

The Quality of the Social Life in the Contemporary City



Sociology

KEYWORDS : life quality, urban environment, problems, public institutions

Dumitru Otovescu

Prof., PhD., University of Craiova, A.I.Cuza Street, no. 13, Craiova, Romania

ABSTRACT

This work presents a part of the results after a field research, made in July 2013 by Oltenia Social Institute of the University from Craiova, among 400 subjects from Craiova, with the purpose to find the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the city dwellers concerning their living conditions.

1. Statistic data and empirical premises

Nowadays, the village and the city are the main territorial communities in which people dwell, work and live. According to the data given by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, at the last Population and Housing Census from October 2011, the stable population from our country was of 20.121.641 people, from which 46% dwelled in the rural areas and 54% in the urban ones. Generally, the cities are characterized by a higher density of the population, as comparing to the density of the villages.

Starting from this social reality, a question is raising: why does the highest share of people choose to live in a city? In the Romanian society from the last half of the century (1960-2010) has been registered an ascendant trend of the urban population, in the prejudice of the rural one, following the villages abandonment, especially by the young generation. After 1990 and until the present moment another ample social phenomenon has been manifesting, that of Romanian migration in different countries from the world, especially on the territory of the developed ones from the European continent (details in Otovescu, A., 2000, p. 72-73; Idem, 2013, chap. I-II). Obviously, the right to free circulation in one country or another is a valuable acquisition for the Romanian citizens, which they benefit from only in the last 23 years. (see more about human rights in Fräsie, C., 2009).

In order to respond to the question above, we intended to discover the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the city dwellers with their own living conditions and the activity of the community institutions. Is this respect, we rendered valuable the results of a field research, made in July 2013 by Oltenia Social Institute of the University from Craiova, among 400 subjects from Craiova – urban settlement with certain characteristics of regional metropolis that gathers almost 300.000 dwellers, being the largest city from the entire Region of Oltenia (made of 5 counties that sums up over 2 million dwellers – 10% of the Romanian population).

2. Opinions and appreciations about the city life

The results of some previous sociological researches attest the existence of certain appreciation with ambivalent character: some evidence the advantages of the urban area (better living conditions, higher income, better medical and educational services, superior conditions of spiritual emancipation and spare time spending, cultural ambiance and a complex network of administrative institutions etc.), while other evidence certain pathological phenomena, menaces and risks of the living in the urban environment (unemployment, poverty, moral degrading, loneliness, precarious solidarity of the dwellers, high expenses, permanent growth of the prices for the basic goods, the bitter struggle for surviving, for building a career, for affirmation and professional promotion, the pollution of the natural environment, the daily stress, the high rate of criminality, the insecurity of the individual etc.).

We are going to analyze the quality of the social life in the nowadays city from Romania, in the light of certain specific indicators that allowed us to formulate specific questions and to obtain different types of answers that we are presenting below. The information was gathered through a questionnaire made to a representative sample of urban population. The used method was that of a poll.

• How do you generally appreciate your life from this moment, as compared to that from the last year?

Almost half of the interviewed people (48.1%) evaluated it “as difficult as before” and 35.1% considered that their life has become worse, having “worse” living conditions than the previous year, 2011. The high share of these negative appreciations (79.6%) is explained, first of all, through the severe regime of economic austerity, introduced by the governmental authorities, in the context of the world economic depression, whose effects in the Romanian society were translated in the general reduction of pensions and wages, mass redundancies and, implicitly, the amplification of unemployment, the lack of certain consistent investments for the creation of jobs. For 19.9% of the city dwellers, life has become “better” or “much better” in 2012, as comparing to 2011, but only 4.4% mentioned that the income obtained by their family situates them among the “wealthy people, who satisfy all their needs” (while 14.7% self-evaluated as being “poor” and the rest as belonging to the middle-class families).

The questioned people said that the improving of the living conditions in the future is dependent on several factors and proposed the next aspects: the increase of jobs (22.2%), the growth of salaries (16.7%), the change of the political class (11.7%, fact already realized in December 2012, after the parliamentary elections, at the leadership of the country being appointed a new government, supported by a political alliance that obtained 70% from the Romanian citizens’ votes), the eradication of corruption (5.3%), the rejuvenating of the educational system (5.3%), the development of industry (4.7%), the change of the collective mentalities (3.8%) etc.

• In addressing all the aspects of your life, how satisfied/unsatisfied are you by it?

There were shaped three categories of significant answers: a) “neither satisfied/nor unsatisfied – 42.9%”; b) “satisfied and very satisfied” – 34.3%; c) “unsatisfied and very unsatisfied” – 21.7%. In conclusion, the share of the positive answers characterizes more than a third of the dwellers from the city in which the poll took place. The main values or sources that supply the discontentment were: a) the fulfilment in the family life (40.8%); b) the professional success (28.8%); c) health (13.6%); d) the high income (4%); e) the children’s accomplishments (4%); f) the tight communication (and help) relations with the relatives, friends and neighbours (3.2%); g) the security of the neighbourhood (2.4%) etc. If we take into consideration the fact that any man looks for obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain, it results that it is important to also know what produces dissatisfaction to the people who live in the city. According to our own appreciations, most of the discontentment that they have is related to the reduced income (70.1%), lack of jobs (11.9%), the diseases they treat (23% of the city dwellers are confronted to permanent problems of health), the uncertain national situation and the behaviour of their own children, to stress and fatigue accumulated daily.

• In what extent are you satisfied with the activity of the local institutions?

The institutions from the urban area are specific structures of organization for the community life, with a major role played in the process of satisfying the collective needs of the citizens.

Unlike in the villages, the city concentrates a higher and more diverse number of public institutions (with economic, administrative, educational, medical, juridical, cultural etc. role). The general appreciation of the citizens regarding the institutions from the analyzed city is a positive one, but with differences of interpretation and share of the answers to the question above.

No.	Evaluation	Share
1	In small extent	52.5
2	In great extent	24.4
3	In very small extent	14.0
4	In very great extent	3.3
5	DK/DA	5.8
6	Total	100.0%

In the case of the concrete evaluations there is a high share of those who formulated positive appreciations concerning some community institutions. For example, 66.2% of them noticed the way in which The Town Hall of Craiova has been administering the city: 62.2% are satisfied with the quality of the common means of transportation; 69.5% declared themselves satisfied with the quality of the ambient environment (especially parks and green areas); 80.3% evaluated as "good" and "satisfactory" the alternatives offered by the local administration to its citizens for spending their free time.

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