

Ways to involve citizens in the decision making process. The case or rural communities of the North Western Region from Romania.

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Abstract: After the fall of the communist system in 1989, Romania faced a lot of modernization efforts in order to implement the democratic principles of the new political regime. These new efforts regarding public administration and the transition to democracy have increased the discrepancies not only between the institutions at the central, regional or local level, but also between urban and rural areas, the latter being marginalized in terms of modernization, development and uniform law enforcement.

We want to identify how citizens are involved in the decision making process and how local authorities communicate with citizens, going beyond the binding legal framework (Law 52/2003 on transparency in decision-making and Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest) by using the administrative and financial dimension of local autonomy. One example can be participatory budgeting. Focusing on participatory budgeting, we can see that there are initiatives in urban areas, but in rural areas there is no information.

In this paper we want to establish the interest of local authorities in identifying the needs of citizens in the context of decision-making, and different ways of citizens involvement.

We start from the premise that participatory budgeting in Romania is deficient and that there is a huge discrepancy between urban and rural areas. At the urban level, in 2022 only 13 county seats have implemented participatory budgeting programs, although 25 counties (out of 41) have participatory budgeting programs adopted by resolutions of local councils (Active citizen fund, 2022, p.1).

Methodology: We noticed the lack of a data base with communities which sustains participatory budgeting at lower levels such as city, town or commune levels, which is why we want to identify at the rural level (the lowest level in Romania regarding the administrative organization of the country) the communes in which participatory budgeting is developed. We choose for our analysis the North-Vest Region of Romania (focusing only at the rural area which is formed by 403 communes) and we want to analyze their web sites in order to see if participatory budgeting is present. We assume that this process can exist at the level of communes without being posted on the official web site. Also, we would like to apply interviews to public administration representatives and citizens in communities where participatory budgeting is happening, but also in developed communities which does not implement it.

In the end we would like to identify best practice cases and promote them to other local administrative institution as an example.