

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL ACTIONS

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Abstract

The article explores the topic of community participation as means not only for an efficient use of resources, but also as an instrument for increasing social solidarity, especially among citizens of rural communities, deprived of access to services that usually the inhabitants of urban communities take for "granted". In an era of decentralization, where the delivery of services (especially social services) is based on the subsidiarity principle, community members have to rely more on themselves and their neighbors, than on the help from the state.

The paper also presents the results of a study developed in two rural communities from Timiș County, Romania. The study approaches the connection between community participation and involvement in social actions under three dimensions of the community: the remoteness of the village from a major city, the extent of the first level of community participation, and the level of social involvement. The findings about the relationship between community participation and involvement in social actions show another type of connection than the initial hypothesis. Some possible explanations about these findings are presented in this article.

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1. Introduction

The changes brought by the 21st century are so many and so dramatic, that often it seems that, by the time we have managed to process the information, this has already changed. The situation gets even more complicated for the public institutions – wide and complex bureaucratic organisms – that seem to be “frozen into project, reacting slowly and often with a lack of focus” (Buzducea, 2010, p. 38), overwhelmed by the rapid developments of the society, that they should be adapting to. The treatment for this “inertia” of the public system could be the innovative programs developed and sustained by the community or by public-private partnerships (Buzducea, 2010, p. 38).

For the first half of the 20th century, citizens relied on public officials and administrators to make decisions regarding public policies and their implementation. The last part of the 20th century saw a shift toward greater direct citizens’ involvement. This trend is expected to grow as democratic societies become more decentralized, interdependent, networked, linked by new information technologies, and challenged by important problems that they have to seek answers to. Citizen participation in the decisions that affect their lives is believed to be an imperative of contemporary society (Roberts, 2004).

Some authors (Marinetto, 2003; Rowe and Frewer, 2000) consider that central government can play a key role in shaping community involvement, through policies influenced by contrasting ideological conceptions of citizenship and political expediency, as long as they use methods and processes that meet evaluation criteria that are essential for effective public participation: acceptance criteria, which concern features of a method making it acceptable to the wider public, and process criteria, which concern features liable to ensure that it happens in an effective manner.

We also consider that increasing community participation among members of rural communities would be an important step towards increasing their efficiency in finding solutions not only to their individual problems, but also to the problems that regard the community as a whole. In this process, the main focus is on the local public authorities, who are not only the representatives of the state authorities, but also the advocates of their community, and thus have an important role to play in teaching community members how to participate and take initiative in community projects.

The first part of the article is dedicated to exploring the different theoretical approaches regarding community participation (motivations, aims and objectives), while the second part of the article presents the findings of a study focused on exploring the connection between community participation and involvement in social actions, in two rural communities from Timiș County, Romania.

2. Community participation – theoretical approaches

Traditionally, international organizations (namely the World Bank) have proposed an approach for community participation as “means for ensuring that Third World development projects reach the poorest in the most efficient and cost-effective way, sharing costs as well as benefits, through the promotion of self-help” (Mayo and Craig, 2004, p. 2). Since the 1970s, the World Bank’s policies have focused on equity

and access to services for the poor, and community participation as the sharing of benefits by the poor.

Rydin and Pennington (2000, pp. 154-155) underline two distinct approaches to community participation: one focused on the democratic right to be involved in the public policy process, meaning that all barriers to such involvement have to be reduced or withdrawn, and another focused on the effectiveness of policy delivery, meaning that public participation can assist in producing a 'better' policy outcome. The first approach emphasize on enabling citizens' access to the policy process, encouraging the take-up of that access and ensuring that such participation makes a difference for the policy outcomes. A policy which has involved a wider range of parties is assumed to operate with a greater level of consent and this is, by definition, more desirable. Thus, the policy process is seen as a "locus" for creating and developing values and preferences on policy options, and public participation is an instrument for bringing the pattern of values and preferences represented within the policy process closer to that existing within the wider society as a whole, since this is the place where the individuals learn the first elements that will represent the patterns exercised for ensuring his/her later existence and social participation (Batâr, 2004, p. 106). The second approach tends to see policy formulation and implementation as being integrally related, so that it is not right to limit the discussion of public participation to the reflection of societal values in policy statements, but there is need for a further action to be addressed: the action of "putting these statements into practice" (Rydin and Pennington, 2000, p. 155). To be effective, participation must be direct and give ultimate control to local communities so that they can decide by themselves their own affairs (Midgley *et al.*, 1986, p. 9)

Most economists or sociologists, interested in rural development processes, prefer to examine the narrower significance of concepts such as "social capital" or "collective efficacy", rather than the concept of "community capacity". Bowles and Gintis (2002, pp. 419-436) state that "social capital generally refers to trust, to the concern for one's associates, and to the willingness to live by the norms of one community and to punish those who don't".

The different perspectives on community participation reflect the discontinuities in the objectives for which the importance of participation has been promoted by different groups: thus, while some have used the concept of community participation in order to describe active participation in political decision making, others intend more than that, saying that participation has no meaning unless the people involved have significant control over the decisions concerning the organization to which they belong (Paul, 1987, p. 2). Furthermore, they argue that the increasing centralization of the state in some societies has reduced the capacity of regular people to influence decisions and contribute meaningfully to social development, making them become not only politically passive, but increasingly dependent on state welfare (Midgley *et al.*, 1986, p. 9). Although, another author's perspective (Preda, 2002, p. 62) highlights

that decrease in community participation and in assuming the citizens' duties is a direct effect of decentralization, in a post-communist country (Romania).

Often, the concept is understood in close relation with the warmth of the social solidarity, being seen as "a strategy that provides people with the sense that they can solve their problems through careful reflection and collective action" (David, Zakus and Lysak, 1998, p. 2), having thus the power to "humanize" the bureaucracy (Midgley *et al.*, 1986, p. 8), due to the process of strengthening the capacities of individuals and communities to mobilize and help themselves.

Economists approached the subject in terms of the equitable sharing of the benefits of projects, concentrating on human and physical capital involved in community participation as inputs for the production of goods and services (Durlauf and Fafchamps, 2006; Castle, 2002). At the same time, other authors regard participation as an "end in itself" (Paul, 1987, p. 2), while others see it as a means to achieve other goals and to intervene in the interest of the common good (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls, 1997).

One official stand of the World Bank (Paul, 1987, p. 2) defines community participation as "an active process by which beneficiary/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 or other values they cherish".

In this perspective, the objectives of community participation relate to: 1. empowerment, 2. building beneficiary capacity, 3. increasing project effectiveness, 4. improving project efficiency, and 5. project cost sharing (Paul, 1987).

3. Community empowerment

The discourse of community development, directly linked to community participation, embeds the concept of empowerment, connected to concepts of self-help, participation, networking and equity. Onyx and Benton (2004, p. 50) state that "empowerment is the taking on of power, at both the individual and social levels".

The perspective on community empowerment is thus influenced by the perspective on power that consists of two main approaches (Mayo and Craig, 2004, p. 5):

1. Functionalist sociologists (such as Parsons) consider the power in society as a variable sum; according to this view, the total amount of power in society is variable, so that power belongs to society as a system, and power can increase/decrease in society as a whole, as that society pursues collective goals. This perspective considers that the "empowerment" of those who lack power has any direct effect on the society's pre-existent order, and does not bring negative effects for the powerful.

2. Alternatively, if power is considered in zero-sum terms, the discussion about "empowerment" can be more problematic. If there is a defined and fix amount of power in society, then increasing power for one group implies, automatically, decreasing the power held by other group.

The broad concept of community empowerment requires a set of multidimensional measures. A commonly used definition of community empowerment is proposed by

Robert Chaskin (2001), who presents the concept as “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital that exist within a given community which, through coordinated actions, can solve collective problems and improve or maintain community welfare”.

Communities can sometimes do what governmental institutions or even markets fail to do (Bowles and Gintis, 2002), because their members have crucial information about other members’ behaviors, capacities and needs, information that is often hard to access by someone from outside the community.

In an article exploring the topic of community governance, Bowles and Gintis (2002) attempt to demonstrate that community governance addresses some common market and state failures, but it is basically funded on insider-outsider distinctions that may be “morally repugnant”. They also affirm that the individual motivations in supporting peer monitoring and other aspects of community governance are not captured by either the conventional self-interested preferences of *Homo oeconomicus* or by unconditional altruism towards one’s fellow community members. According to their perspective, well-designed institutions make communities, markets and states complements, not substitutes, as opposed to poorly designed institutions, markets and states, which can crowd out community governance, and even sometimes, through the media channels, send distorted messages to the population, in a pursue for “advantages for some in the short-term”, scarifying “intergenerational social justice and the long-term effectiveness of any government” (Preda and Grigoraş, 2011, p. 246).

In the process of exercising community participation, Paul (1987, pp. 4-5) distinguishes between four levels of intensity in community participation, examining them from the simplest to the most complex:

1. Information sharing. Program designers and implementers (including public authorities) share information with the members of the community, in order to enable their collective or individual action. This is the level of the lowest intensity, but it brings a positive impact upon the program outcomes, because it facilitates a better understanding of the own tasks, by the community members. The author highlights the fact that in certain types of programs (such as family planning or nutrition programs) information sharing may in fact be critical for the successful implementation of the program.

2. Consultation. This level involves an increase in the intensity of the community participation. During this step, the beneficiaries of the programs (members of the community) are not only informed, but consulted on key aspects regarding the program, so the implementers are offered the opportunity to receive an efficient short-time feedback, that can be used to further improve the design or methodology of the program and adapt it to local necessities, thus contributing to the substantial decrease of program risks.

3. Decision making. An even higher level of intensity involves a decision making role hold by community members in matters related to program design and implementation.

The decisions may be taken only by beneficiaries or in collaboration with other parties on specific issues or aspects relating to a program.

4. Initiating action. The highest level of intensity that community participation can reach is the phase during which community members take the initiative in terms of actions/initiative regarding a certain program. Initiative expresses a proactive capacity and the confidence to get going on one's own. This step is different from a qualitative perspective of the capacity to act or decide on issues or tasks proposed or assigned by someone else.

Community empowerment or capacity strengthening is necessary mainly in disadvantaged areas, isolated villages falling within this category. Most studies regarding community capacity strengthening were developed in urban areas, whilst community participation has been seen as central to cost-effective strategies for regeneration in urban, industrialized contexts (Mayo and Craig, 2004, p. 2). Although these studies enlighten regarding the issue itself, still, there are distinct characteristics and dynamics of rural communities that involve unique challenges in assessing and building the capacity of these communities.

Moreover, even if a commonly shared opinion is that community participation is an expression of the democratic principles in public administration, there are still some voices that assert a more subtle reality: in post-communist countries (such as Romania), with a long history of authoritarian regime, the citizens tend to display a certain resilience in assuming their political and social duties, this pattern being re-enforced by the current economic decline and the decrease of the resources the government uses for social welfare programs (Preda, 2002, p. 62).

4. The research

As part of a larger research study implemented between August 2009 and May 2010 in Timiș County (which is located in the Western part of Romania) in two rural communities, a sociological survey based on questionnaires was conducted on a total number of 400 adult citizens, residents of the two communities selected. Community sampling distribution was made by random sampling, stratified, probabilistic, multistage and proportional to the areas investigated, taking into consideration the following socio-demographic indicators: residence, sex, age, education and nationality.

This part of the study was developed based on the following approaches: the four levels of intensity of community participation presented by Paul (1987), the higher efficiency of community participation in urban, industrialized contexts, highlighted by Mayo and Craig (2004), and the influence of the newly acquired democratic principles over the resilience of citizens of a post-communist society, in assuming their duties, identified by Preda (2002).

The study aimed at exploring the connection between community participation and citizens' involvement in social actions, in two rural villages from Timiș County.

Based on the approaches presented above, our hypotheses were:

A. The first level of community participation (according to Paul, 1987) in rural communities increases as the community taken into study is furthest from the region's main city.

B. An increased extent of first level community participation induces an increase of citizens' involvement in local social actions.

In order to validate these two statements, the communities selected for the research were: a rural community situated at the longest distance (more than 90 km) from the region's main city, Timișoara, (hereafter C1) and a rural community situated at the shortest distance (about 7km) from the region's main city (hereafter C2).

4.1. First level of community participation and the distance from the region's main city

As presented above, one of the themes investigated was the first level of citizens' participation in community life. In order to measure the first level of community participation, we took into account two dimensions:

– The interaction between citizens and local authorities (one item: “When you have a question or a suggestion about how things work in your village, to whom you address to?”), and

– The citizens' level of knowledge about the local public authorities' activity (Q16 – “How knowledgeable do you consider yourself regarding: a) City Council activities, b) local budget allocation/execution, and c) current projects developed by the City Hall?”

The results obtained on these two dimensions are presented below, as a primary data analysis.

To the item “When you have a question or a suggestion about how things work in your village, to whom you address to?” in C1 community, a large percentage (79.17%) of citizens communicate directly with local authority representatives, most of them (75%) interacting directly with the mayor or deputy mayor of the community. A percentage of 6.25% prefer to discuss the topic with family and 5.21% with friends. A very small percentage of 2.08% of respondents say they do not discuss with anyone the doubts or proposals about the community. A small percentage, of 7.29% did not respond or did not know how to answer to this question.

For the same item, in C2 community, the following situation can be observed: a major percentage (63%) of the respondents communicate directly with the representatives of the local authorities; 16% of the respondents prefer to discuss with family or friends; 12% of respondents do not discuss with anyone their suggestions; 11% of the subjects did not respond or did not know how to answer this question.

The level of knowledge about the activities of public authorities was analyzed by drawing frequency tables for each of the three specific aspects investigated in the three items related to “How knowledgeable do you consider yourself regarding ...?”.

Thus, it can be observed that in C1 community the knowledge on the three specific aspects investigated is relatively high.

Table 1: The citizens’ level of knowledge about the activities of public authorities in C1

	City Council activities		Local budget allocation/ execution		Current projects developed by the City Hall	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very well informed	90	46.9	40	20.8	52	27.1
Well informed	42	21.9	82	42.7	48	25.0
Informed	26	13.5	36	18.8	52	27.1
Not too informed	14	7.3	14	7.3	20	10.4
Not informed	20	10.4	20	10.4	20	10.4
NA	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	192	100.0	192	100.0	192	100.0

Comparatively with C1 community, the level of knowledge of the public authorities’ activities is lower in C2 community.

Table 2: The citizens’ level of knowledge about the activities of public authorities in C2

	City Council activities		Local budget allocation/ execution		Current projects developed by the City Hall	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Very well informed	28	13.5	16	7.7	14	6.7
Well informed	36	17.3	22	10.6	22	10.6
Informed	28	13.5	22	10.6	20	9.6
Not too informed	54	26.0	40	19.2	36	17.3
Not informed	62	29.8	108	51.9	116	55.8
NA	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	208	100.0	208	100.0	208	100.0

So, at this stage, we can notice some significant differences between the two communities investigated, not only regarding the frequency of interaction between citizens and local authorities (higher with 16,17% in C1), but also regarding the level of knowledge community members have regarding the activity of local authorities: for example, only just by analyzing the percentage of people that consider themselves “very well informed” about City Council activities, we can observe a difference of 33,4% (from 46,9% in C1 to 13,5% in C2).

After the primary data analysis, a secondary analysis was made in which all the items were encoded, in order to obtain a synthetic image regarding the extent of the first level of community participation for each community.

Table 3: The extent of first level community participation in C1 and C2

C1 – First level of community participation					C2 – First level of community participation				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High	114	59.4	59.4	59.4	31	14.9	14.9	14.9
	Medium	54	28.1	28.1	87.5	105	50.5	50.5	65.4
	Low	24	12.5	12.5	100.0	72	34.6	34.6	100.0
	Total	192	100.0	100.0		208	100.0	100.0	

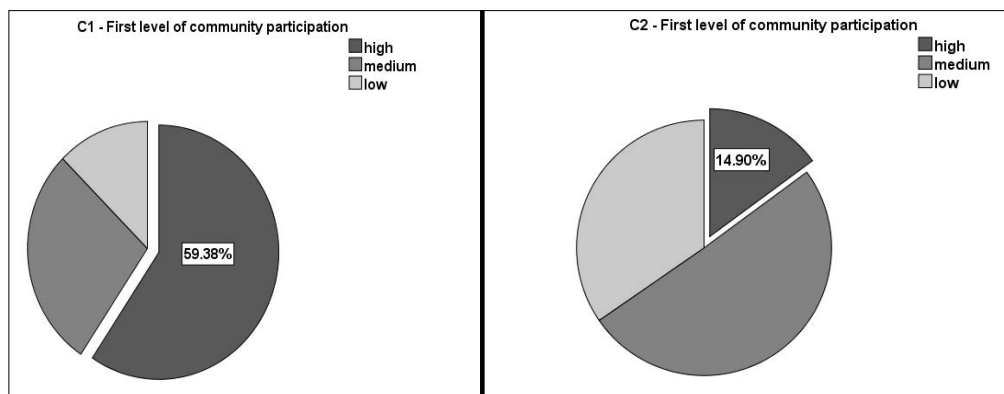


Figure 1: The extent of first level community participation in communities C1 and C2

As it can be noticed from Table 3 and Figure 1, the extent of first level community participation is much higher in C1 than in C2, with a difference of 44.48% between the percentage of citizens that hold a “High” level of community participation in C1 (59.4%) and the percentage of citizens that hold the same level of community participation in C2 (14.9%).

Summarizing the results obtained, we notice that, compared to C2 community (situated the closest to the region’s main city), C1 (the community situated furthest from the region’s main city) holds the following characteristics:

- High frequency of interaction between community members and representatives of local public authorities;
- High knowledge among citizens about each of the three items (Local Council activities, local budget allocation/execution, and current projects developed by the City Hall) relating to the activities of the public authorities; and
- An overall high level of community participation, that results from the synthesis of the two dimensions above.

Thus, we can conclude by saying that “the first level of community participation in rural communities indeed increases as the community taken into study is furthest from the region’s main city”. This would partially contradict the position evoked by Mayo and Craig (2004), according to whom the efficiency of community participation would be higher in urban, industrialized contexts. We used the expression “partially”

because the dimensions evoked by now have only measured the extent of community participation, and not the efficiency itself.

The second part of the study is dedicated to exploring the efficiency in terms of “involvement in social actions”, since, as we have seen in the first part of the article, sometimes community participation is seen as more than a mean to gain material resources – is an instrument that consolidates social solidarity.

4.2. The first level of community participation and citizens’ involvement in social actions (dedicated to supporting disadvantaged groups)

4.2.1. Citizens’ involvement in social actions

The involvement of citizens in social actions was analyzed from two main perspectives:

- Past experiences regarding involvement in social actions (one item “Have you participated in community actions dedicated to helping disadvantaged groups in the last 12 months?”); and
- Availability for such involvement in the future (four items “If your community would organize actions to support disadvantaged groups, would you get involved?” – with the possibility to express the preference for one of the following groups: poor families, elderly and/or sick people, children at risk of school drop-out and Roma people).

The results regarding past experience in social action are presented comparatively in the figure below.

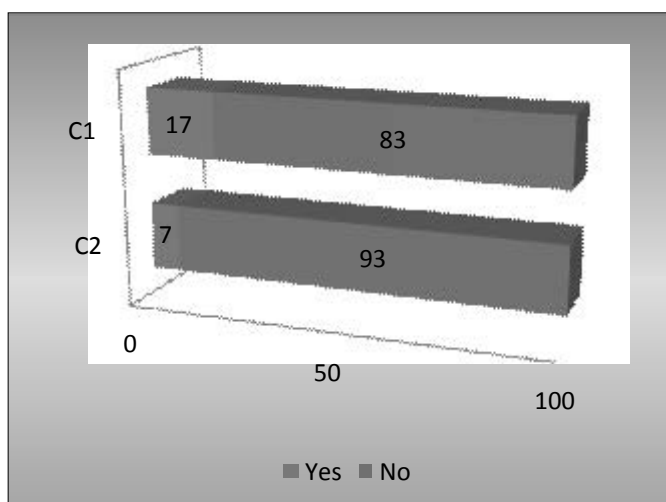


Figure 2: Participation in social actions in the last 12 months

The first aspect that one will notice after analyzing Figure 2 is the difference of 10% between C1 (17%) and C2 (7%) as regarding the percentage of community members that got involved in community actions dedicated to helping disadvantaged groups in the last 12 months.

The primary data analysis regarding the availability of the two rural community members for getting involved in social actions in the future are presented by each category of target group preferred in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Availability of C1 community members for getting involved in social actions

	In social support actions for poor families		In social support actions for the elderly and the sick		In social support actions for children in risk of school dropout		In support actions for social integration of Roma people	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Surely, I will get involved	102	53.1	88	45.8	84	43.8	84	43.8
Maybe I will get involved	44	22.9	60	31.3	60	31.3	58	30.2
I will not get involved	24	12.5	28	14.6	32	16.7	32	16.7
NA	22	11.5	16	8.3	16	8.3	18	9.4
Total	192	100.0	192	100.0	192	100.0	192	100.0

Compared to the actual involvement, presented in Figure 2, we can notice a much higher percentage of community members from C1 that say that they will “surely get involved”. Also, from the situation regarding C1 community, we can observe a slightly higher preference for helping “poor families” (53.1%), as compared to other vulnerable groups (elderly and/or sick people, children in risk of school dropout and Roma people). Also, we observe a very small percentage (between 12.5% and 16.7%) of community members that state for sure that they will “not get involved”, compared to the situation of actual involvement presented in Figure 2 (83%).

Table 5: Availability of C2 community members for getting involved in social actions

	In social support actions for poor families		In social support actions for the elderly and the sick		In social support actions for children in risk of school dropout		In support actions for social integration of Roma people	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Surely, I will get involved	98	47.1	80	38.5	80	38.5	54	26.0
Maybe I will get involved	80	38.5	94	45.2	84	40.4	76	36.5
I will not get involved	30	14.4	28	13.5	34	16.3	68	32.7
NA	0	0	6	2.9	10	4.8	10	4.8
Total	208	100.0	208	100.0	208	100.0	208	100.0

The percentages of “sure” future involvement in social actions expressed by the community members in C2 strike us also as being very high (between 47.1% and 26%), compared to the actual involvement, presented in Figure 2 (7%). Other common aspects with the situation of C1 community are the small percentage of community members that declare they will not get involved in future social actions (between 14.4% and 32.7%), and the slightly higher preference shown

by the respondents for helping poor families (47.1%), as compared to the other vulnerable groups (between 26 and 45.2%).

One particularity, which can be noticed in C2 community (the discussion does not belong to the topic of the current article, but it would be a pity for it to get unnoticed) and it is not found in C1 community, is the small percentage of community members that express their availability for helping Roma people. Not only that Roma people are the least preferred group for getting a “sure” help (26% is the smallest percentage for this category), but they are also those that get the highest “not” percentage (32.7%) from those who are not willing to participate in social actions. This preference, expressed in this particular way by the community members, could be interpreted by some as a discriminative behavior against Roma residents, but, as we said before, this debate is not part of this study, so we will not pursue it further.

A comparative situation of the two communities regarding their members’ availability for involvement in future social actions is presented in the figure below.

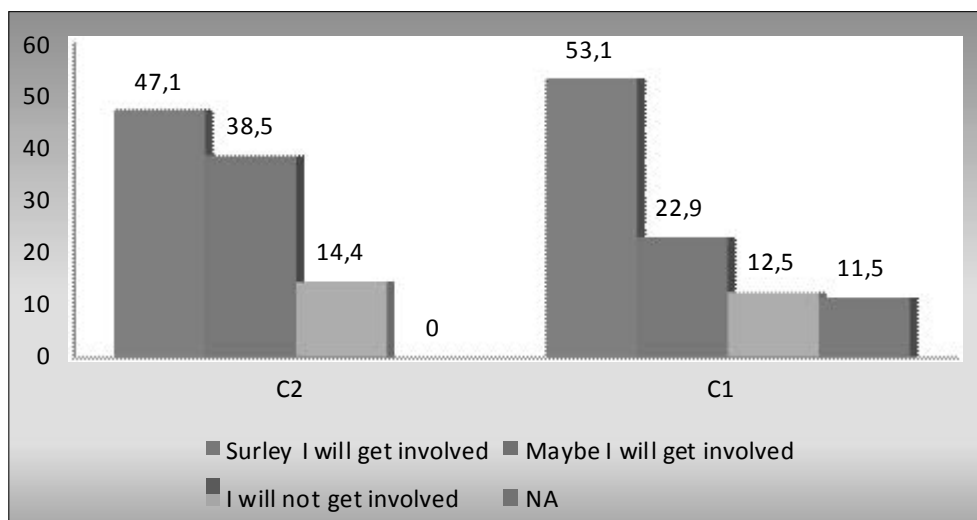


Figure 3: Community members’ availability for involvement in future social actions – C1 and C2

Leaving aside any other analysis, we have to acknowledge that both communities present a high potential of involvement in social support actions. The important matter in question would be, here, if the local public authorities are aware of this potential and, if the answer is “Yes”, what are they doing to exploit it in the interest of the community, as a whole?

At a secondary data analysis, we have tried to get an image about citizens’ involvement in social actions, based on the data collected about their past experiences and their availability for such actions in the future. The results obtained are presented in Table 6 and Figure 4.

Table 6: Level of involvement in social actions in C1 and C2

C1- Level of involvement in social actions					C2- Level of involvement in social actions				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High	24	12.5	12.5	12.5	10	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Medium	75	39.1	39.1	51.6	82	39.4	39.4	44.2
	Low	93	48.4	48.4	100.0	116	55.8	55.8	100.0
	Total	192	100.0	100.0		208	100.0	100.0	

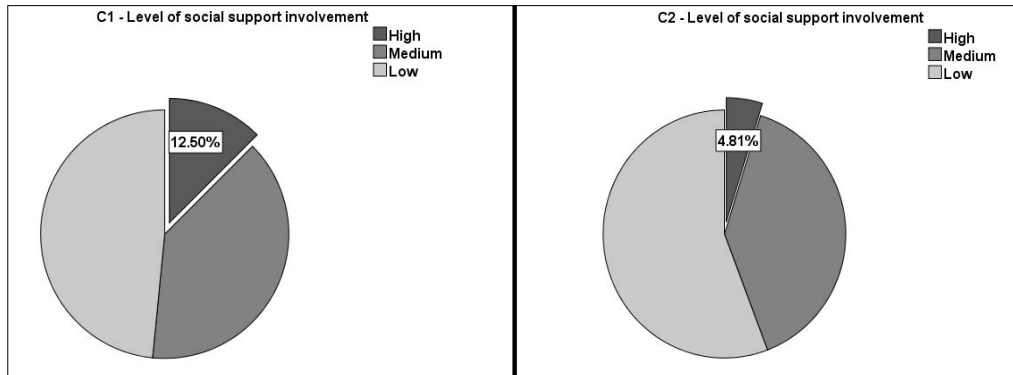


Figure 4: A synthesized image regarding citizens’ involvement in social actions, based on their past experiences and their availability in the future – communities C1 and C2

Thus, comparing the results for the two communities, we can observe in C1 an increased percentage of citizens presenting a high level of involvement in social actions (12.5% compared with 4.81% in C2). Based on these results we assume that the distance from the region’s main city could have an influence on people’s behavior towards each other, a longer distance involving an increase in citizens’ involvement in social actions.

4.2.2. The connections between the extent of first level community participation and citizens’ involvement in local social actions

In order to validate the second hypothesis (stating that “An increased extent of first level community participation induces an increase of citizens’ involvement in local social actions”) a correlation was conducted between the results of the secondary analysis regarding the extent of first level community participation and the results of the secondary analysis regarding the citizens’ (past and future) involvement in social actions developed at local level.

It can be observed that in the case of C1 community the relationship between participation and engaging in social actions is relative, the distribution offering a non-conclusive direction.

Table 7: C1 – The extent of first level community participation *
C1 – Level of involvement in social support actions Crosstabulation

		C1 – Level of involvement in social support actions			Total
		High	Medium	Low	
C1 - First level community participation	High	13	53	48	114
	Medium	9	18	27	54
	Low	2	4	18	24
Total		24	75	93	192

Thus, only 11.40% of the subjects that present a high extent of first level community participation have also a high level of involvement in social actions; 46.49% of them having a medium level of involvement in social actions; while 42.10% scored a low level of involvement in social support actions.

From the entire group of respondents that scored a medium extent of first level community participation, 16.66% have a high level of involvement in social support actions; 33.33% have a medium level of involvement in social support actions; and 50% presented a low level of involvement in social support actions.

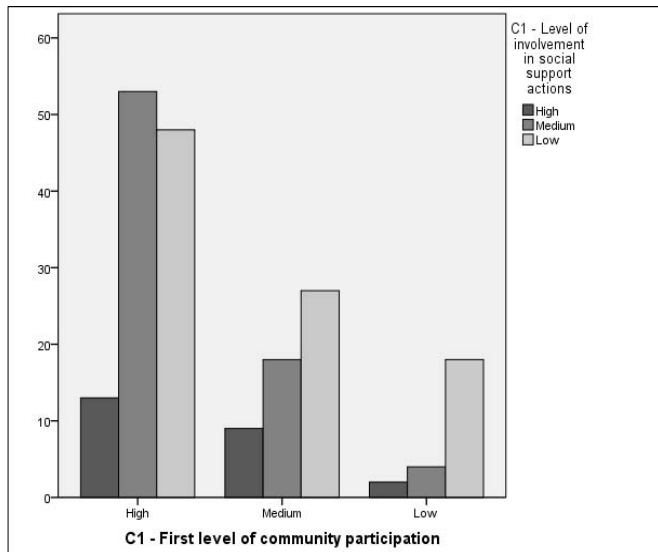


Figure 5: C1 – The extent of first level community participation *
C1 – Level of involvement in social support actions Crosstabulation

Of all respondents that presented a low extent of first level community participation 8.33% registered a high level of involvement in social actions, 16.66% scored a medium level of involvement in social actions, and 75% had a low level of involvement in social support actions.

At this point, in the case of C1 community it would be more accurate to state that: “A decreased extent of first level community participation induces a decrease of

citizens' involvement in local social actions" (the χ^2 test of significance for nominal variables – see table below –, shows that the differences observed are supported and are not random: $\chi^2 = 10.806$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.03$).

Table 8: Chi-Square Tests (C1)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.806 ^a	4	.029
Likelihood Ratio	11.105	4	.025
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.850	1	.050
N of Valid Cases	192		
a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.			

Table 9: Symmetric Measures – C1

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.142	.070	1.977	.049 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.146	.072	2.037	.043 ^c
N of Valid Cases		192			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					
c. Based on normal approximation.					

The same as in C1 community, in the case of C2 community the relationship between participation and engaging in social actions is also relative, the distribution offering non-conclusive direction.

As noticed from Table 10, from the total number of subjects that presented a high extent of first level community participation, only 6.45% present also a high level of involvement in social actions, 61.29% of them present a medium level of involvement in social actions, and the rest of 32.26% show low level of involvement in social support actions.

Table 10: C2 – The extent of first level of community participation *
C2 – Level of involvement in social actions Crosstabulation

		C2 – Level of involvement in social support actions			Total
		High	Medium	Low	
C2 - First level of community participation	High	2	19	10	31
	Medium	4	45	56	105
	Low	4	18	50	72
Total		10	82	116	208

Regarding the subjects that presented a medium extent of first level community participation we also can observe that 3.81% score a high level of involvement in social support actions, 42.85% a medium level of involvement in social actions, and the majority of 53.34% of the subjects that have a medium level of participation have low level of involvement in social actions.

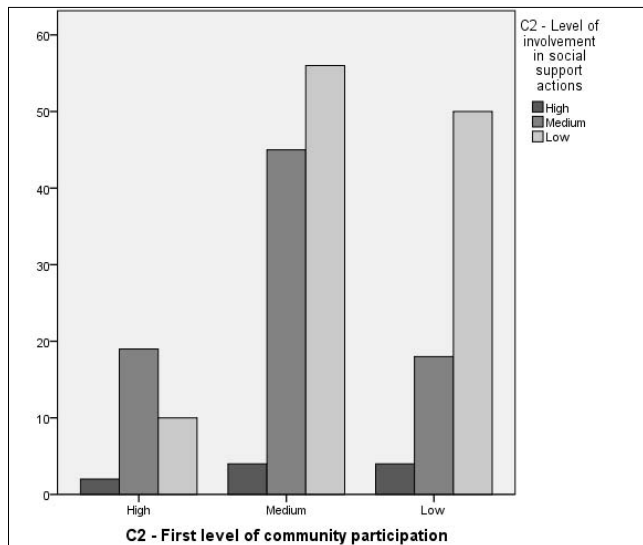


Figure 6: C2 – The extent of first level community participation *
C2 – Level of involvement in social support actions Crosstabulation

As about the subjects that presented a low extent of first level community participation the results show that 5.5% of the subjects present a high level of involvement in social actions, 25% of them have a medium level of involvement in social actions, and the majority of them (69.44%) present a low level of involvement in social actions.

Again, we observe that the results validate a reversed reality than the initial prognosis, meaning: “A decreased extent of first level community participation induces a decrease of citizens’ involvement in local social actions” (the χ^2 test of significance for nominal variables – see table below –, the differences observed are supported and are not random: $\chi^2=13.948$, $df =4$, $p<0.01$).

Table 11: Chi-Square Tests – C1

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.948 ^a	4	.007
Likelihood Ratio	14.339	4	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.865	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	208		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.49.

Table 12: Symmetric Measures – C2

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.207	.070	3.036	.003 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.226	.068	3.329	.001 ^c
N of Valid Cases		208			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
c. Based on normal approximation.

5. Conclusions

The economic and social problems need a counterpart for balancing community life. Community participation, even if not a new concept might be a way, surely not the final solution although, for more adapted policies and measures implemented in rural areas especially when the general lack of resources is more evident.

In the research undertaken for this article we have investigated from this perspective only the first level of participation that, according to the data gathered, was met in higher percentages in the rural communities furthest from the main city of the region. In both primary and secondary analysis undertaken, there have been noticed significant differences between the two communities investigated. It seems like in more homogeneous communities the participation tends to register greater values than in heterogeneous communities (closer to big cities).

Regarding this involvement in social support actions it seems like the distance from the region's main city has also an influence: a longer distance involves an increased availability in citizens' involvement in social actions. Also we have demonstrated that both rural communities investigated have a high potential of involvement in social support actions, although the actual involvement is low, with noticeable differences between the two communities. This raises the question expressed above also: do local public authorities know the great potential of involvement that exists in their communities? Is the discrepancy between action and availability the result of lack of initiative from the local public authorities in involving citizens in the communities' problems?

As for the relation between community participation and citizens' involvement in local social actions, even if the variables differed in the two communities investigated, the results showed a negatively oriented reality in both cases, meaning that decreased extent of first level of community participation induces a decrease of citizens' involvement in local social actions. A possible explanation for this situation could be the attitude of the community members towards the community participation: maybe they perceived it not as means for social cohesion, as we thought, but as an instrument for achieving their individual welfare, not having any connection with the group interest, but serving solely to the one using it.

Anyway, we should keep in mind, no matter the individual motivation, that community participation is indeed a strong instrument for achieving community welfare and should be promoted by the local authorities in their interaction with the citizens: "far from representing holdovers from a pre-modern era, the small scale local interactions that characterize communities are likely to increase in importance as the economic problems that community governance handles relatively well become more important". (Bowles and Gintis, 2002, pp. 419-436).

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