. Temporary CCGs might be given a specific task clearly defined and a time limit for accomplishing the task. They often conclude their work with a written report outlining their recommendations. Some examples of impermanent CCGs are:

- Consultative committees for specific projects (neighbourhood improvement or locality transportation plan)
- Task Force on Opportunities for Youth
- Committee for Study on Attracting New Businesses
- Committee for Study on Revising City Charter
- Blue Ribbon Committees (panels of selected volunteer experts for very specific and usually highly technical assignments, e.g., Health Care Improvement)

Sometimes the work of an impermanent CCG can lead to the establishment of a permanent one. For example, a temporary CCG on neighborhood development recommended in its report that the city should establish a special annual grants fund for "grass roots" neighborhood improvement proposals. The city accepted the recommendation and set up a permanent CCG with the task of reviewing proposals and recommending the best proposals for funding each year. Such choices made openly and on the basis of published criteria help assure citizens that the program is being run fairly and transparently without bias.

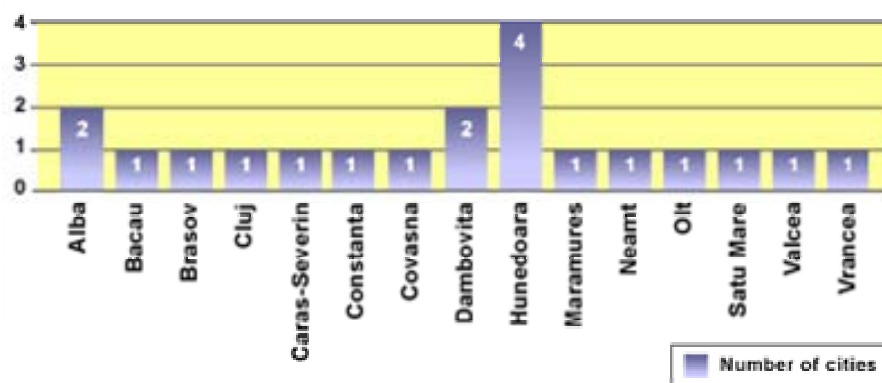
There are some risks and obstacles often encountered in Romania:

- Lack of incentive to establish and sustain the CCG; the CCG will not function well and will not be sustainable unless the task is a necessary and serious one, the public understands and supports the role of the CCG and their advice is taken seriously, by both citizens and the local council.
- Lack of civic commitment; usually people are unwilling to get involved in community business, unless they do not have a direct interest. Raising public interest takes time. Once a CCG is established, benefits for the members should be shown both for the community and for the local government. Building a proper attitude around this concept is the key issue of citizen participation, especially in Central and Eastern European countries.
- Lack of understanding of the profit on both sides; Even though CCGs are one of the most effective and least expensive means available for obtaining enlightened and educated citizen input into local government decision making and operations, it can be difficult for the public to perceive the benefits. However, CCGs proliferation in local government, throughout the world, has served to greatly strengthen the civil society underpinnings of democracies everywhere.
- Resistance to models from democratic countries; What works in Western Europe or North America may need to be changed and adapted by other countries. Some countries may have to chart their own course with respect to advisory bodies. For example, it may be that the elected council and the administration should jointly constitute a particular advisory body, or that some acceptable balance is achieved. Approaches used elsewhere can be adapted to local needs and conditions, and will be

effective if the public can see that the government is seriously trying to be more transparent and effective.

Most of the good things in the area of participation in Romania have been accomplished through different assistance programs. In 2002 they were developed only through the Local Government Assistance program, sponsored by USAID, various citizen participation techniques to help solve local problems in 26 cities from 15 counties all over the country.

**Fig 3.2.2 Distribution of Participation Techniques on cities and counties<sup>8</sup>**



The following part of this sub-chapter is concentrated on the most relevant examples of participation of this kind, namely the Citizens' Consultative Groups.

### **Citizens' Consultative Groups on Public Transport in Brasov**

The city of Brasov carried out a very successful public budget hearing in 2001, attended by 1,623 people. This was the third consecutive year that Brasov ran a public hearing on its local budget, but this time the quality and impact of the hearing was significantly recognized — the previous year only 35 people attended and the meeting was of little effect. This year, the questioning from the public was both relevant and strong. One essential innovation of the meeting was the establishment of the Citizens' Consultative Committee on Transport. This 14 member group of volunteers from various fields and professions was appointed to serve an indefinite term but are working out its own rules and procedures. The main purpose of the group is to help the city and its public transport utilities make funding decisions on transport, which was voted the third priority in the budget at the public hearing.

The CCG met once a month, or even more often, if needed. The first task of the group was to fill out a questionnaire on preferences regarding different choices on transport fees, subsidies, taxes and bus purchases.

### **Budget CCG in Turnu Magurele**

Turnu Magurele was one of the first cities in Romania which seriously considered adopting the idea of a CCG for the local budget. The CCG consists of 9 persons, chosen by the mayor

<sup>8</sup> Source: [www.lga.ro](http://www.lga.ro)

with advice and support from other city leaders. One principle for selection is that members must have the capacity to understand financial matters. The idea was new, and some people did not totally trust the idea at first. However, the CCG was extensively involved in preparations for the budget public hearing in December 2000, and played a helpful and significant role.

There was some argue about policy, and eventually some recommendations to the mayor. The debated policy reproduces the interest of the group against the budgetary process. Members with dissimilar opinions expressed their views regarding public expenditures, as well as ways of maximizing income.

As a result of the debate, the mayor seriously considered the proposals for the next debate in the local council meeting. Therefore, the local budget for 2001 had citizens' contribution and reflected the community needs, and not just the politicians' views.

### **Education CCG in Turnu Magurele**

In 2001, the mayor of Turnu Magurele started a consultative group on education. The initiative was opportune, since educational finance was delegated in that period from central to local governments. The members of the CCG were school principals. The purpose of this consultative group is to exchange information amongst the different schools, as well as between the schools and local government.

By the time of the first meeting, the mayor remarked the benefit of having the consultative groups and members of the public comprehend more about the limited resources of the local government.

This was a significant improvement, with potential for strengthening communication between the local government and the education sector. Other profits would include allowing school officials to talk more skillfully with parents and other stakeholders about how the local budget influences education decisions.

### **Councils of Elderly Persons in Pitesti and Medias**

In Medias and Pitesti there are CCGs consisting of retired persons who desire to work on a volunteer basis with the city administration. In Medias, the group has 27 members. They meet at least once a quarter, or more often upon the mayor's request.

Sometimes, there is a special focus to the meetings. For instance, one meeting focused on environmental themes where managers of some local manufacturing plants were invited. Environmental issues were discussed and some progress resulted. Members of the group were invited to official functions and were kept informed about city plans and initiatives. They are always notified of dates and location of the city council meetings so they can plan ahead to attend.

In Pitesti the group was formed of 30 pensioners, all with high education, who met monthly to work on issues assigned by the mayor and problems they identify on their own. Problems they have worked on include: holiday preparation, traffic issues, street cleaning, waste disposal, and stray dog problem.

### **CCG for Pasture Management in Cristian Village**

Cristian Commune (Sibiu County) created a CCG to work on the problem of preserving and managing three common pasture areas. The CCG visited the pastures to establish more precisely the character of the problem. The CCG then met with stakeholders (pasture owners,

cattle and sheep owners, the mayor and staff) to design a plan for establishing pasture committees for each site.

Some elements of the plan contain:

- Members of the pasture committees are elected.
- One member of each pasture committee is a member of the CCG.
- The job of the pasture committees is: (1) to clean and maintain the pasture; (2) collect pasture fees; (3) manage rotation of animals in an equitable way and (4) protect against poachers.
- In return for their work, members of the pasture committees do not have to pay pasturage fees.

A public meeting was held to talk about this plan, where around 200 people attended. The CCGs suggestion was accepted and pasture committees were elected. Apparently, there is community satisfaction with the arrangement and the situation of pastures and collection of pasture fees has improved. The need for direct involvement by the commune administration in pasture management has been to a large extent reduced.

### **3.3. Timisoara Case Study**

#### **3.3.1. The Attitude towards Local Authorities**

Besides the regional and national political and economical context, another relevant aspect for the purpose of this research is the attitude people have towards the local authorities and the way decisions are taken. This section will provide a clear picture of the place the regular citizen believe attributes to himself in the decision making process.

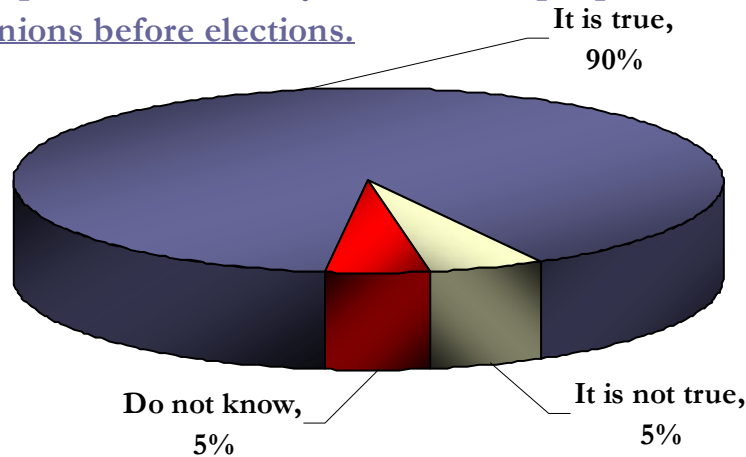
First of all a brief introduction about the local government in Romania is required. The particularities of the system, namely the existence of two separate bodies (the Local Council and the City Hall), are relevant for the accuracy of this section.

The municipalities in Romania are made up by two distinctive parts: the executive (**City Hall** – including vice-mayors, clerks, directors, employees – the mayor is the person in charge) and the legislative (the **Council**, the president of the council is the leader) The elected officials at the local level are the mayors and councilors Their tasks are extremely vague and most of the time their competences interfere. In the past there were lots of conflicts between the mayors and the city councils. The councilors are elected on the party list (the list is decided by the party who proposes it, the citizens cannot change it or the order of the candidates), which leads to legitimacy problems, and the mayors by direct vote. In case of conflict with the mayor who has been directly elected, the mayor usually wins the image battle and takes advantage of his position. That is why there is a weak council and a strong mayor. That is why citizens have different perceptions about these two components of the local governments.

But this distinction is not clear sometimes even to the Romanian citizens. People tend to lay a bigger responsibility on the City Hall since the mayor is most visible and his name is generally known, unlike the names of the members of the Local Council.

Fig 3.3.1 Politicians interests<sup>9</sup>

The politicians are only interested in people's opinions before elections.



When being asked whether their life is influenced by their municipality, only 39% of the persons over 18 years old think that this is true and 23% believe that the municipality has very little to do with their lives. Another question in the Public Opinion Barometer<sup>10</sup> has given the opportunity of the respondents to make a first and second choice of the authorities that influence their daily life. 37% have chosen the City Hall as the main influence and 22% the Government. Only 3% of the respondents think that the Local Council exerts a big influence on their lives (a little over 20% have however chosen the Local Council as their second option). What needs to be noted here is that 27% of the population attributes no responsibility for their daily life to any of the authority bodies mentioned in the list.

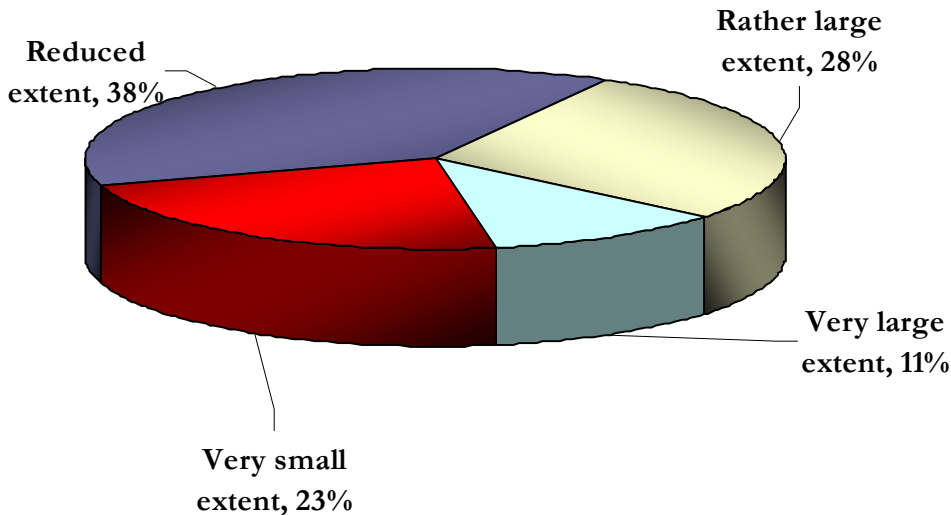
Even though people attribute big responsibilities to the local authorities, the general trend is towards a lack of information on the activity of City Hall and the Local Council. When asked to grade their knowledge about the City Hall on a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 being really poor and 10 really extensive, 22% of the respondents marked themselves with grades from 1 to 4. The percentage increases to 29% when the question was directed to the knowledge of the Local Council. These low awareness levels are obvious from other questions in the Public Opinion Barometer. Only 20% of the population with a right to vote says they are familiar with the activity of the Local Council and the Mayor in their community and 46% do not know the name of any local councilor.

<sup>9</sup> Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2004

<sup>10</sup> Public Opinion Barometer is official research of national scale, contracted by Metromedia Transilvania company, prepared each semester, containing dates and analysis regarding Romanians feelings towards various issues like democracy, corruption, political parties etc. as well as demographic data

Fig 3.3.2 Municipality's influence<sup>11</sup>

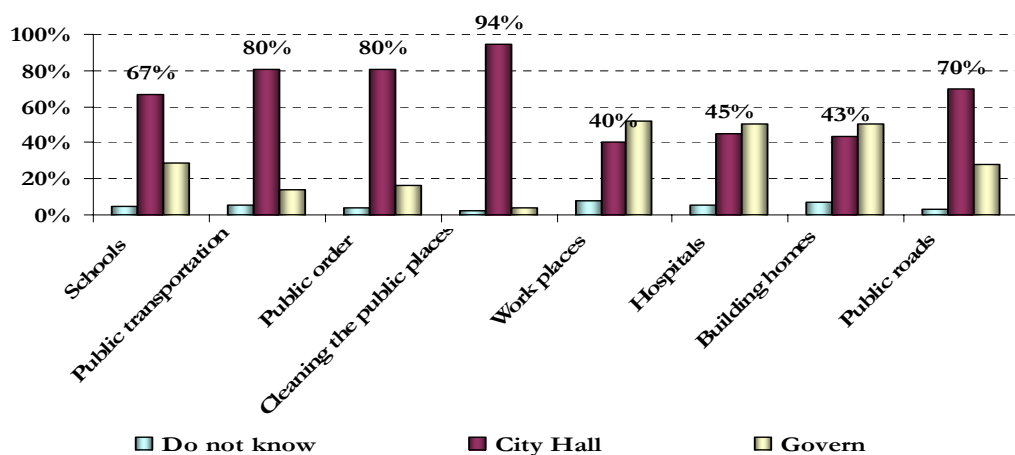
To what extent is your life influenced by the decisions of the municipality?



This lack of information is doubled by the feeling that the common people have nothing to do with the decision making process and can by no means influence the direction their community follows. 87% of the respondents think that they can not influence the decisions taken on the part of their community. The majority of those who think they can do almost nothing to influence the decisions are females (56%), aged 18 to 49 (55%), with elementary and medium education (38% and respectively 42%).

Fig 3.3.3 Problems responsibility<sup>12</sup>

In your community, who should take the responsibility for solving the problems concerning the



<sup>11</sup> Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2004

<sup>12</sup> Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2004

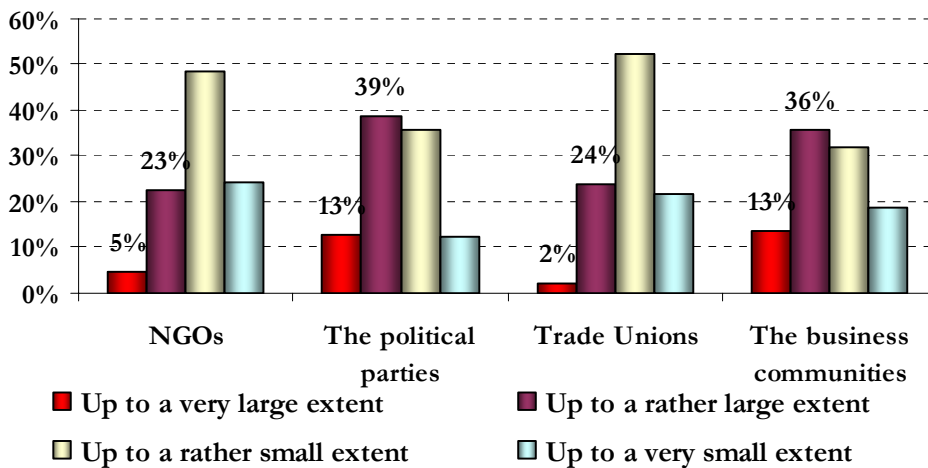
Fig 3.3.4 Profile respondents: can you influence decisions?<sup>13</sup>

Profile	Up to an extremely small	Up to a rather small extent	Up to a rather large extent	Up to a very large extent
	No education	2%	2%	1%
Elementary education	38%	22%	24%	21%
Medium education	42%	52%	49%	42%
High education	18%	24%	26%	38%
18-29	21%	23%	21%	22%
30-39	16%	18%	17%	18%
40-49	19%	21%	23%	21%
50-59	15%	16%	18%	16%
Over 60	29%	22%	22%	23%
Male	44%	49%	55%	60%
Female	56%	51%	45%	40%
<i>Total</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>3%</i>

The decisions of the municipality are considered to be influenced by other factors. 49% of the respondents think that the decisions are being influenced by the business communities and 42% think that the political parties are the ones that have a major say in the decisional process. We can recognize again the feeling of alienation of the citizens and the fact that they see themselves as maneuver masses and even victims of those who have the power.

Fig 3.3.5 Influence on the municipality<sup>14</sup>

To what extent do the following bodies influence the decisions of your municipality?



<sup>13</sup> Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2004

<sup>14</sup> Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2004



The feeling of alienation is further emphasized by the fact that 93% of the respondents recognize some form of corruption among the mayors and 88% recognize corruption among the local councilors. Those who do not trust the local authorities at all are generally females (even though there is not a very big gap between the male and female distrust), aged 18-29 with medium and high education.

### **3.3.2. Timișoara Context**

Timisoara is a city in western Romania, in the Banat region, Timiș county, population 329,554 in 2000. All of the variants of its name derive from the Timișel river, now known as Bega after it was re-channelled. An industrial city with extensive services, it was the first European city to be lit by electricity on November 12, 1884. Timișoara is a multicultural city with influential minorities, mainly Germans, Hungarians, and Serbs, as well as Italians, Palestinians and Greeks. Timisoara was also visited by Eiffel; the creator of the Eiffel tower in Paris built a foot bridge over the river Bega too.

Archaeological discoveries prove that the area where Timisoara is located today has been inhabited since ancient times. The first identifiable civilization in this area are the Dacians that also left traces of their past. It is also known, due to coin findings, that the city was inhabited also during the Roman occupation of Dacia. While no record of the city is known from those times, it is agreed by the historians that the city was inhabited throughout time up to the middle ages when the city is mentioned for the first time

In 1853 telegraphy is introduced in the city, in 1857 gas street lighting (first city in Romania), in 1857 the first train line linking Timisoara with Szeged. In 1867 horse trams are introduced in the city. In 1884 Timisoara is the first European city to have electric street lights and in 1899 the trams in the city is electric. The city is incorporated into Romania in 1918 together with most of the Banat region. In December 1989 the Romanian revolution against communism started in Timisoara.

Timișoara is the most western city of Romania, being situated at 571 km from București and at less than 700 km from other 13 European capital cities. The interaction with them contributes to the economical and social development of the city. Timiș County is the largest in surface in Romania and the ninth out of 41 in number of inhabitants. Timișoara is the fourth city in population, after București, Constanța and Iași and the biggest in Transilvania and Banat areas.

Fig 3.3.6 Map Romania - Timisoara



Timișoara has 317.660 inhabitants, with around 26.000 persons less, comparing to the result of the 1992 counting. Timișoara is a strongly urbanized city, the population density being 2.457 persons/sq km. Active population in 2002 was 137.494 persons, representing 43,3% of total population.

The local economy is defined by an important volume of foreign investments, coming mainly from Germany and Italy. In the period 1990 - 2004, around 400 million euro was the value of foreign investments in the city. Since 2002, Timișoara is the second destination for investments of Romania, after Bucharest.

For facilitating the regional cooperation, Timișoara and Timiș County are part of the Euro-region Dunăre - Mureș - Tisa – Criș.

Timișoara is also twin city with Faenza (Italy), Gera (Germany), Karlsruhe (Germany), Mulhouse (France), Rueil-Malmaison (France), Szeged (Hungary), Sassari (Italy), Treviso (Italy). In the close future the same protocol will be signed with Novi Sad (Serbia) and Palermo (Italy).

### 3.3.3. Neighborhood Consultative Councils in Timisoara - History and Legal Grounds

The beginning of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils in Timisoara (NCCs) can be traced back to 2003 when a Local Council Decision set the grounds for forming these bodies. In 2004 the first NCC was formed and today there are established 12 out of the proposed 14 councils.

The model was borrowed from Mulhouse in France, a town with which Timisoara has “twinning” relations<sup>15</sup>. The NCCs have been active in Mulhouse for over 11 years and represent what the vice-mayor of Timisoara (Adrian Orza) believes to be “the best form of participative democracy at a local level”.

The main motivation that the local authorities in Timisoara claimed for forming these councils was the fact that the “audiences” system which had been working over the past 12 years was not by far as efficient as it should have been. Before the forming of the NCCs, the only way the common people could have presented their opinions and problems and asked for feedback directly from local officials was by asking for an audience or by writing a petition. But this system was hardly efficient in identifying the problems that would concern a larger number of individuals (the majority of issues being brought to the attention of the officials were very case-specific). As the vice-mayor of Timisoara, Mr. A. Orza, stated, “the NCCs are not part of any international project and does not have as a purpose to take money from some EU funds, like other Romanian projects, but to really involve the community in the decision making process”

In the first stage of forming the NCCs, the citizens were not at all asked for their input or feedback. The Mayor has worked together with the Local Council for developing a set of rules that would govern the functioning of the councils. The basic principles incorporated in this document were stating that “NCC is a citizen organization, with no legal personality, apolitical and non-profit, which promotes the values of democracy by realizing a permanent dialog between the local administration and the inhabitants of a certain area, insuring in this manner an active participation of the citizen at solving concrete problems of the community that he belongs to”.

NCCs were meant to function as social partners of the Local Council, with the purpose of identifying and solving local community’s problems. They represent instruments of citizen participation, for enrichment of the decision making process in the local public administration, with the scope of commonly realising of local public interest actions, works, services and projects.

According to the initial forming document, anybody who was a citizen of Timisoara city could have become a member of the NCC, apart from the local councillors and public clerks form the municipality of Timisoare who could not be members of any NCCs. The minimum number of people necessary to form a council was 7, and they would have had to be able and willing to debate together various aspect of the collective life. The limit number of members was 50, due to the need of assuring a satisfactory functioning of the Council. The selection of the members was to be made during the constitutive meeting, taking into account the CV’s

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<sup>15</sup> Mulhouse was one of the first big French cities which created, beginning with 1993, neighbourhood councils, opened for all people of Mulhouse who wished to be involved in the life of their neighbourhood. The meetings take place on regular basis and are held under the authority of the Vice Mayor president of the council. Source [www.moulhouse.fr](http://www.moulhouse.fr)

and on the basis of the vote of the majority of the participants. The initial forming meetings were chaired by representatives of the public administration. The mandate the first NCCs would have been given was for three years.

The NCC was to be led by a bureau made from one president, one vice-president and one secretary which organises the activity of the council. The need for theme related issues was not ignored and the NCCs were given the option of organizing thematically working groups

The City Hall promised to offer the NCCs a place where they could meet on a regular basis (trimestrial as was suggested at the beginning). The presence of the members is mandatory and the absence without motive from three consecutive meetings leads at the replacement of that person with another volunteer. NCC could be called by the president with at least 10 days before the meeting. The call should have been in writing, through post, by phone, with the help of mass-media or other means of publicity, with the help of the representatives of the City Hall. The call will be accompanied by the issues to be discussed during the meeting.

NCC meetings could be public. Each NCC should have at least once a year an open session for the neighbourhood citizens, for letting them know the people who are part of the Council and for reporting the state of play of different works.

In what concerns the members of the NCCs, they are volunteers; they do not receive any retribution or other facilities. They should work for the interest of the community and should be involved in the decision making process, encouraging the local initiative and promoting the proposals of their neighbourhood to the Local Council.

For favouring the collaboration between NCC and the local administration there is a permanent connecting group. Any proposal of the NCCs needs to be analyzed by the speciality commissions inside the Local Council and by the speciality departments of the City Hall. The powers of the NCCs are however clearly limited to an Consultative body, the actual decisions being taken by the Local Councils.

In 2005 the document was changed at the proposal of one of the NCCs, the most notable changes being the provisions regarding the voting system (“Decisions were to be taken with open vote, in the presence of the majority of the members, simple majority of votes being enough for taking a decision”) and the possibility granted t the NCCs to work with any other organizations and association as may be required to fulfil their projects.

All the above are the grounds for forming and functioning of the NCCs. But the way from good theory to god practice is often not that simple. In this case as well there were several obstacles and problems that needed to be overcome in order to achieve the goals of this initiative: bringing the people closer to the decision making process.

The following part of the research was focused on interviewing key persons as far as the NCC’s are concerned, (the Mayor of Timisoara, Vice Mayor, Local Councilors, Presidents and Members of NCCs and clerks) consulting the relevant documentation from the City Hall library and therefore identifying the strong parts as well as the weak parts and any other relevant issues.

### 3.3.4. Insights into the functioning of the NCCs

The completion of this case study required some more in-depth research. There are several things, such as the daily usually problems, the minor incidents, the important successes and the people's opinions that would provide the necessary information for having a complete picture of the councils. I have therefore looked for input on the opinion and experience level from those who have been involved in the NCCs from the time when these were only an ambitious plan as well as from those who are now active members of the NCCs.

The main topics of discussions for all the interviews were the beginnings of the NCCs, all the obstacles met in the way, the motivations of the persons involved, the identification of strong points and weak points, the budget allocated and whether the money is enough to support the well functioning of the councils, possible views for the future. There were also very specific questions that were directed to certain subjects that had in their area of interest the respective issue.

As a general characteristic drawn from all the interviews with persons that represent the municipality, the NCCs were regarded at the beginning as a positive thing (even a way of meeting the electoral promises of always caring for people's problems), but as time went by the enthusiasm had diminished and many problems that occurred were left un-tackled (due to various reasons like lack of time and resources, etc).

Most of the municipality representatives have identified several problems in the functioning of the councils. From the very beginning they said that **people in central areas were less interested** (up to the point of complete indifference) to the new Neighborhood Councils that were to be formed. At the **opposite end stay the people living on the outskirts of the town and older people**. They were from the very beginning the most active members of the NCCs and the ones that responded the quickest to the appeal of the City Hall. This thing can be explained by a variety of reasons: as far as the older people are concerned, it is always likely to have a higher rate of participation on their side because of the fact that they have more free time and they are also more concerned with the problems of the community since they spend more time there (as opposed to persons that are really working towards a career and who tend to spend less and less time in the neighborhood). Regarding the dissimilarity in participation between centre-located citizens and the ones who live at the periphery, the interviewers were suggesting that the reason for this disparity is given by the different amount of problems that these groups have. While people in the city centre have the majority of utilities and road infrastructure problems solved, the outskirts still have major problems with the both. Therefore, they argued, there is a difference in the stake that these groups have, and that is why the citizens of the more periphery neighborhoods were more active. There was also another explanation given by some officials referring to the fact that in the city centre live more heterogeneous groups than in the outskirts. This is correct if taking into consideration that in the city centers of the developed part of the world, according to Wirth (1938), live "five types of inner city residents: the cosmopolites, the unmarried or childless, the ethnic villagers, the deprived and the trapped" which cannot represent a homogeneous group. As Wirth (1938) states, "the more accentuated the characteristics of urbanism, the larger, the more densely populated and the more heterogeneous a community will be".

Another problem that was identified by the majority of the subjects was the fact that these Neighborhood Councils suffer from lack of organization on the part of their members. Even though the statute clearly states the manner in which a meeting must be called, people are still crossing this provision and the meetings are less productive than they should be. Also, the members of the NCCs, since they are regular citizens with no prior knowledge of the local administrative system, find it hard at many times to properly organize and to properly come with the right proposal to the Local Council. The Mayor and the Vice-Mayor of Timisoara both declared that the City Council is providing spaces for the NCCs to hold their meetings, but other than that there are no funds and no additional training courses or material that was given to the participants in the NCCs. As one of the officials declared in the interview, “We expect from NCCs to come up with budget proposals. For this they have to understand the budget, how it is created and from where the money comes”. Therefore, the members and the presidents of these councils might have very good intentions and might also have good proposals, but the result is definitely diminished.

As far as the proposals that come from the active NCCs, only one of them was definitely successful, and that is the one regarding the changes of the rules that govern the forming and the functioning of the NCCs. The other Councils are still coming with proposals that would regard only a restricted number of people (insufficient communication inside the communities) and with other problems that can be solved without the Local Council to take any action. This sort of attitude is the result of the fact that the members of the NCCs were not given a proper training on the way the City Council functions and on the responsibilities of each part of the institution. Of course, another reason is that the NCCs are only at the beginning; therefore they did not have the proper time to evolve and to become more active. The small, case-specific problems that the NCCs raise during the meetings is a proof of the fact that people still have a paternalist view on the City Hall, placing the responsibility for most of their problems on this body. “Many people come with small problems, like fighting with a neighbor over the parking place” says a president of a NCC. This shows clearly the lack of training and the lack of information regarding the purpose of the NCCs. This issue raises question marks regarding the way that the municipality informed the citizens, the way it assists and it helps. “There is no training from the municipality and they expect us to come with well written budget proposals” says one of the members of NCC.

Another conclusion drawn after interviewing all the different representatives of the City Hall was that the perception of the NCCs was not always positive inside the Local Council itself. The councilors were not used to have another consultative body, they claimed that they were elected to solve the problems and promote decisions and laws and that the implication of a third party – be it with a consultative role – only complicates and slows down the entire process. One of the interviewed councilors stated that “some members of the local council or and some officials of the city hall are skeptical and say that these ... (NCCs) require time and money, that they are inefficient, especially that they (councilors and officials) are the ones supposed by the law to make decisions”. This type of attitude made the mission of starting and supporting the NCCs even more difficult. This goes back at the debate about reconciliation between direct and representative democracy. Even though in theory those two forms are not contradictory, but complementary, in practice the elected officials are reluctant to give away power and sometimes even information and therefore they situate themselves as opposites to the participation tools. In the same time the citizens do not trust their representatives and either tend to become opponents of them or they just do not participate at all. These problems encountered at the practical level do not change the accuracy of the

theory but show the tensions and the real difficulties in creating the proper environment in order to obtain a good balance between direct and representative democracy.

Another problem that is somehow related to the one that I have mentioned previously is the fact that the political adversaries of the group that initiated the NCCs accused them of trying to manipulate people and of trying to place their key opinion leaders in the front position of all the NCCs. All the representatives of the City Hall that were asked to comment on this issue recognized that the debate on this subject definitely caused a lot of harm to the NCCs since it diminished their credibility. The Mayor declared that: "I have been accused by the PSD (main opposition party, the successor of the communist party), when the NCCs establishment was decided, that we want to politicize. By the contrary, we wanted to take into account the real opinion of the citizens; if one or another of the members of the NCCs are members of a party, this is not our problem anymore ".But they also said that they do not know and most of all do not take into account what are the political preferences of the NCC members and presidents. But this issue needs to be analyzed more thoroughly since the competition among political parties in Timisoara is quite fierce and it is obvious that it is a threat for the NCCs that they become politically controlled (by either political party).

One commonly accepted positive feature is that the City Hall has ceased to be that abstract notion to the regular people and that the decision making process is thus more transparent. People welcome the idea that they can bring their problems in front of the Local Council and that they have someone else to represent them apart from the councilors that formed the Local Council after the latest elections. The organization and information aspects are still quite poor, but they are improving gradually since people have more experience. One of the interviewed members of an NCC declared that: "the municipality helps them a lot and he is very satisfied by the cooperation with the city hall staff".

An overall conclusion from the interviews is that the NCCs are after all regarded as a positive thing, they are useful in terms of input from the people, but there is still a long way to go until this system will function as it is supposed to function. The City Hall has still got to invest some money into the NCCs and to provide further guidance until the councils will be able to properly function with no external influence.

**Fig. 3.3.7 Establishment of Consultative Councils in Freidorf (left) and Ghiroda (right) Neighbourhoods<sup>16</sup>**



<sup>16</sup> Source: [www.primariatm.ro](http://www.primariatm.ro)

An overall opinion on NCCs is that people are generally happy with the idea that they are closer to the decision process and they are willing to give some of their free time to participate in the meetings of the Councils. Paradoxically, their perception on the NCCs seems to be more positive than the perception of the City Hall representatives interviewed. This may be caused that the NCCs members are still enthusiastic about the fact that they can work with the City Council in solving problems in the interest of the community; at the same time, many of the NCCs are only at the very beginning and they did not have a chance to function properly yet. The NCCs are perceived as the chance of regular people to have a say in the decisions that are taken for their community other than the vote they cast every four years.

One problem that was identified by these subjects was the still poor communication between the community as a whole and the NCCs. There are a lot of persons that do not know about the existence of these councils and there are a lot of persons that do not trust them. The persons interviewed agreed that they need to communicate their activity and their organization in a more aggressive way so that more and more people are aware of their existence.

Another thing that was obvious from these interviews was that the majority of persons that are now members of the NCCs are those that have previously had participated in civic or political activities. This should be an alarm signal for the NCCs for they do not serve their purpose very efficiently in this way, a big majority of people being still left out of the entire process.

All these interviews helped in better understanding the perceptions and the activity of the currently existing NCCs. In the following part of the paper the focus is moved to the people that have nothing to do with these councils and I have tried to see what the awareness level is and what the people's opinions are on the Neighborhood Councils or on other initiatives of this sort.

### **3.3.5. Population Survey on the topic of participation and NCCs**

The indicators for civic participation are well above the national numbers – a normal fact if we consider that Timisoara was the first town in Romania to protest against communism in 1989 and that it has a local culture of social participation and reform. 36% of the respondents declared that they are members of trade unions, 29% participated in strikes and 17% joined public manifestations.

The least popular forms of participation among the respondents were the petition signing and NGO membership (3% and respectively 2%). As far as expressing their options in local elections, the results are again above the national average: 93% declared that they voted in local elections after 1989. This figure is confirmed by the fact that Timisoara had the biggest turnout at the last local elections (June 2004) out of the whole country.

This data depicts the citizens of Timisoara as generally social aware and active individuals. They seem to have a more developed participatory culture than the national average. The feature of democracy as opposed to communism in what concerns the active participation in the decision making process may have had a bigger impact on the people living in this city.



However, it is to be mentioned that the citizens of Timisoara have a predilection towards forms of civic participation that have a less formal character. Strikes and public manifestations are more spontaneous and very much case related participation means. They are not set within a regular, consistent and continuous set of regulated actions and are more “extreme” measures meant to force the authorities into the attitudes and decisions that are desired by their participants.

The still high figures for the voting behavior and the trade union membership might point to a tendency towards more regular and at the same time regular participation. But when taking a closer approach these forms of participation talk less about a positive participating attitude and more about common practice and general trend. Voting behavior is likely to be high since the right to vote is one fundamental right that all the Romanian citizens missed during the communist period. At the same time, trade union membership is not necessarily related to proper participation and active attitude.

Petition signing and NGO membership are the two forms of participation most related to our object of study, namely the NCCs. Particularly the NGOs can be considered to be the most similar to the Neighborhood Councils since they have a formal legal framework for continuous action. But as resulting from this questionnaire these forms of participation are the least popular ones (the data is consistent with several surveys that were taken on a national level). This is due to the fact that people do not have the proper participatory education or information means that would lead to these forms of involvement in the public life. Another reason would be that the day to day life and worries leave little time for an extra regular activity and people in general resort to more “forceful” means of having their say in the decision making process.

However, all the numbers analyzed above do set the grounds for a positive attitude towards local public participation and potentially active involvement in the NCCs.

The questionnaire has further looked into the information methods used by the citizens of Timisoara as far as the local public life is concerned.

The responses regarding the information habits and the frequency of information on the local political, social and economical life mirror people’s interest in the above mentioned issues. 57% of the respondents declared that they watch the local news on TV at least 5 times a week and 22% do that 3 or 4 times during a week. The next preferred information channel is the radio (41% are listening to the local news at 3 times or more per week). The least popular method seems to be reading the newspaper with 30% declaring that they read the local pages less than once in a month.

The figures regarding the information methods used fall under the same pattern as the general national media consumption habits. People are more likely to watch the news on television due to lack of time and reduced availability for the extensive analysis that are the characteristic of the written press. But when we are looking at this data through the perspective of the methods used to inform the citizens of Timisoara on the existence and activity of the NCCs, we can say that the communication methods used by the initiators of this project were not the most efficient ones. As stated in the previous chapter, the NCCs were firstly made public through the written press and were present on the TV on a more controversial and conflict attitude.

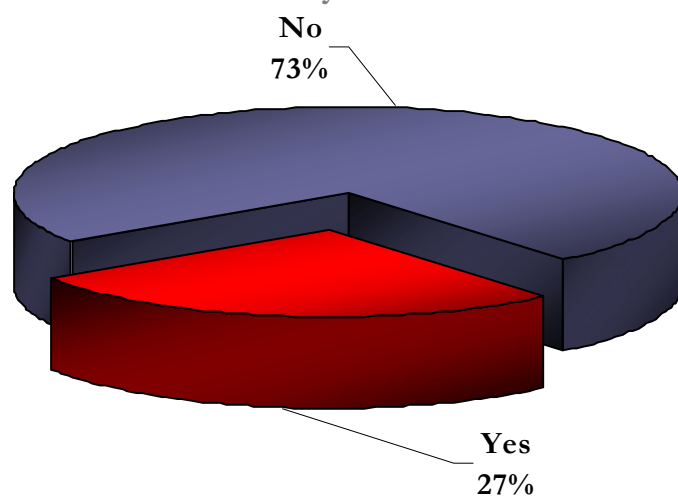
Another valuable information from the questionnaire is the frequency with which people discuss political, social and economical issues with their friends and family. Previous studies have depicted the word of mouth as the most effective information method for Romanian citizens (Barbu, 1999). 76% of the respondents declared that they frequently discuss political and social events with their acquaintances.

Considering the fact that participation tools in general and NCCs in particular in Timisoara are at their very beginning, it is extremely important to evaluate the level of awareness of the citizens regarding these NCCs. The degree of awareness affects both the citizen's opinion and attitude towards NCCs, their understanding of the purposes of the NCCs and the level of participation itself.

But when asked whether they have ever heard of this advisory body, only 27% responded positively.

**Fig 3.3.8 Population Awareness**

Have you ever heard of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils in your town?



This conclusion is further supported by the fact that there is no visible correlation between the positive answers (people who have heard of the NCCs) and the previously civic active persons who are more likely to be up to date with the recent developments in this field. The citizens who did not know about the existence of the NCC have equally taken part in other forms of public participation or been outside the boundaries of citizen participation.

When further looking into the reasons for the poor awareness level for the NCCs we considered the information means used by the subjects.

As some of the persons interviewed in the previous stage of the research stated, the NCC had a rather big exposure mainly in the newspapers, with several local television appearances

(even though these were mostly centered on conflict issues) and less focus on the radio. This type of informing people on the initiative is however, as stated previously, less fortunate, for the written press holds the last place among the preferred information methods on the local matters. Indeed, 90% of those who have heard about the NCCs are frequent readers of the local section of the newspapers, 78% watch the local news on TV at least 3 times a week, and only 45% are usually listening to local news on the radio.

The data presented above must also be viewed in conjunction with the response to the question on the first information source on the NCCs, question addressed only to those who already knew about their existence. The most frequent initial source of information was the discussion with friends, relatives or other acquaintances (33%), followed by the local TV (30%) and newspapers (23%) (only 10% of the respondents declared that they knew about the committees due to information material in public places or received by mail). This means that even though they are frequent readers of the newspapers, people first perceived the news of the NCCs through more direct communication methods. This leads to the conclusion that the “word of mouth” (which is however a primary information source, with approximately 76% of the those over 18 years old declaring that they discuss politics or other social matters with their family and friends) as well as other personally addressed channels of communication are more suitable and likely to be more effective for the NCCs. .

But even though the people in Timisoara seem to have a rather pro-active attitude towards citizen participation in general, the enthusiasm towards the NCCs was reduced. Only 35% of those who knew about the committees were interested in further getting more information and only 6% tried to contact the members of these committees. This points to the fact that the population is generally skeptical about this initiative and that it would take a bigger effort on the part of the local authorities and of the people already involved in the NCCs to create a positive attitude towards these bodies. But this is a further step to be taken because so far not even their organization and activity is that well known, only 20% of the subjects declaring that they know about these matters.

However, the general perception of the NCCs seems to be positive, over 75% believing that the councils are correct, and represent the people’s interest to the Local Council. But this needs to be viewed through the light of the fact that only a third of those who found out about the NCCs were further interested in getting more information. This fact leads to the conclusion that the 75% is not an accurate figure since not so many persons further looked into more detailed at the NCCs. Therefore we can say that people favor this type of initiative in general but they take no particular interest in it; they are glad to know that something is being done, but they do not take the effort to participate themselves. It also seems to be a gap between the intentional level and the actual active level because 50% of the respondents declare that they would like to participate in one of the meetings of these consultative councils and only 6% actually did something about it.

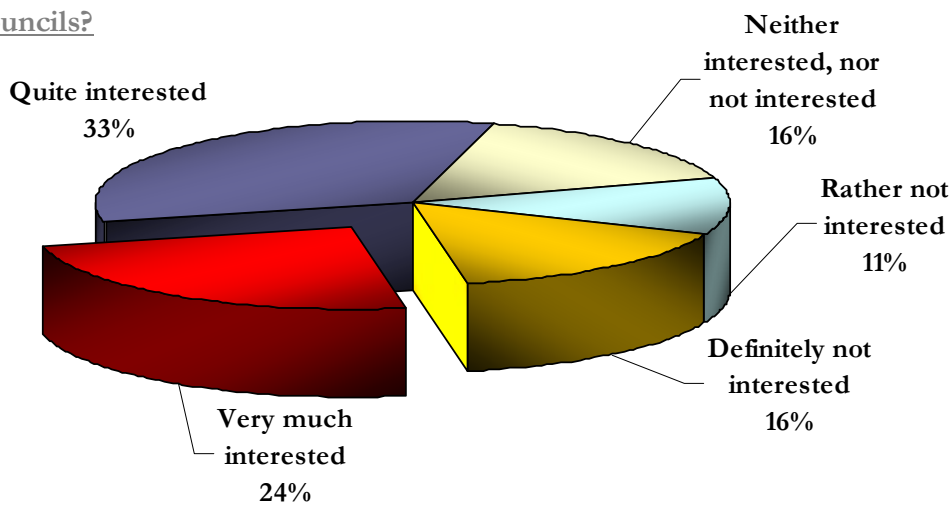
When it comes to the socio demographic profile of those who know about the existence of the NCCs, the general picture is that of medium income, medium education males, over 40 years old, living outside of the center of the city. The youth has a particularly low level of information corroborated with a positive attitude towards this initiative.

After viewing this data we might say that people have not yet made a clear connection between their daily lives and problems and the activity of the NCCs. They do not yet perceive

the councils as a potential spokesperson for their needs; they might just view it as an observatory body that keeps an eye on the controversial actions of the Local Council. This might be due to the fact that so far there were no door to door or direct mailing type of campaigns, campaigns that would enable the citizens to directly express their concerns to a formal organization that can take action towards incorporating people's needs into the decision making process.

**Fig 3.3.9 Interest in NCC participation**

Not informed persons - How interested are you in participating in a meeting of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



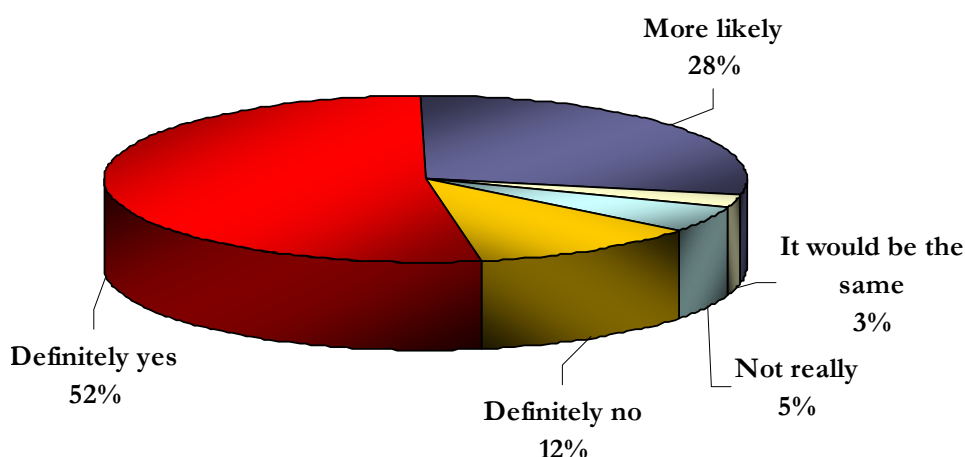
On the other hand, the respondents that have found out about the NCCs only during this interview proved an even less enthusiastic attitude. Only 23% declared that they would definitely like to participate in one of the meetings of these councils, 30% showing a more reserved attitude. The level of skepticism is therefore much higher. At the declarative level, over 70% of these people that did not know about the NCCs until the interviewer presented them the basic information said that they would like to further find out more about the councils. But as seen previously, there is a big gap between the intentional and the active attitude and it much more firm actions need to be taken in order to determine the people to be interested in and eventually participate in the activity of the NCCs.

All the respondents were then asked whether they believe would help if the Local Council would ask for their opinion when making decisions. More than 80% considered that this kind of attitude would be beneficial. This response has to be considered in conjunction with the general belief and discomfort of the Romanian citizens that the politicians are interested in the common people's opinions only in the periods prior to the elections. Feeling that there most of the time they are left aside the decision making process, people want to have a closer connection to the local authorities. Even though this 80% mention above might be viewed as an "I know better" type of attitude, it still gives a clear picture of the fact that many of the people's concerns are not even tackled by the municipality. And there is further evidence in the questionnaire that people do not overestimate their single ability to change things (only 14% are convinced that if they would be members of the Local Council then the Council

would do more for the community) and that they are aware of the fact that it takes more than occasional actions and single opinions to bring their concerns right to the center of the decision process.

**Fig. 3.3.10 Utility of being asked**

Do you think it would help if the Local Council would ask for your opinion in matters regarding your community?



The conclusion after processing the data from this questionnaire is that even though the awareness level is still low, there is a relatively positive perception of the NCCs on the general level. People would like to feel that they take part in the decision making process, they want to know that the local authorities consider the voice of the regular people when deciding over public matters and they welcome the idea of being represented by their peers in front of the Local Council. Even though the individuals might not take part or further follow the activity of the NCCs, they would have a general feeling of comfort and trust and they like to know that in case they need to speak out their needs and problems there is an approachable body that would listen to them and that would consider their opinion. This is definitely a favorable ground for the NCCs, providing that better communication methods are used and more people are involved in these councils.

### 3.3.6. SWOT Analysis of the NCCs

The circumstances in which the NCCs were created are defined by:

- The general lack of a sense of civic duty and responsibility among citizens;
- A profound distrust of government and prospects of just administration;
- Big difficulty to turn on and mobilise people to take political and developmental processes seriously; in other words, a demobilisation of citizenship.

Considering this and after analyzing all the data gathered in the previous stages of the research the final point is in clustering the information in a very clear and focus driven

manner. A SWOT analysis was developed for this purpose, analysis that also sets the ground for the way forward presented in the final conclusive chapter.

### ***Strengths***

The Neighborhood Consultative Councils in Timisoara are, no matter the barriers and malfunctions, a positive step towards involving the regular people in the decision making process. As a result of the data collected during the case study, there are several strong points that need to be further stressed on in order to make the NCCs efficient.

- Even though the extent is rather reduced, the NCCs do bring common people closer to the decision process and enable them to have a say regarding the activity of the Local Council
- The Councils gather input on the issues that concern the people the most, input that is helpful in developing further policies
- The NCCs also provide a forum for people to debate the problems of their community. People might experience the alienation feeling that no matter their ideas and opinions, no politician will hear about it and therefore there will be nothing positive coming out of their exercise of thinking and debating.
- At the same time, this policy made the city Hall to be regarded as less of an abstract body and more of a pro-active institution.
- The Neighborhood Councils are also an important step towards building a participatory culture among the citizens of Timisoara.

### ***Weaknesses***

The fact that the NCCs are among the first policies of this kind has resulted none the less in a series of weak points that have to be regarded with a positive and pro-active attitude in order to achieve improvement.

- The members of the NCCs did not receive any sort of consistent training for the part they are currently playing in the decision making process. Their meetings are therefore less productive than they should be.
- The existence and activity of the NCCs has been poorly communicated, people are not properly informed and the local authorities did not highlight the benefits of the initiative.
- The community members have a low level of involvement, especially among the youth (the NCCs do not present any degree of attractiveness).
- The people who are members of the NCCs do not represent the interest of their community in general, they are still too much focused on case-related issues that only concern a small fraction of the population.
- The NCCs do not cooperate with other stake holders
- Citizens have a low level of trust towards the local government. The Local Councilors do not entirely approve of or appreciate the NCCs' involvement.

### ***Opportunities***

The NCCs are however only in the initial stage and there are several opportunities that should be seized.

- Being the first organized form of participation it can benefit from the people's enthusiasm commonly associated with new things.
- The NCCs provide important insights on the real life and problems of the communities and help developing better policies
- The NCCs can have activities that are addressing the problems of certain groups such as the youth, the retired persons, etc.
- The Councils can collaborate with a multitude of actors on the NGO scene and develop projects together with them

### ***Threats***

There are however, several things that endanger the activity and development of the Councils, things that need further special attention and consideration for the success of the initiative.

- The danger of the NCCs to become politically controlled
- The possibility that the initial enthusiasm wears out with every new obstacle until the NCCs will be unpopular
- The lack of immediate results might push the people away

## **Chapter 4**

# **CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD**



#### 4. Conclusions

The questions that were posed at the beginning of this study and towards which all the information in the previous chapter was collected and analyzed referred to the extent to which citizen participation initiatives and projects are developed in Romania, the level of citizen's awareness of Neighborhood Citizens Committees (NCC) as a new policy to increase participation and to the efficiency of this initiative.

As far as the general Romanian case is concerned, we can say that there is a clear necessity for coherent and consistent projects that would involve the citizens in the decision process, further than casting their votes. People feel that they have almost nothing to say when decisions are taken for their community, they feel the need to be represented, they highlight the issues that they are concerned about and they state that either the local or the national authorities should take action regarding these problems. But the way things are developing people feel more and more left aside and only used for their vote in elections.

There were few programs meant to form consultative citizen bodies for the administrative matters, most of them starting at the initiative of foreign organizations. The awareness level and the interest of the citizens were not as high as expected and the outcome of these programs was further diminished by the general lack of trust on the part of the citizens and by the rather low participation rate, but the results were nevertheless positive. This shows the necessity of constantly and consistently bringing these initiatives to the attention of the people. Any further programs meant to bring people closer to the decision point would be welcomed by the citizens but at the same time regarded with suspicion and caution at the beginning.

As stated in the theoretical chapter, one of the major inconveniences in introducing new forms of participation is the mistrust of both sides, local leaders and the population. Local authorities often do not believe that the local population has the capacity to participate and contribute constructively in any stage of a policy-making process. In Timisoara case the situation is somehow worse: the officials who support the NCCs and the idea of participation in general believe that the citizens are able to do everything without training or too much assistance. This, combined with the mistrust of those officials which do not support the NCCs and are hoping for a failure, can lead to bad results and in time with the abandon of the idea.

In the same time in the theoretical part one explanation of the determinants of participation assumes that those who have more resources, such as knowledge, money or time, are more likely to participate, and it has been tested in the context of post-communist democracies, pointing to the lack of visible differences between them and established democracies. This assertion is not entirely true in the Timisoara case. Here it was proved so far that the people from the periphery, who are (in Romania in general) more poor, participate with more interest due to various reasons stated in the analysis. But in the same time the older people who have more time participate more, which confirms part of the theory. But the most important aspect underlined also in the theoretical chapter is the fact that due to the lack of civic culture caused by the communist system, the citizens do not gather to participate spontaneously or pushed by need, but they wait for some authority to organize them. And probably this is one of the reasons why they did not initiate their own NCCs but the municipality did.

In the last years in democracies all over Europe there was an increased attention given to other forms of participation, where citizens become involved in policy making and implementation. Even if the results of this participation have not always been satisfactory, it came like a natural course of action, like a step forward. In Romania people learned to exercise their basic participation role – the vote – as well as other forms of participation at the same time.

As stated in the literature review chapter, Lutz and Linder view participation not only as the election of people into representative bodies, but rather as the less formal way to let people participate in and influence government activities. We can therefore say that participation in Timisoara in particular and in Romania in general is still in the incipient stage.

The more specific objectives of this study regarded the Neighbourhood Consultative Councils in Timisoara. Beyond any doubt this initiative has a positive nature and if carried on considering the lessons so far, it has the chances to be an effective tool of involving people in the decisions regarding their communities. NCCs can provide the community additional influence in decision-making process, all the NCC members interviewed agreeing that establishing a NCC augmented the community's influence on municipality decisions.

The NCCs can also accelerate the decision-making process. NCCs might help hurry the solution selection and implementation process of diverse policies or programmes. With community contribution through the NCC, the local administration might be able to screen out remedial options that the neighbourhood will not accept prior to spending resources on feasibility analysis.

NCCs can offer an effective opportunity for careful consideration of solution choices. Questions can be answered rapidly and information supplied early so that the NCC—and the community in general—fully comprehends solution alternatives.

But unfortunately so far the awareness level on the part of the citizens is low, due to improper communication strategies, lack of major actions that would regard more people (the activity of the NCCs has not resulted in any major benefit for the communities so far) and suspicion and lack of interest from the citizens.

The activity of the NCCs had also several obstacles to overcome. There were a few resistances from the part of some of municipal officials and employees, mostly because they were afraid of changes correlated to the expansion of public participation in the decision-making process. They were uncertain whether they would lose their autonomy to perform their duties and felt threatened by broadening accountability mechanisms.

There was also a lack of support at a higher level by some municipal councillors, as they did not participate actively in the consultation process themselves. Instead, they left it up to City Hall officials, which made it difficult for them to have a sense of ownership and leadership in the process.

Certain parts within the community were unconvinced about the usefulness of setting long-term objectives as opposed to developing immediate solutions to the problems they were experiencing. This had as effect a major difficulty in gathering the community together to talk

about new subjects with longer time horizons, instead of concentrating exclusively on short-term improvements.

In the same time the expectations that the local administration has from the NCC are by far too big considering that no resources are spent for training and capacity building for these NCCs. To be more concrete, the local administration expect that the NCCs will understand the budget of the city, will come up with sound projects financially correct and will provide a vision for the neighbourhood where they live. At this stage this is unrealistic and will probably affect in a negative way the established NCCs. The local administration tries to involve these NCCs into participatory budgeting. This method could be a very effective one once it can be applied.

But the process cannot be effective without having the municipality completely implicated in it. The local administration representatives are still far from realising that the NCCs will work properly only if they have their full support. At this moment some local leaders believe that once established, these NCC's success or failure depends totally on the citizens involved and as one of them declared, "the ball is in their court; if they want to meet and do something positive, good; if not, it's their problem. We played our role..."

The case study highlights several important lessons for communities considering formation of a NCC.

Even if a process is participatory, it is decisive that there is always an unambiguous definition of roles, responsibilities and tasks to keep away from conflict and disagreements, which can either freeze or terminate an initiative. Adding up, instruments must be created to make sure that all information relevant to the process and outcomes is continuously circulated and considered accurate by all stakeholders.

In polarised political environments, like the Romanian one, it is essential to factor in the broader political calendar to make sure that elections and other important dates do not destabilize the process, as political interests tend to polarise during such times.

Participatory processes are reliant on strong, credible and organic structures behind each stakeholder in the process. Inadequate capacity and reduced organisational bases damage the capacity of the process. This is a basic prerequisite for working inter-sectorally and for institutional receptiveness as new issues appear. This does not advocate one fixed arrangement, but rather an institutional framework that permits for an associated structure to deal with each over-arching strategic objective.

Participatory processes must extend further than the organised NCCs and also make an effort to comprise the unorganised sectors.

The time and energy implicated in mobilising community structures should not be underrated. Gathering all participants together generally takes longer than anticipated because of the imperfect inter-connection and structured communication between social organisations. The NCCs is an effective tool to augment the space for democratic participatory practices.

Given the various expectations of all the citizens in cities, it is important to use different methodologies to arouse the conversation and keep it going. It is even more important to

equip citizens with skills to convert their engagement into practical involvements that can lead to solutions for the many urban problems.

All these conclusions can be collated and put under the form of further recommendations for the proper functioning of the NCCs in Timisoara and for other initiatives.

One important learning and further recommendation is that the NCCs should be created as early as possible. The case study confirmed the significance of early community involvement in the decision making process. A NCC is one of the most effective instruments for promoting community involvement and creating a NCC early in the decision-making process would offer major payback:

- The community can contribute in and impact decisions.
- The community has a chance to examine possible remedy selections and to respond to proposed solutions.
- Trust-building, a slow process, will get an early commence.
- Operations and dynamics within a NCC have time to grow and mature.

Another important thing is that the community should take the initiative in NCC creation and operation. It is decisive that the community owns it's NCC and that the community itself begins the creation of the NCC. Self-selection of members provides legitimacy to the process and guarantees that the NCC is in the hands of stakeholders. It is up to community inhabitants to choose if and how they want to form a NCC.

The reliability of a NCC is a function of two characteristics: inclusiveness and autonomy. The NCC must stand for all stakeholder interests — both to preserve credibility within the community, and to guarantee the local administration that the NCC is the voice for the entire community rather than for a small number of interested parties. More importantly, the NCC must be capable of acting independently, free from the influence of others with an interest in the result of the situation.

The process by which the NCC accomplishes its assignment must be both open and responsive to community needs and interests. The easiest way to achieve this is to make sure that all NCC meetings are open to the public, well advertised, and cover all interests articulated by the local community. If possible, NCC meetings should be assisted by a unbiased party to guarantee that participants do not feel that they are being pressed in one direction or the other.

Yet another important aspect is the access to good technical know-how. All NCC members agreed that having sound, autonomous technical advice is a key element of NCC success.

NCC leadership should be consistent and ready to spend whatever time commitment needed to see the NCC through to achievement. Effective NCCs are inclined to build up a “personality” that reflects the input of core players in the process. Lacking effective leadership, NCCs will probably operate in a stop-start manner, losing credibility as decisions are made randomly or wasting time bringing new members up to speed.

It is often difficult to tackle all issues and concerns in detail at a public meeting. The NCC process supposes establishing an ongoing environment for discussing and resolving issues

and concerns. NCCs provide a place where community members with diverse points of view are able to resolve their divergences and build up a unified voice. It also provides a place where the community, the local administration and technical experts can take the time to inspect and talk about detailed information.

The frequency of NCC meetings varied at each one — from as frequently as twice a month to as seldom as once per trimester. Meeting efficiency and the capacity to maintain the momentum of the group over time are more important than how often meetings are held. A fine compromise appeared to be scheduling regular monthly or bimonthly meetings, while preserving the flexibility to schedule special interim meetings as conditions warrant.

The need for extra resources is a frequent concern. NCC members that were interviewed for the case study noted the need for funding to NCCs for managerial, logistical and technical support. Other NCC members said they would like to send out mailings or publish fact sheets or a newsletter to the community at large, but lacked the organizational capability to do so.

NCC leaders must recognize that citizens do not have by default a full understanding of the budgeting or other technical subjects. They require unambiguous clarifications of the goals, purposes, policies, mechanisms, and limitations of the programs. This broadens to a lucid understanding of the role and responsibilities of the NCC and citizens with a stake in the process.

Even though the NCCs are only at their beginning, the time is their main enemy. As underlined in the theoretical chapter, the process of participation should lead to a specific outcome. People need results and visible changes. After all I believe this is one of the keys of the success or of the failure of the NCC policy in Timisoara.

However, all these are only base principles required for the proper functioning of the NCCs in Timisoara and of any other further projects at the same kind. The case study offers extensive information on only one city in Romania, and if we are to develop a base model that would work in any other part of the country then further analysis is required.

Starting from this study we can conceive a more extended research that would take part in parallel in several locations in Romania. People's attitudes, expectations and opinions towards NCCs or other potential bodies need to be carefully collected through focus groups and work groups. Another important question for any further research would be if the existence of the NCCs also increases the level of other forms of participation. With a new, more extensive set of data collected over a longer period of time (the need for establishing trends and pattern of behaviour) we can create a comprehensive picture of the citizen participation forms in Romania and design useful guidelines for further action.

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## List of Interviewees

60. Mr. Ciuhandu, Gheorghe, Mayor Timisoara
61. Mr. Orza, Adrian, Vice Mayor Timisoara
62. Mr. Toader, Corado Dacian Alidor, Local Councilor Timisoara
63. Mr. Silviu Sarafolean, Local Councilor Timisoara

64. Mr. Ion, Ion, General Director from the Citizens' Information Bureau Timisoara
65. Ms. Borsa, Violeta, The public relations department representative Timisoara City Hall
66. Mr. Schiffbeck, Adrian, Manager of the city hall department responsible for the NCCs Timisoara City Hall
67. Mr. Triponescu, Gheorghe President of Ghiroda NCC
68. Mr. Goldiș, Dan, President of Lipovei NCC
69. Mrs. Iacob, Letiția, President of Freidorf NCC
70. Mr. Mihailescu, Liviu, member Calea Sagului NCC
71. Mr. Andon, Adrian, member Mehala NCC
72. Mrs. Gutfreind, Delia, member Ghiroda NCC
73. Mrs. Bonda, Paula, member Ghiroda NCC
74. Mr. Mihaescu, Virgil, member Circumvalatiunii NCC
75. Mr. Panaitescu, Gabi, member Cetate NCC

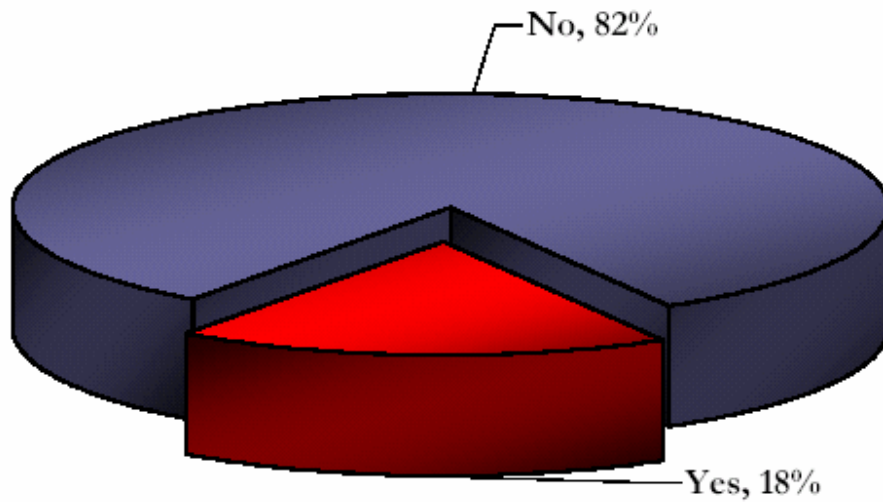
# **ANNEXES**

## **Annex 1. List of Abbreviations**

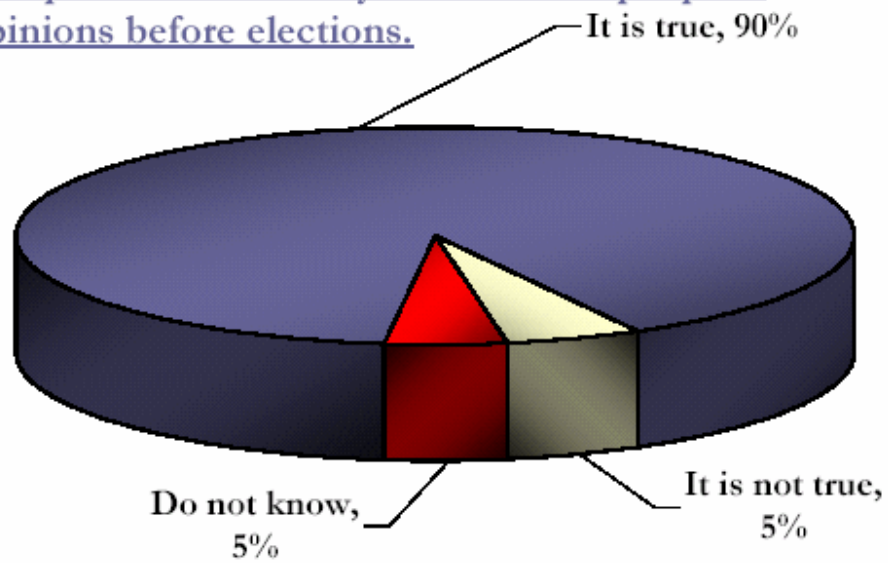
**NCC** Neighbourhood Consultative Council  
**CCG** Citizen Consultative Groups  
**BOP** Public Opinion Barometer  
**SWOT** Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats  
**NGO** Non Governmental Organization

Annex 2. BOP analysis results

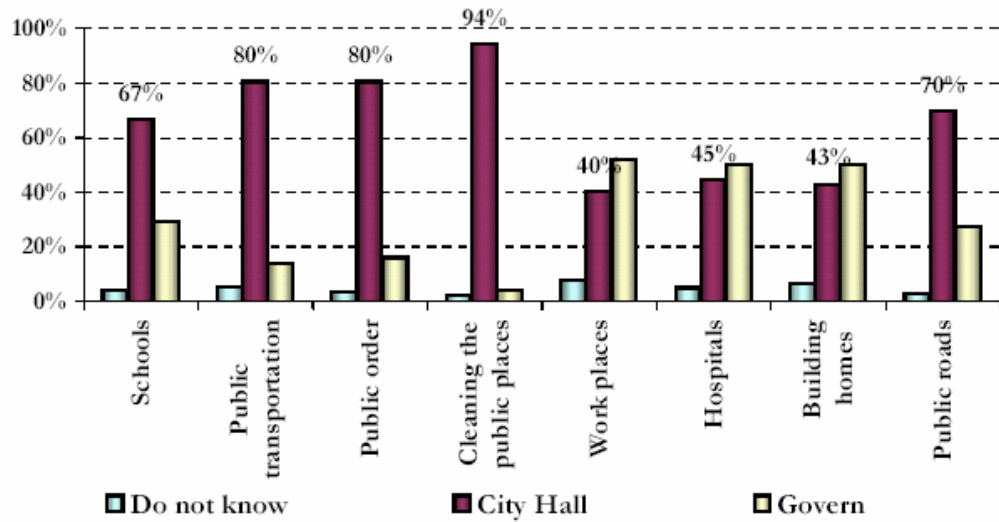
Is there a local councilor that represents you?



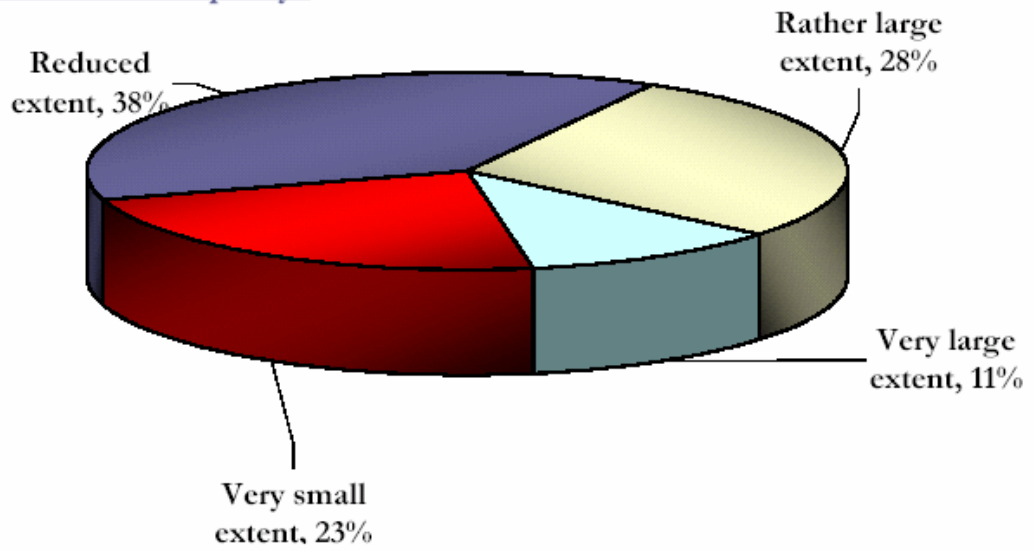
The politicians are only interested in people's opinions before elections.



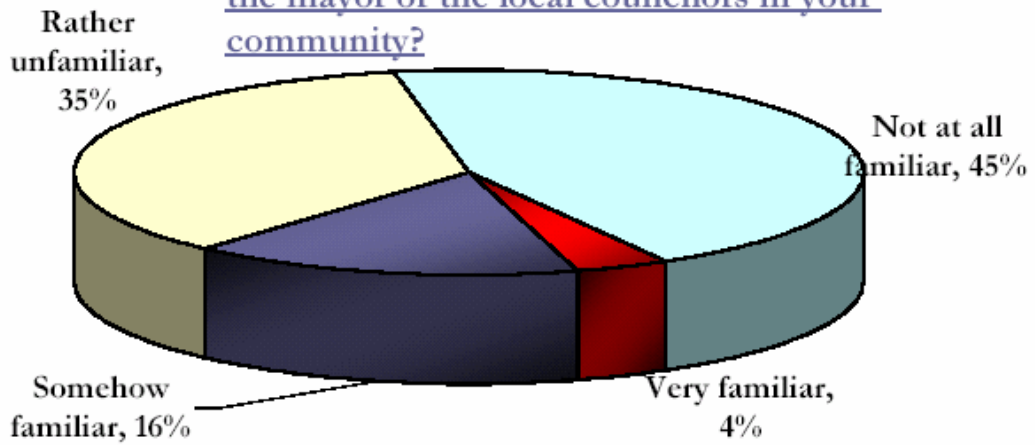
In your community, who should take the responsibility for solving the problems concerning the



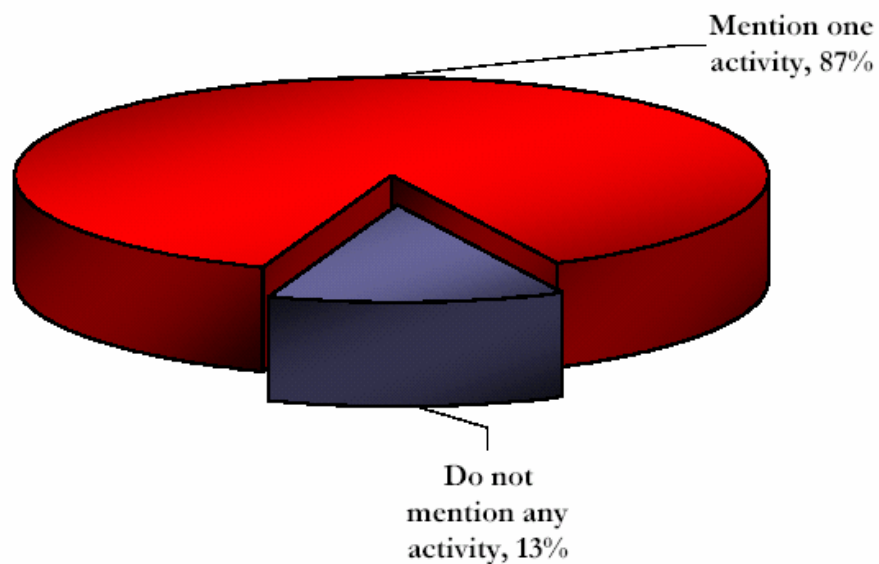
To what extent is your life influenced by the decisions of the municipality?



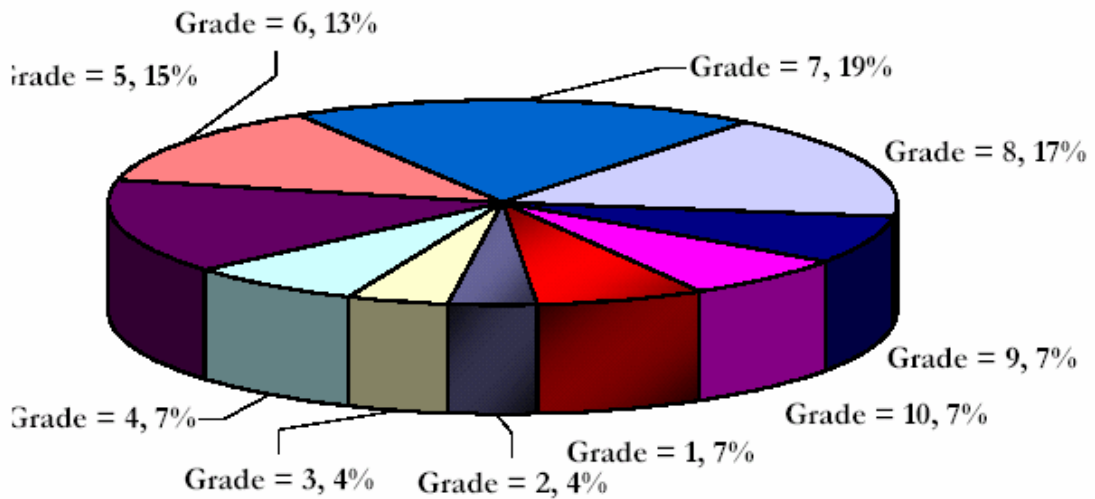
To what extent are you familiar with the actions of the mayor or the local councilors in your community?



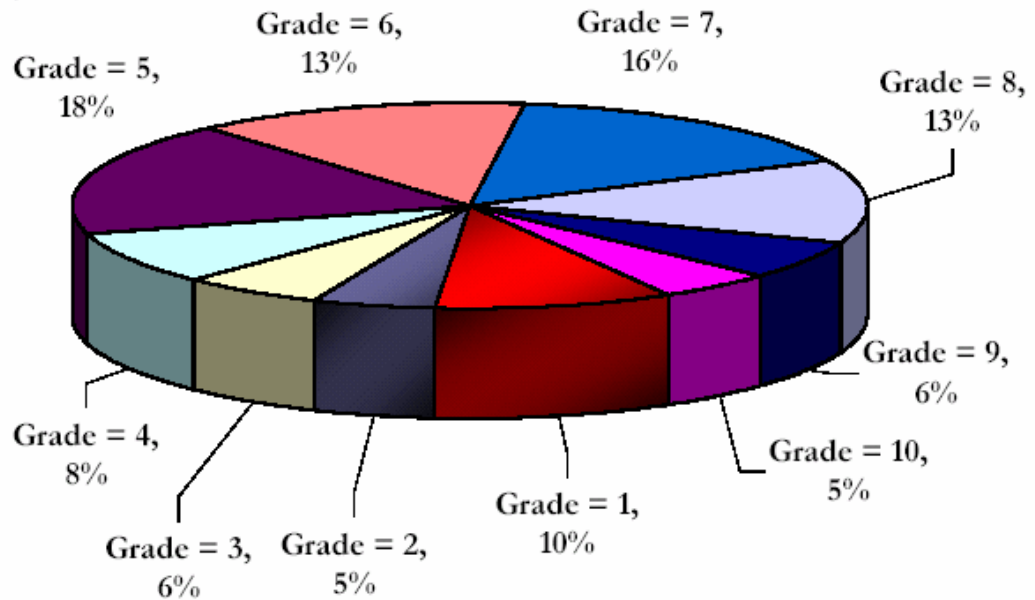
Can you please mention one of the activities of the mayor or of the city councilors in your community over the last year?



On a 1 to 10 scale (1 - nearly anything, 10 - almost everything), how many things do you know about your City Hall?

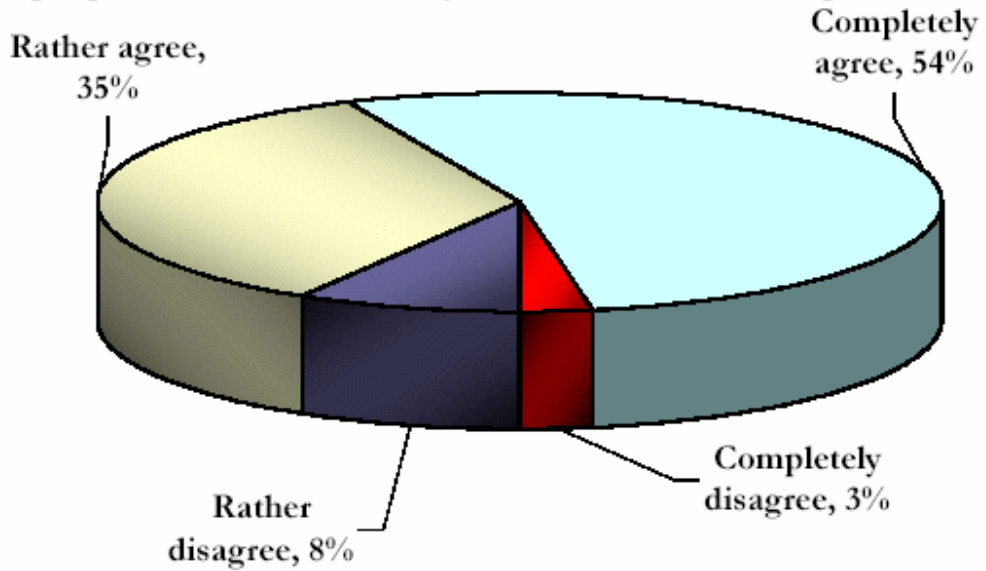


On a 1 to 10 scale (1 - nearly anything, 10 - almost everything), how many things do you know about your Local Council?

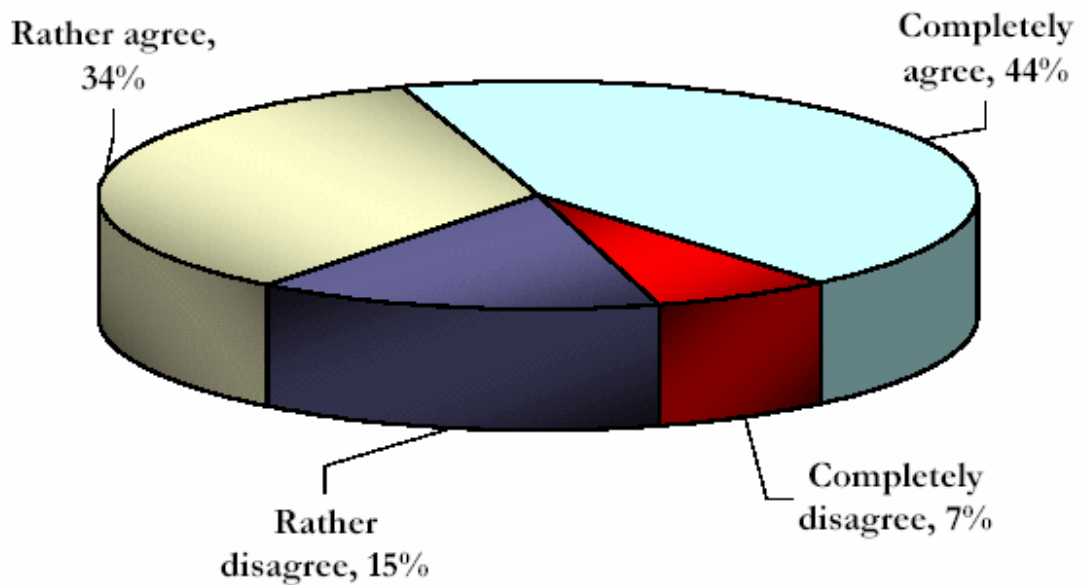




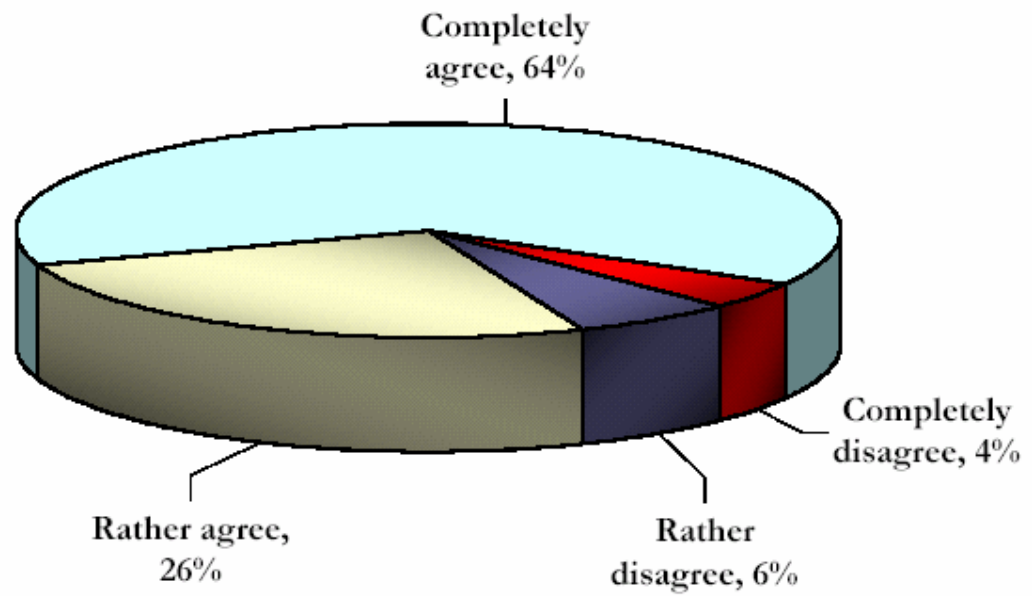
The situation today is too complicated for simple people like me to have a say in the evolution of things



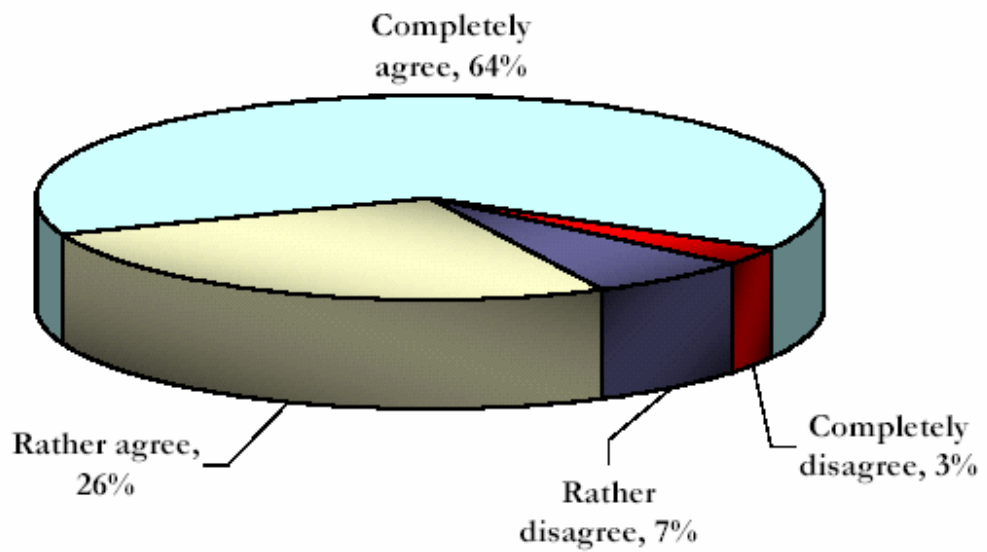
Nobody is interested in what people like me think.



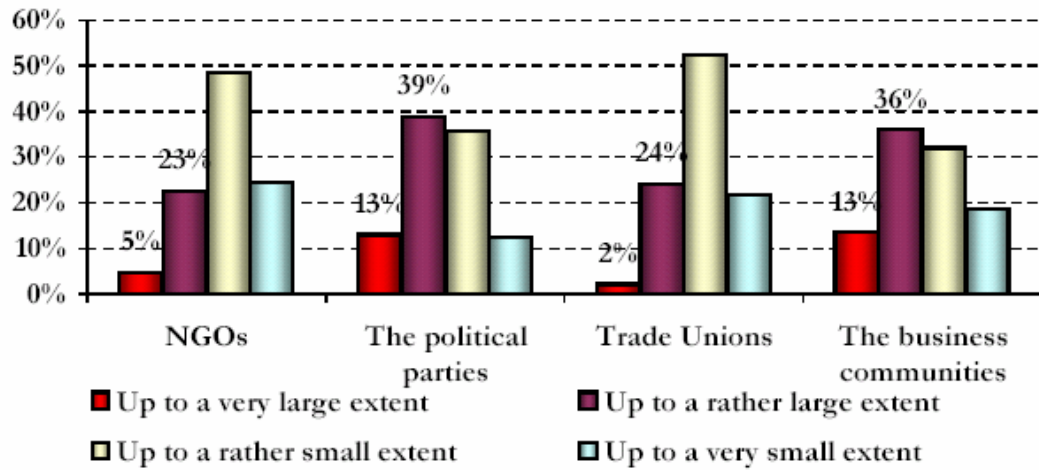
The majority of those who have the power try to take advantage of the others.



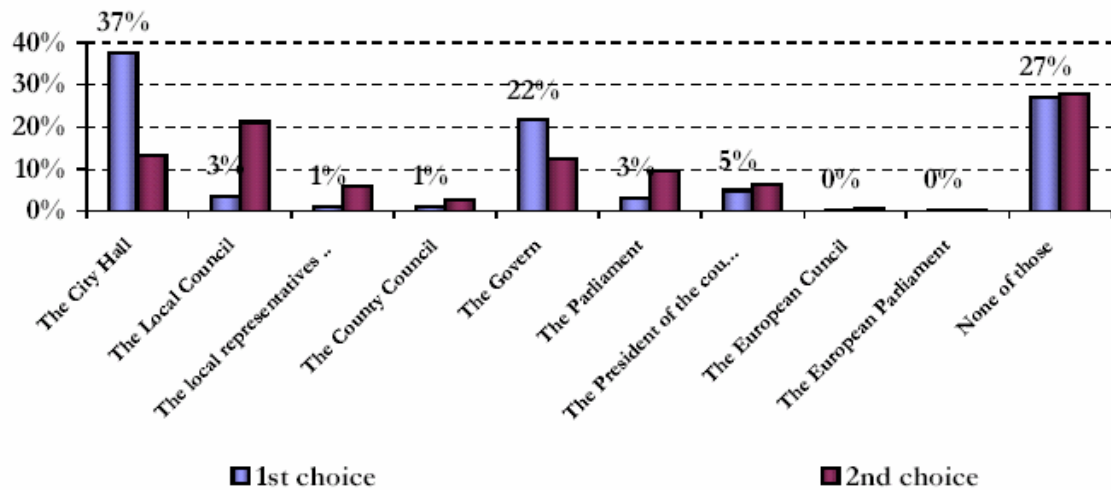
Those who rule the country do not care about what happens to me.



### To what extent do the following bodies influence the decisions of your municipality?

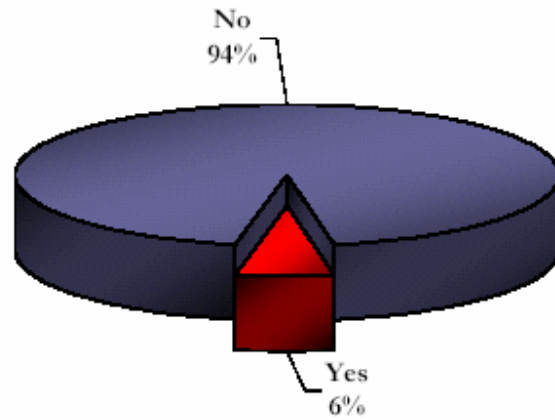


### Which one of the following authorities influence the most your daily life?

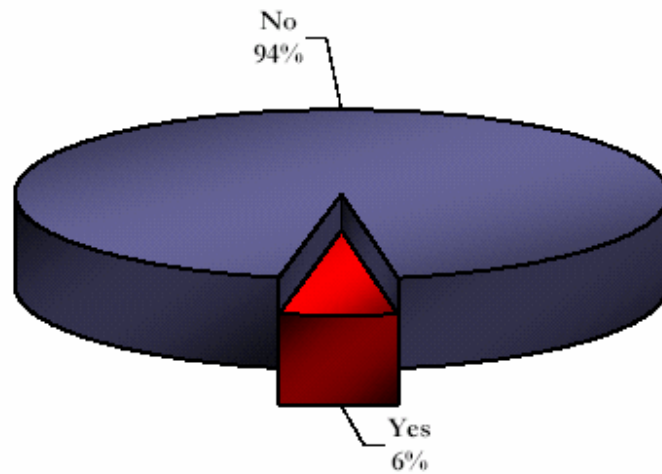


Annex 3. NCC Questions 1-12

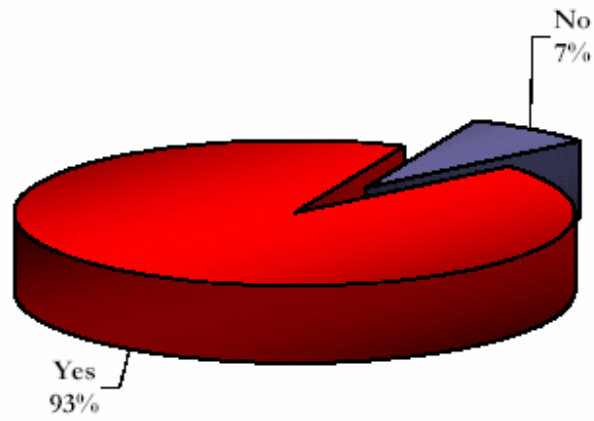
Have you ever signed a petition to the local authorities?



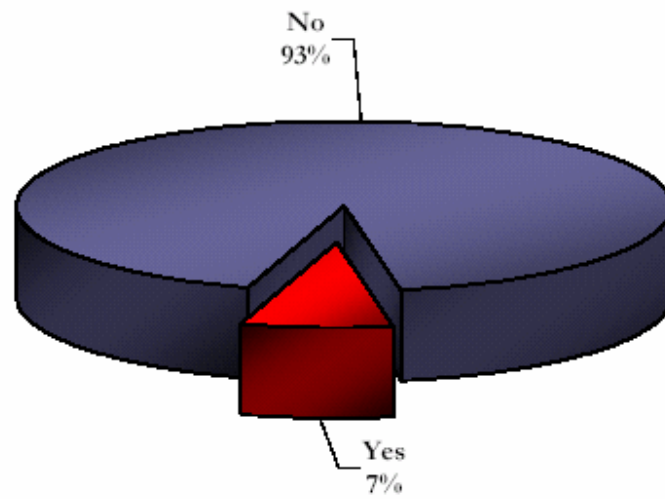
Have you ever participated in an electoral campaign?



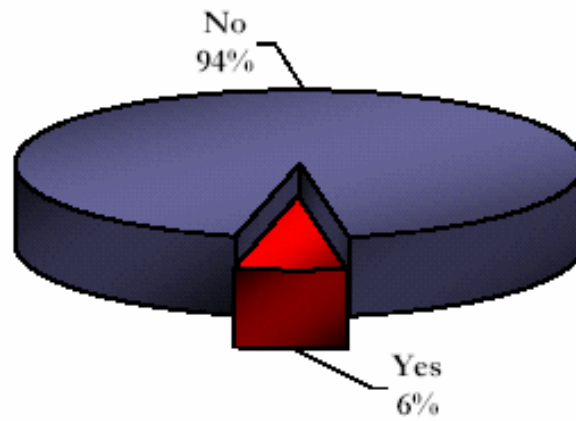
Have you ever voted in local elections?



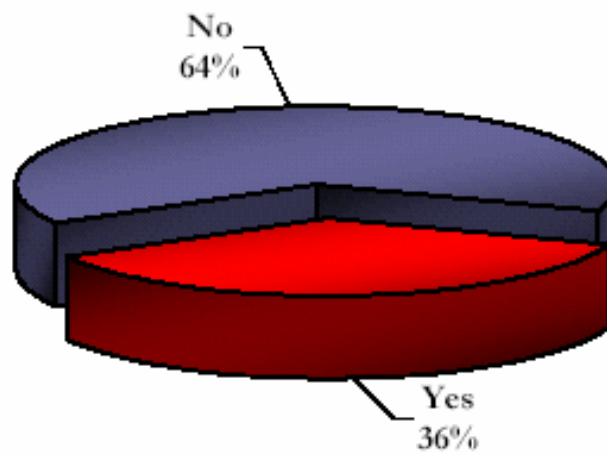
Are you a member of a political party?



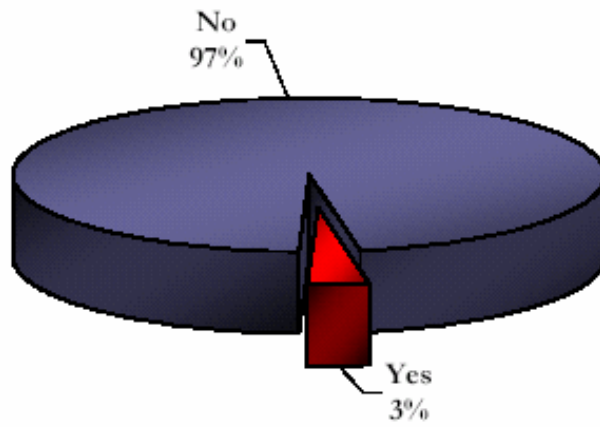
Are you (or a close relative/friend of yours) a member of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils in your town?



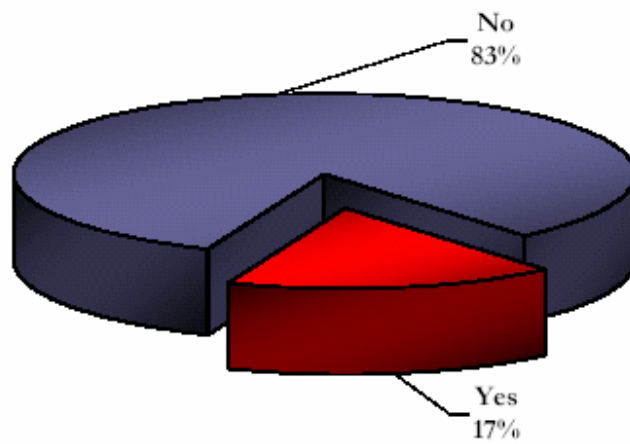
Are you a member of a neighborhood association?



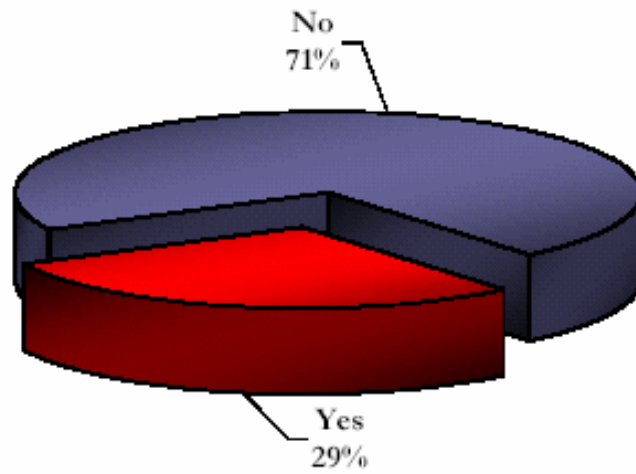
Have you ever signed a petition to the national authorities?



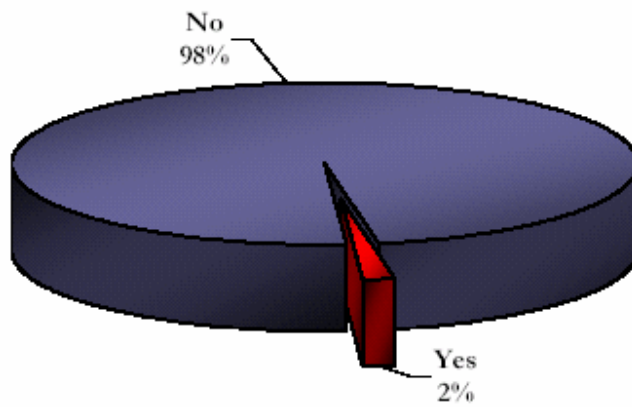
Have you ever participated in a public manifestation?



Have you ever participated in a strike?

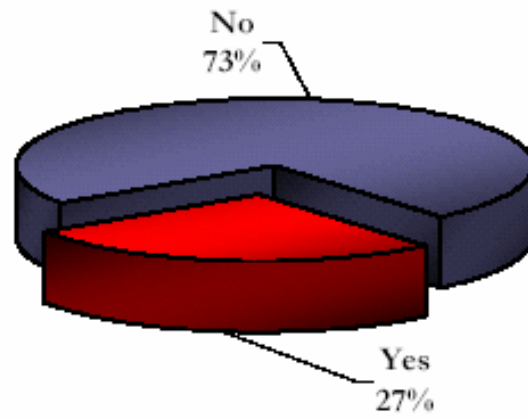


Are you a member of an NGO?

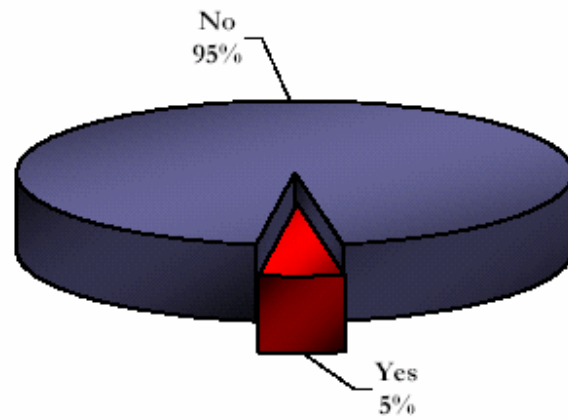




Have you ever heard of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils in your town?

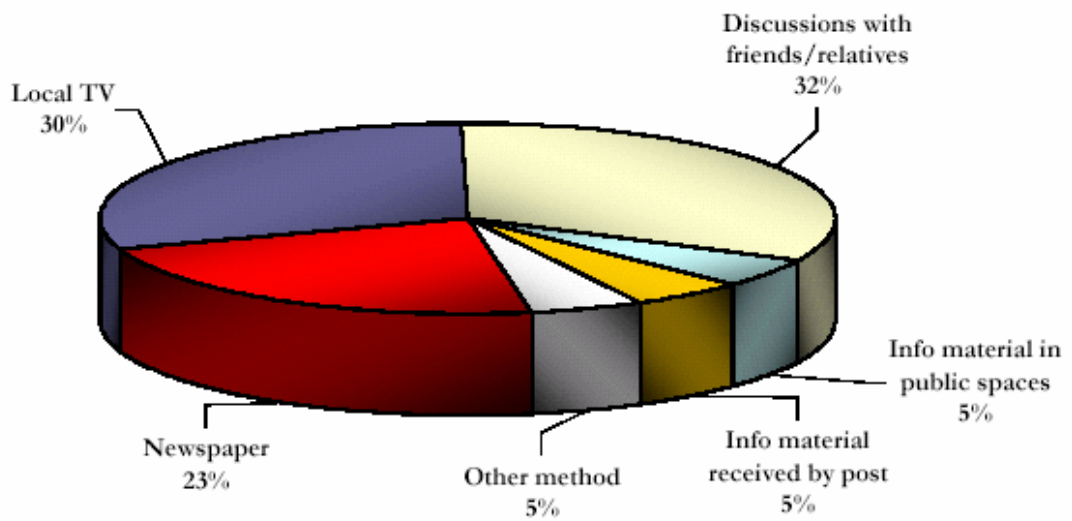


Are you a member of a professional/sports/cultural association?

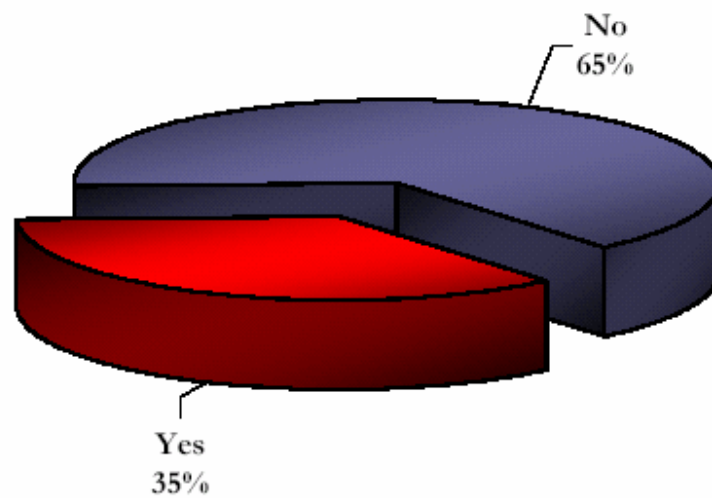


Annex 4. NCC Questions 13 – 22

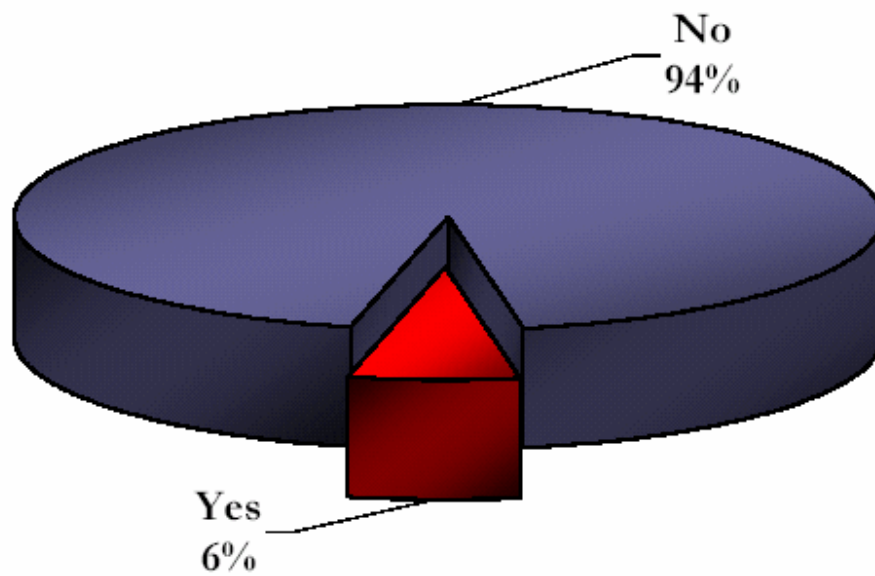
Where from have you first heard of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils in your town?



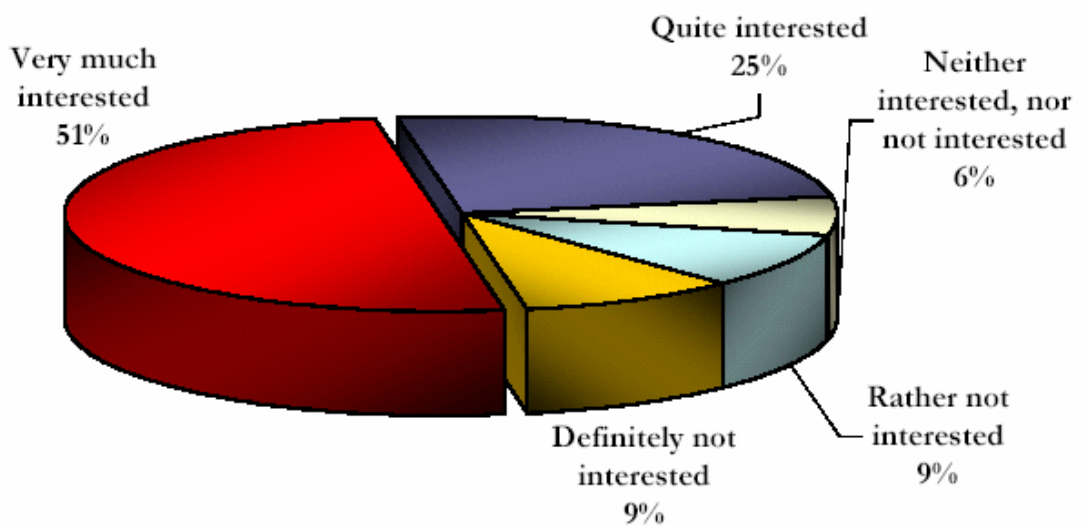
Have you tried to get more information after finding out about the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



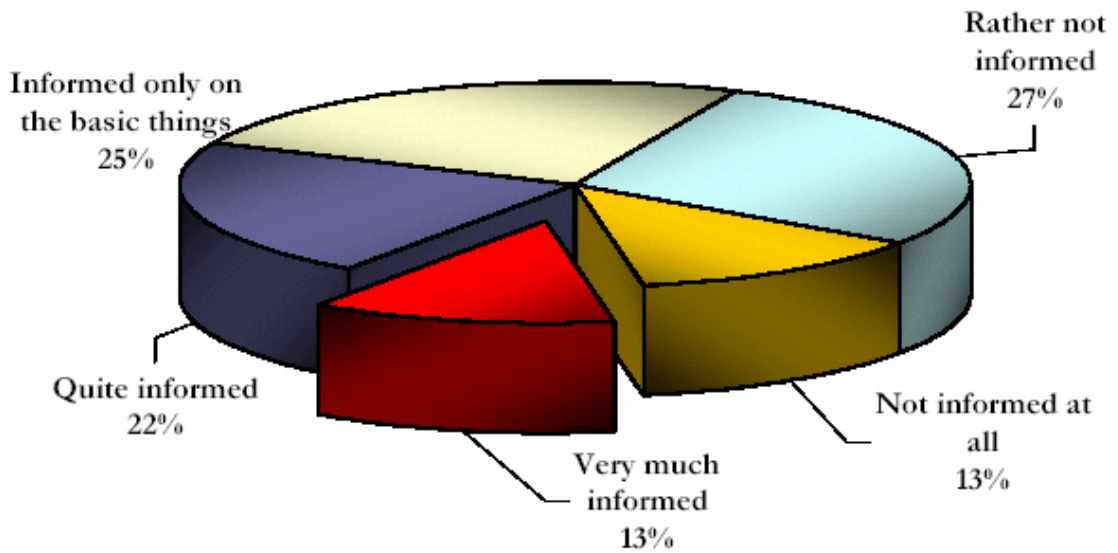
Have you tried to contact the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



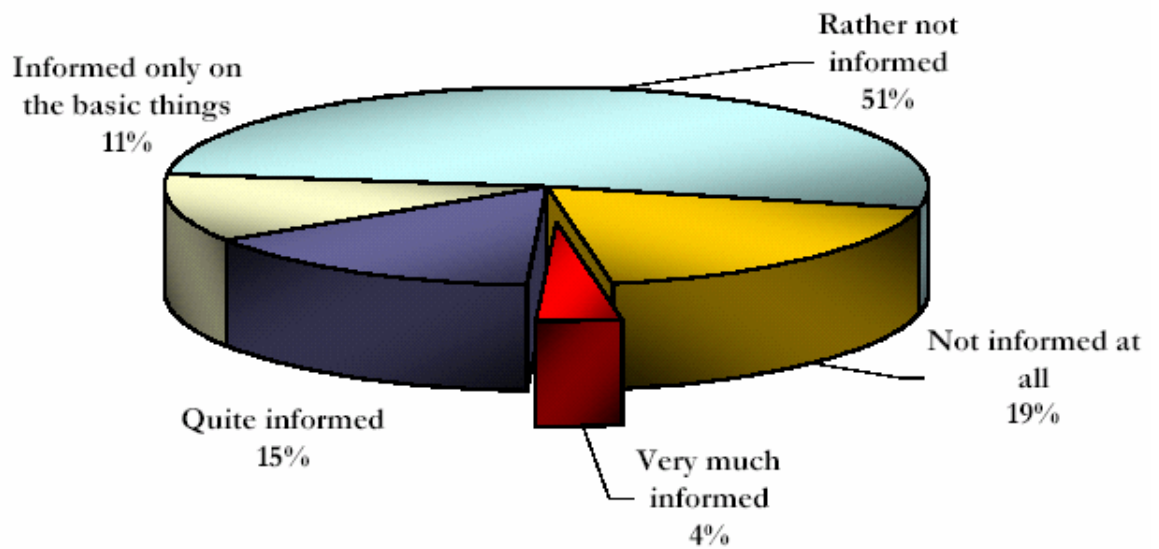
Informed persons - How interested are you in participating in a meeting of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



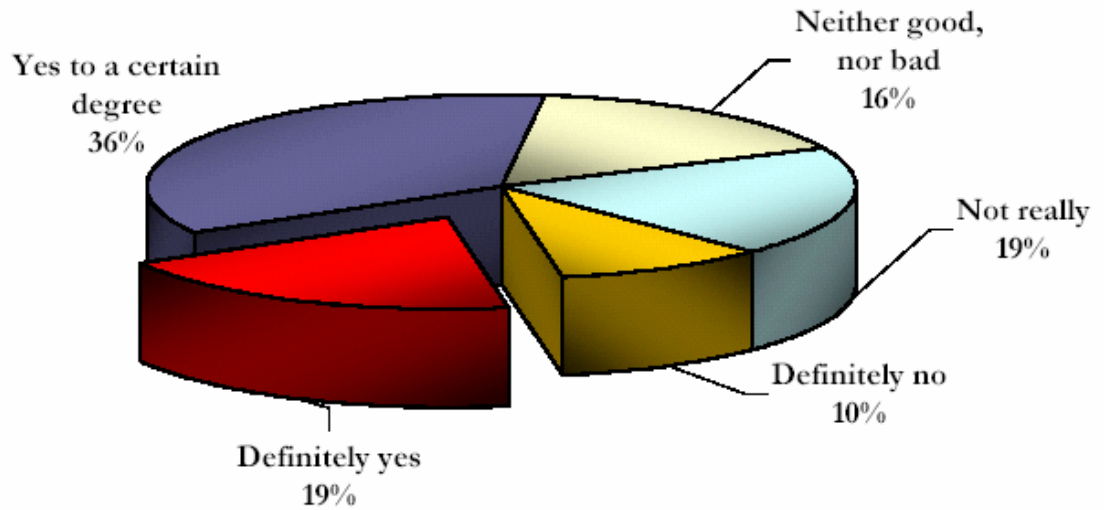
Informed persons - How well informed are you about the activity of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



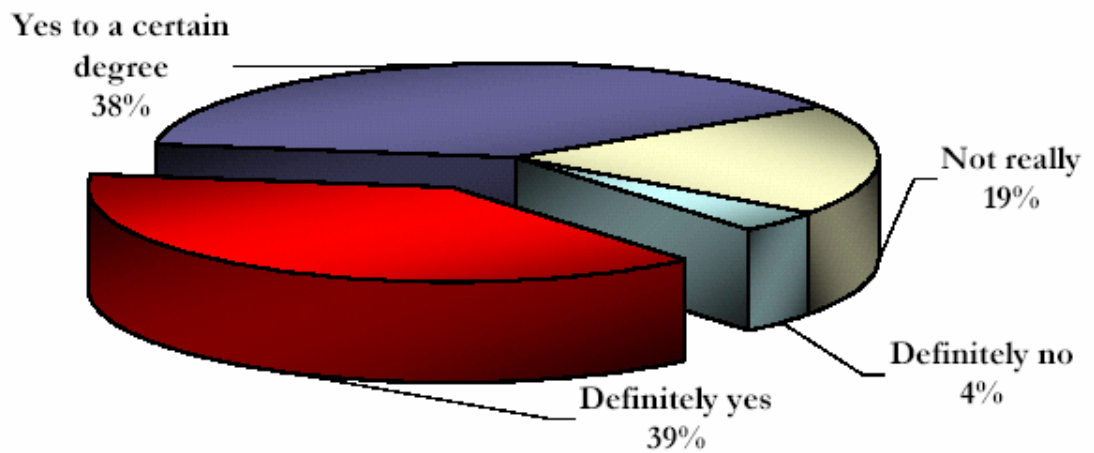
Informed persons - How well informed are you on the way the Neighborhood Consultative Councils are organized?



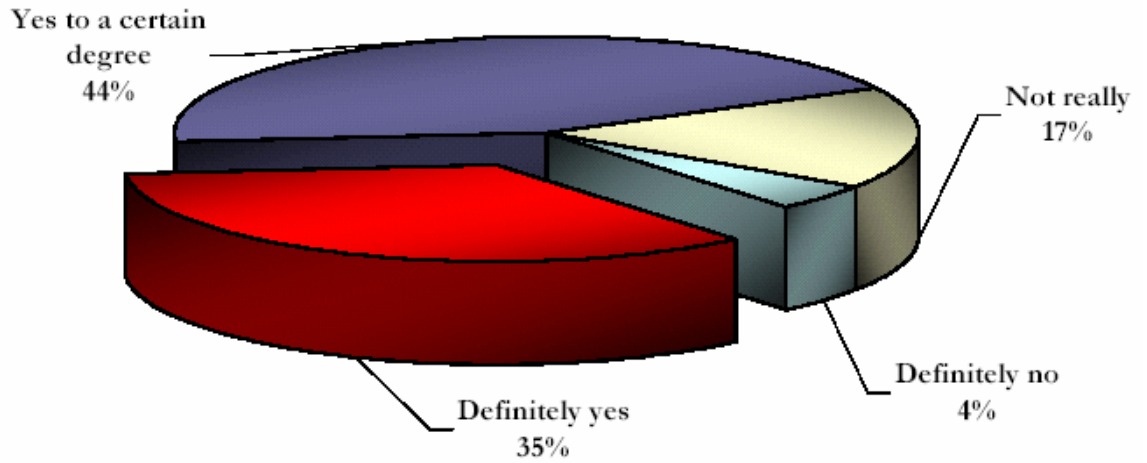
Informed persons - Do you think that the Neighborhood Consultative Councils have done good things for your community?



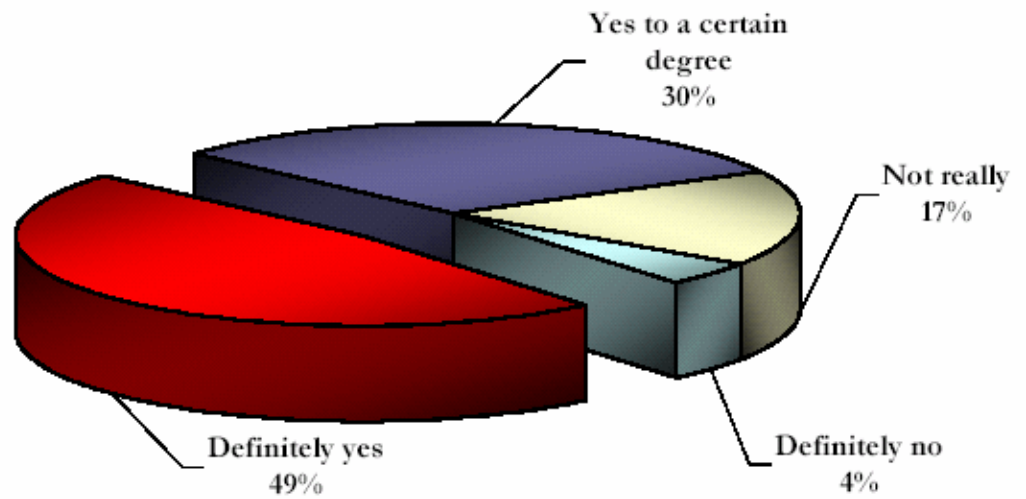
Informed persons - Do you think anybody can become a member of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



Informed persons - Do you think the Neighborhood Consultative Councils represent your interested to the Local Council?

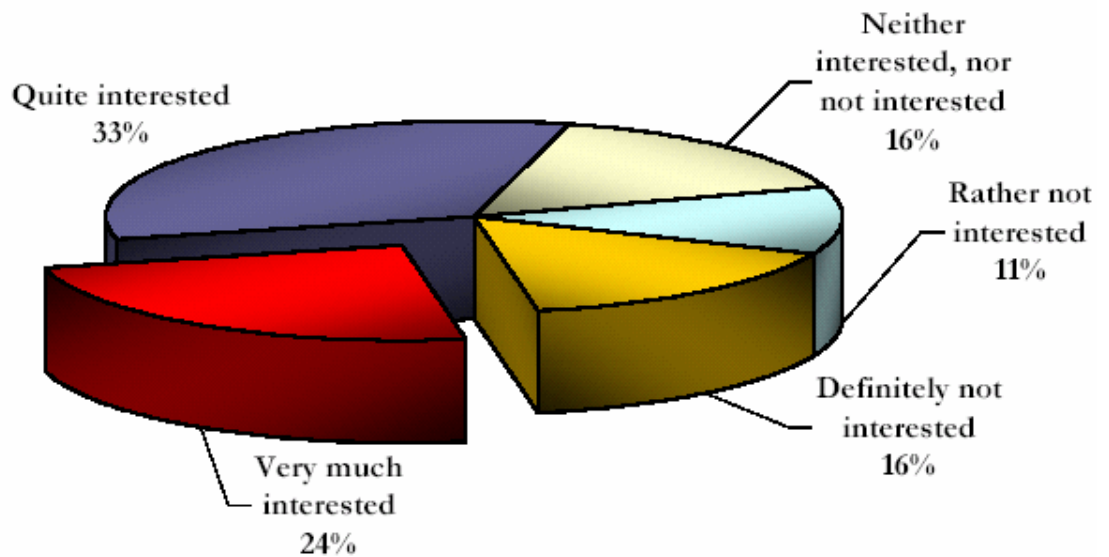


Informed persons - Do you think that the Neighborhood Consultative Councils correct?

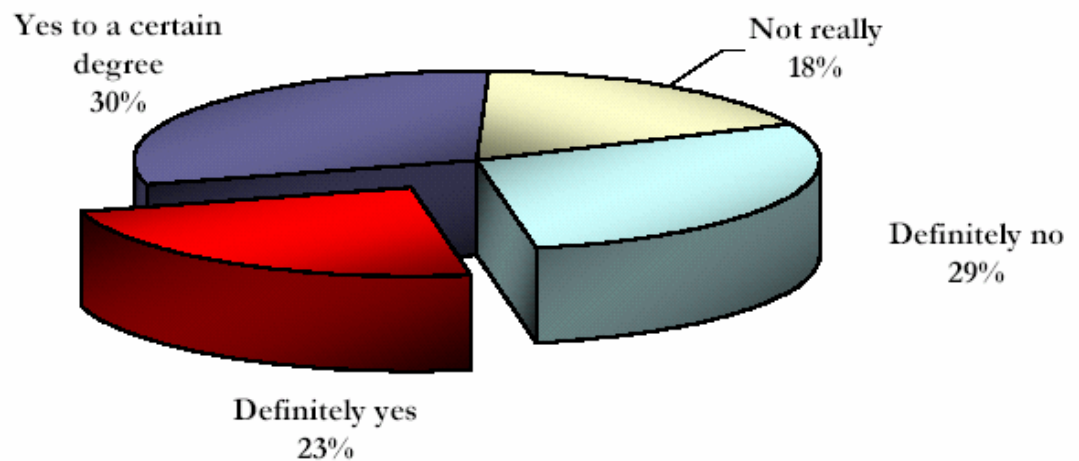


Annex 5. Questions 23 – 31

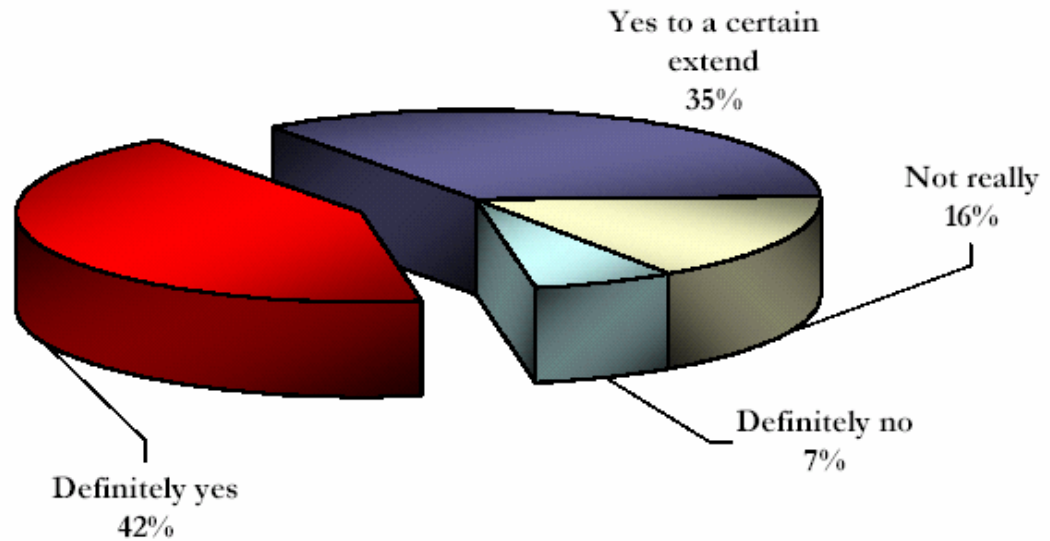
Not informed persons - How interested are you in participating in a meeting of the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?



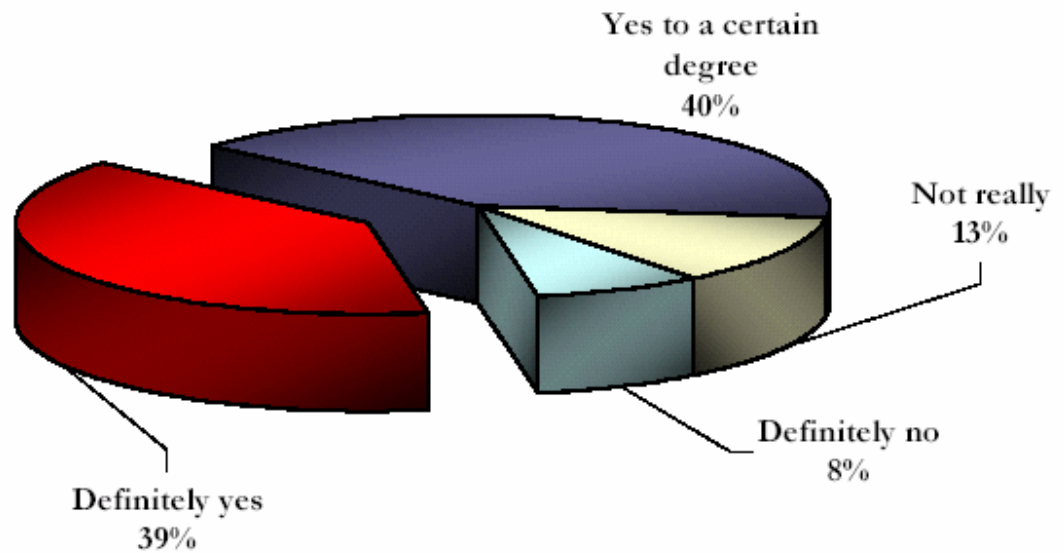
Not informed persons - Do you think that the Neighborhood Consultative Councils are likely to represent your interested to the Local Council?



Not informed persons - Would you like to find out more about the Neighborhood Consultative Councils?

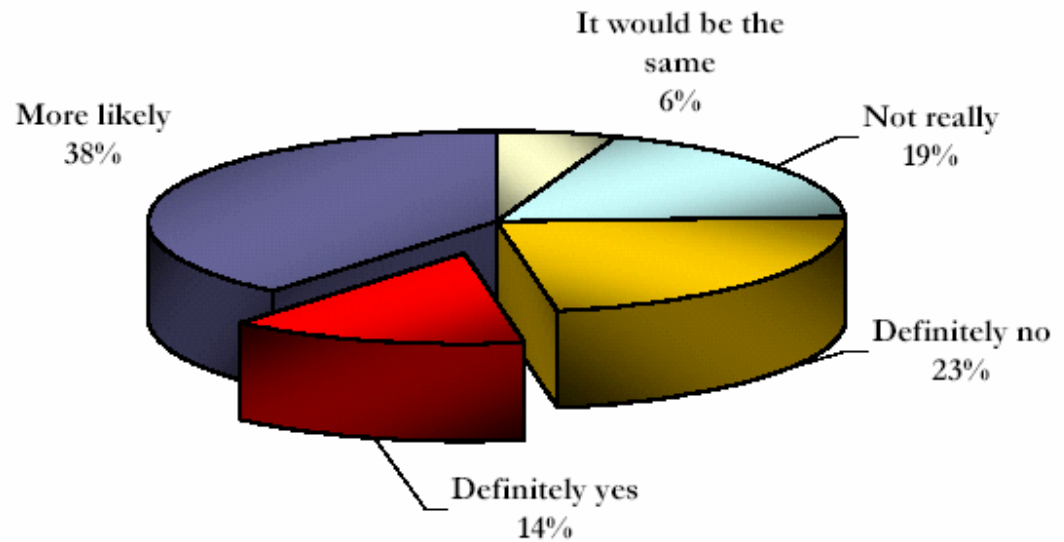


Not informed persons - Do you the Neighborhood Consultative Councils correct?

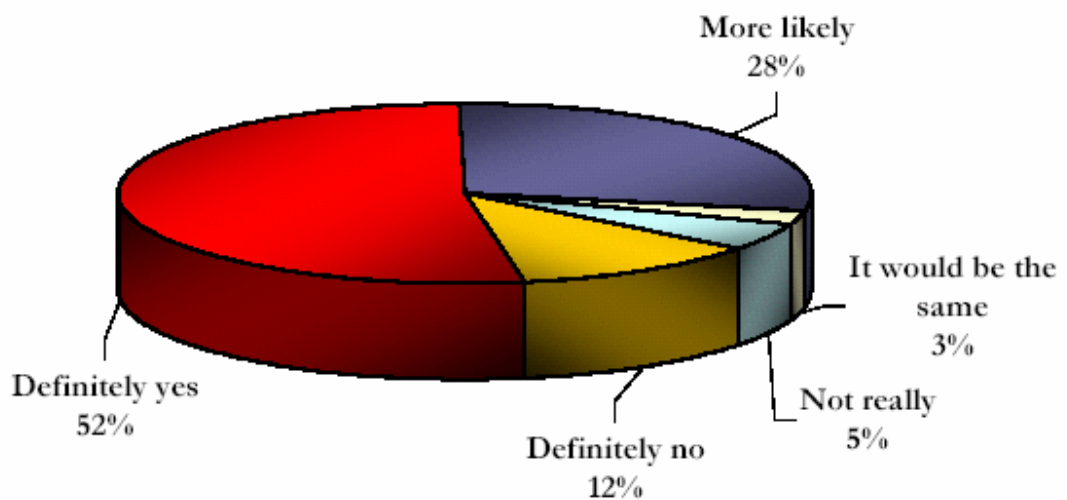




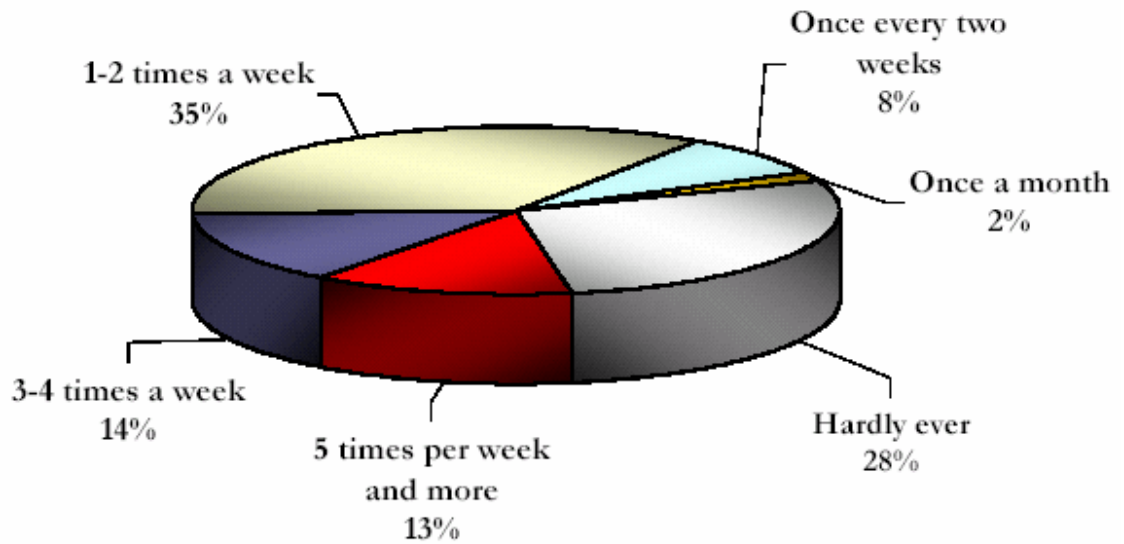
Do you think that if you were a member of the Local Council it would do more good things for your community?



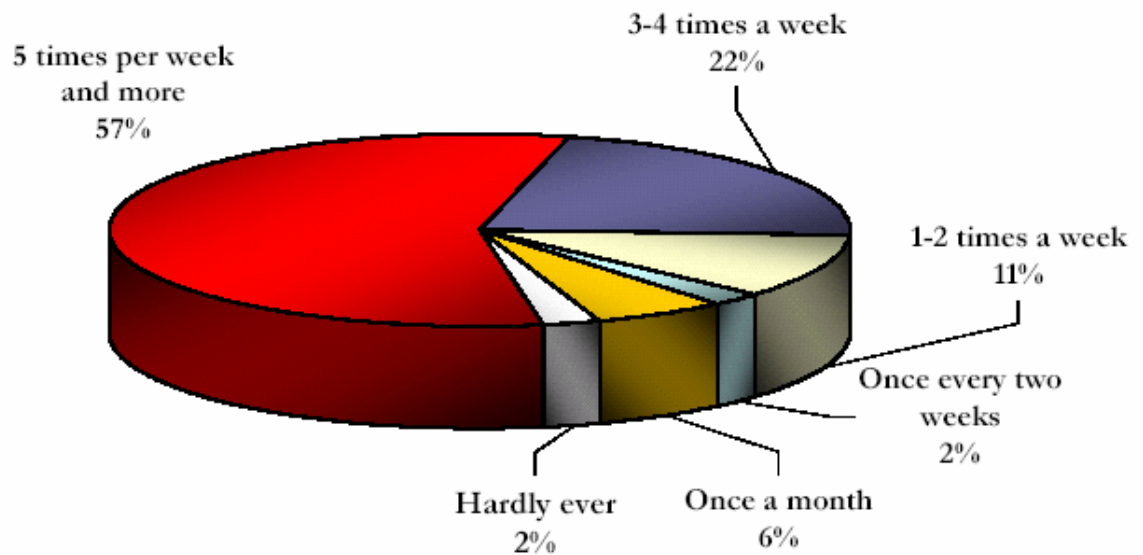
Do you think it would help if the Local Council would ask for your opinion in matters regarding your community?



How often do you read the local news in the newspaper?



How often do you watch the local news on TV?



How often do you listened to the local news on the radio?

