

Provision of Public Services for Overall Well-being in the Municipality

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present analysis of subjective well-being regarding municipality provided public services and its impact on overall well-being using the approved methodology.

The main findings are as follow: in order to provide public services that meet the needs of the public, municipalities should involve the community in the decision-making process. Research into subjective well-being carried out in Salaspils municipality showed that well-being is directly affected by public services provided in the municipality.

Keywords: subjective well-being, municipality, citizen participation, public services.

Introduction

Municipalities play a very important role in ensuring and promoting well-being of the public as local government is charged with responsible for effective and efficient use of natural resources, provision of public services, creation of job places. Local municipalities draw up municipal land and property use and lease, infrastructure renovation and investment plans with a view to developing and improving public services.

Municipality provided public services may be defined as systems, activities that are of benefit to the local community. Many different definitions of public services depend on what goods and services are being marketed. Citizens' expectations regarding public services delivery have been rising due to technology and communication development.

People living in the municipality want to interact with the service provider using modern communication tools Seeking to meet their rising expectations municipalities have to implement a participatory policy, and measure subjective well-being and identify the level of satisfaction with provided services.

It is important for service providers to know their clients' opinion about public services, their expectations and whether they have been met and what needs to be done. therefore customer satisfaction surveys should be carried out regularly and the quality of services evaluated since it is one of the most significant indicators identifying the satisfaction level and subjective well-being.

Regular assessment of public services is an important issue especially at local level, taking into account that local government is the main public employer and provider of a wide range of services. Local government is close to citizens and should more actively promote a participatory policy in its activity and strategy. Community involvement in local government activity is a means of information sharing, collecting and obtaining feedback.

The aim of the paper is to analyse public services provided in Salaspils municipality and their role seeking to achieve overall well-being and evaluate subjective well-being using the approved SPIRAL methodology.

In order to achieve this aim the following tasks were formulated:

- 1) to overview the theory of the role of the municipality in ensuring well-being;
- 2) to analyse legal acts on public services provision in the municipality;
- 3) to present the results of the empirical research carried out in Salaspils municipality (Latvia) using the SPIRAL methodology seeking to evaluate and improve subjective well-being regarding provided public services.

The following research methods were used: analysis of the scientific literature on the concept of well-being and its links with community participatory practices, analysis of subjective well-being identified during the research carried

out in Salaspils municipality using the SPIRAL methodology approved by EU Council experts.

The theoretical framework of the role and importance of local authority in ensuring well-being in the context of public services at local level provided in various strategic documents and normative acts has been analysed in comprehensive scientific studies.

Stoker (2011) considers that the role of local government is under threat because of wide societal and economic developments, and that democracy is strongest in those municipalities which fulfil various functions.

The concept of local governance and its implications for well-being have been analysed in many comprehensive empirical and theoretical studies and equated to good governance (Jordan, 2008, O'Riordan and Voisey (1998); Lafferty (2004); Gahin (2003); Evans (2005) Dluhy and Swartz (2006)) has developed the framework for evaluating the role of local government in ensuring well-being. Lately the concept of sustainable development came to the fore (Swanson and Pinter (2006). Pinter et al. (2012) has proposed the Bellagio Principles for assessing progress towards sustainability; Mineur (2007) – indicators for monitoring and evaluating sustainability in the context of ensuring well-being.

The role of local government is laid down in several laws passed in the Republic of Latvia. The main law governing the work of a municipality is the Law on Local Governments. Although it does not directly speak about the role of a municipality in promoting well-being the functions of a municipality are clearly laid down in Paragraph 15 and are the basis for defining and funding its activity. The functions of a municipality include public services delivery, territory administration, organising education, cultural, health and social care services, etc. (Latvijas Vēstnesis, 1994). All that is directly linked to well-being.

Public participation in the decision-making process promotes well-being and ensures sustainable development of the community. As the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) declares: “We underscore that broad public participation and access to information and judicial and administrative proceedings are essential to the promotion of sustainable development” (United Nations, 2012: principle 43, p. 14) and further “we acknowledge the role of civil society and the importance of enabling all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development” (United Nations, 2012, principle 44, p. 14). In addition, public participation contributes to the development of civic competences, building

democratic skills, overcoming the feeling of powerlessness and alienation and legitimacy of the political system in general (Soma, Vatn, 2014).

Public service delivery in the municipality

Services are usually defined as works, processes and activities (Zeithaml, Bitner, 2000). The concept of service comes from business literature with various definitions: Ramaswamy (1996) describes service as “business transactions that take place between a donor (service provider) and receiver (customer) in order to produce an outcome that satisfies the customer”, Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) defines services as “works, processes and activities”.

Having reviewed various definitions of services Yong (2000) notes the following features which help understanding the concept. Firstly, services are an activity which happens through interaction between consumers and service providers (Ramaswamy, 1996). Secondly, such factors as physical resources and the environment play an important mediating role in the process of service production and consumption (Collier, 1994; Gronroos, 1990). Thirdly, while providing services, i.e. fulfilling certain functions, consumers may need help in, for example, problem solving (Aninboade, 2012; Gronroos, 1990; Ramaswamy, 1996).

It is traditionally believed that services are not authority's priority. Public services usually have a built-in customer base. Having this monopoly means that authority is not stimulated to improve services.

A need for and interest in integration of sustainability strategies into the core business processes of the public sector has been growing (Brammer, Walker, 2011; Enticott and Walker, 2008). Several countries have started implementing some initiatives towards sustainability, e.g., the UK (Enticott, Walker, 2008), Sweden (Lundberg et al., 2009), the Netherlands (Hoppe, Coenen, 2011) or the USA (Saha, 2009). Sustainability initiatives mainly focus on creating a sustainable environment, and measuring and assessing authority activities in this area, namely its operations and management practices. Local governments municipalities are part of a wider movement towards sustainability culture, they are recognised leaders in and advocates for sustainability (Domingues, 2015). Local public service agencies play a central role in adopting initiatives towards sustainability and have to strengthen this role, as emphasised by Williams et al. (2011). For example, in Norway, almost half of all government spending goes to local government, counties and municipalities since they are responsible for CO2 emissions (Larsen,

Hertwich, 2011). In Portugal, local authority often is the main local employer and plays the main role in local development, regardless of its size, location or demographic characteristics (Nogueiro, Ramos, 2014).

At local level, community administration collaborates with community members in decision-making on public service provision, represents their interests dealing with external agencies, ensures social participation (Edwards, Woods, 2004). Social participation is when stakeholders are (or have been) directly or indirectly involved or are (or have been) affected by developments (Braun, 2010). In this context, Braun (2012) holds that the forms of social participation include: provision of information, consultations, assistance in solving problems, direct engagement with the community, building a steady partnership, developing common ideas, making common decisions, finding a compromise. All that empowers the community to influence local decision-making. Another stakeholder, NGOs, collaborate with community members and work for the benefit of both service suppliers and clients. Governance here is both an activity and commitment, including empowerment, local responsiveness and social inclusion (O’Toole et al., 2010).

A strategy for social cohesion was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2000 and revised in 2004, 2007 and 2010. Social cohesion means that the welfare of all members of society is ensured, the community is involved in decision-making regarding all community matters (the development and improvement of public services among them), disparities managed and minimised, polarisation avoided. The SPIRAL method (*Societal Progress Indicators for the Responsibility of All*) was developed to evaluate subjective well-being and is being used in over 20 countries. The method is based on common fundamental values with a view to ensuring welfare for all members of society through co-responsibility. Welfare is being evaluated taking into how stakeholders collaborate at local, regional, national, European and global levels. Local government, businesses, hospitals, schools, associations, NGOs, researchers, etc. took part in developing this methodology (Council of Europe, 2008). Further, the results of the research carried out in Salaspils municipality (Latvia) using the SPIRAL methodology focusing on public services and citizen involvement will be analyzed (see more Jēkabsons, Sloka, 2014; Grantiņš et al., 2013; Jēkabsons et al., 2013).

Research methodology

The research on well-being in terms of public services was carried out in Salaspils municipality. The municipality is located in the central part of Latvia. Salaspils is a suburb of Rīga, the capital city of Latvia. In 2004 Salaspils city and Salaspils district municipalities were formed with the administrative centre in Salaspils. In 2010 Salaspils municipality was formed. About 23 000 people are living in the administrative centre, other 2 000 – in its rural area. In Soviet times many blocks of houses were built in Salaspils for builders and workers of the Hydroelectric Power Plant, Thermoelectric Power Plant, Nuclear Power Plant and other plants. According to statistics Latvia, the municipality is most densely populated (over 200 people per km², Latvia’s average – 33.8 people per km²). Since 2009 positive population growth has been registered (1,2%, in Latvia – 3,9%). Because of its relative overpopulation, intensive traffic, closeness to Rīga (18 km) from Salaspils), as well as some industrial pollution sources (asphalt production plant, fertilizer production plant, mechanical workshops, former Nuclear Power Plant) it, is one of the most polluted municipalities in Latvia (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The territory of Rīga planning region and impact area of Rīga development centre
Source: State Regional Development Agency, 2012

The indicators of sustainable development are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Sustainable development indicators (Salaspils and Rīga municipalities, Latvia)

Indicator	Salaspils municipality	Rīga Municipality	Latvia
<i>Economic dimension</i>			
Number of economically active market sector statistical units per 1000 pop. (2014)	47,9	86,8	68,6
Revenue from income tax in municipal budget per capita, EUR (2014)	606,10	600,8	489,40
Average salary, EUR (2014)	959,00	895,00	783,00
<i>Social dimension</i>			
Unemployment rate, % (2014)	4,7	4,3	6,6
Crime rate per 1000 pop. (2014)	11	30,3	22
Budget expenditure on health, education and social care per pop., EUR (2014)	478,9	468,5	527,6
<i>Environmental dimension</i>			
Urban waste t per km ²	64,05	747,79	25,22
Urban waste t per pop.	0,32	0,39	0,81
Hazardous waste t per km ²	14,44	14,44	0,61
Hazardous waste t per pop.	0,07	0,006	0,01

Source: Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre database, Ministry of the Interior Affairs database, State Treasury database, State Employment Agency database, CSB database

From the economic viewpoint, Salaspils could be described as one of the wealthiest municipalities in Latvia, its inhabitants salaries are relatively high, as well as personal income tax revenues to the municipality budget per capita is higher than average in country. However, there are not many enterprises in Salaspils – the number of economically active market sector statistical units per 1000 population is significantly lower than on average in Latvia. This could be explained by the fact that a significant number of Salaspils inhabitants are working in Riga.

Analysing the social indicators, it could be concluded that the unemployment rate is relatively low, living is safe (2 times less criminal offences

per 1000 population than on average in Latvia were registered in 2014). Speaking about municipality budget expenditure spending on education, health and social care is smaller in Salaspils municipality than the in other municipalities. It could be explained by the fact that during the last years priority has been given to infrastructure improvement, construction and renovation of public facilities, for example a new sports hall was built, school buildings, boiler houses were renovated, etc.

As the main concern of the paper is public services, the following public services were identified in 13 areas (see Table 2).

Table 2

Analysis of public services in Salaspils municipality

Function	Area	Public service
	Public order	Ensuring public order, organizing crime prevention by the municipal police and Administrative commission
		Organizing civil protection Registering dogs Organizing control of stray pets
Administration	Regulation	Issuing construction permits, residential commissioning by the construction board Assigning address Issuing commercial licenses, trade in public places permits
		Issuing permits to hold public events Issuing outdoor advertising permits Archiving documents Accepting and registering applications

Administration	Fundamental rights protection	Dealing with adoption and trusteeship issues Safeguarding children's rights Settling parenting disputes Providing support to big families Registering place of residence Changing the name, surname Registering a marriage, death		
	Budget and taxes	Administering real estate tax Administering state and municipality charges		
Enhancing development	Education	Organizing pre-school education Development of public schools infrastructure Arranging pupils' transportation Organizing lifelong learning Registering pre-school children		
	Promotion of business	Provision of support to local entrepreneurs Provision of business advisory services Provision of support to young entrepreneurs		
	Spatial planning	Assigning address Preparation of topographic maps, territory plans, land use, construction regulations Reporting on land use, territory planning, construction development Development of land use and construction projects		
Providing support	Property of municipality	Property lease Property development		
	Municipal business	Shareholdings management		
	Technical support	Provision of internet services Management of public premises Provision of information on utilities		
Ensuring service provision	Social and health sector	Organizing health care services Organizing social care services Organizing social support Defining a low income family (person) Allocation of minimum income support benefits Organising long-term social care and social rehabilitation services Allocation of housing benefits Allocation of childbirth benefits Allocation of extra benefits in crisis Allocation of food stamps Provision of social housing Provision of compensation to public transport operators Allocation of benefits to victims of war or repressions Allocation of benefits to single old age persons Granting persons upon attaining the age of 85, 90, 95, 100 and over Allocation of funeral benefits Provision of temporary housing		
		Infrastructure	Maintenance of municipal roads Provision of utilities Organizing public transport Management of municipal parks, gardens, cemetery, forests and water bodies Garden allotment lease Land lease Allocation of municipal housing	
			Culture and sports	Supervision of public libraries network Organizing cultural life Management of sports and culture infrastructure Organizing art, sport and musical schools infrastructure Supervision of tourism information centre activities

Source: author created, based on Latvijas Vēstnesis, 1994, www.salaspils.lv

Municipal public services cover different areas, such as education, culture and sports, social and health care, infrastructure, regulation, public order, etc. All regulated areas have been grouped by four main functions of a municipality: administration, providing support, ensuring service provision, enhancing development. Usually the list of public services varies, and changes depending on political statements, the financial situation, for, other reasons.

In order to identify public satisfaction with services, surveys should be carried out. The SPIRAL method was used to identify and evaluate subjective well-being Data were collected from 25 homogeneous focus groups, representing the population of the municipality.

Answers to such open-ended questions as “What is well-being for you?”, “What is ill-being for you?”, “What do you do or could do for your well-being?” served as the indicators of subjective well-being, numeric values were assigned to each indicator and analysed. The collected indicators were divided into 8 main groups: 1. Access to the means of living; 2. Living environment; 3. Relations with institutions; 4. Personal relations; 5. Social balance; 6. Personal balance; 7. Feeling of well-being/ill-being; 8. Attitudes and initiatives (URBACT, 2012). The indicators were synthesised using the SPIRAL methodology approved by the Council of Europe.

Analysis of the research

The approved SPIRAL methodology was used in the research carried out in Salaspils municipality in 2010 and 2012. The results of the research are shown in Fig.2.

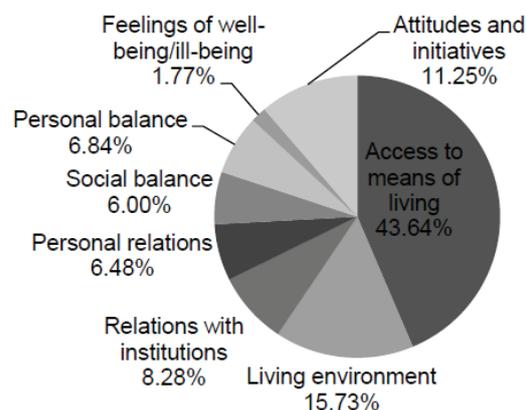


Fig. 2. Synthesis of indicators from all homogeneous groups in Salaspils Municipality, %, 2011

Source: Results of the research carried out in Salaspils municipality (25 homogenous groups, 2867 respondents, September 2010-May 2011)

The results show that the most important areas regarding subjective well-being are “Access to the means of leaving” (43,64%), “Living environment” (15,73%) and “Attitudes and initiatives” (11,25%). 200 indicators defined the areas, those that spoke about public services were present in each area. The dimension “Relations with institutions” shows the principles the municipality is using while managing public services: transparency, justice, effectiveness, channels of communication, etc. The dimension “Living environment” directly describes satisfaction with public services in the municipality. The description of the indicator “Access to public services” is given in Table 3.

Table 3

Description of the indicator “Access to public services”

Situation	Description
Very bad	It is problematic to visit health care institutions.
Bad	Difficulties in getting a place in a pre-school institution. Bad public transport infrastructure. No swimming pool. No shops and cafés on the Dole island.
Average	Convenient public transport. Sufficient number of shops.g. Public transport available. The catholic church is heated.
Good	Good access to institutions. Public transport system well-developed
Very good	Free of charge admission to the Botanical Garden. The swimming pool. Sufficient number of good quality leisure facilities.
<i>Situation in Salaspils</i>	<i>GOOD</i>

Source: Results of the research carried out in Salaspils municipality (25 homogenous groups, 2867 respondents, 3 meetings, September 2010-May 2011)

The description of the situation includes some replies provided by the respondents. When

the research results were presented to focus groups leaders they were asked to agree/disagree with the

evaluation: access to public services was evaluated well public transport, an important public service, was evaluated very well.

The direction towards some actions were provided (*free of charge admission to the Botanical Garden*), and a commission was set up, its activity approved and now visitors are admitted to the Botanical Garden free of charge using special ID

cards which can be used visiting other local objects. Thus the public was involved in decision-making and, management what in turn improved personal subjective well-being. Activities for the future were identified, prioritised, implementation plans drawn up. Analysis of the indicators of well-being is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Analysis of the indicators of well-being

Function	Area	Indicator	Evaluation of a situation (very bad/bad/average/good/very good), its description
Administration	Public order	Physical safety	Average. Preventive work is being carried out; road safety (pedestrian safety) has improved
	Regulation	Coherent policy	Good. Economic legislation created, political environment good; young, educated and active people involved in decision making; regional policy coherent; regulation does not strengthen national identity
	Protection of fundamental rights	Functioning of justice	Average. Main rights protected; public administration sometimes shows little concern about citizens
	Budget and taxes	Taxes	Average. Taxes collected; tax rates should be reduced
Enhancing development	Education	Education/development	Average. Educational needs met; number of general education schools sufficient; quality of education quality good
	Business promotion	Business support	Good. Business environment good; initiatives supported
	Spatial planning	Living environment	Good. Environment protected, no construction of large objects; recreational facilities available
Support	Municipality property	Housing / facilities	Average. A gym in the municipality available; municipal houses in good condition; housing for people with disabilities available
	Municipal business	City administration	Average. Politicians competent; corruption level high; shortage of places in kindergartens; bureaucracy high; administrative penalties lacking
	Technical support	Meeting places	Average. Places for NGO meetings available; facilities for children in indoor activities facilities in good condition; their number insufficient; internet available
Ensuring of services	Social and health care sector	Health	Bad. High quality health care unavailable; shortage of qualified doctors
	Infrastructure	Infrastructure	Bad. Infrastructure poor; pedestrian safety on the highway not ensured (no crossing)
	Culture and sports	Leisure / culture / sports	Good. Facilities for various activities available

Source: Results of the research carried out in Salaspils municipality (25 homogenous groups, 2867 respondents, 3 meetings, September 2010-May 2011)

The research shows that people are not satisfied with health care, its services and infrastructure, both in terms of quantity and quality. It should be noted that the central and local governments share responsibility for care services in this sector. People are also not satisfied with the state of the roads and courtyards, they should be renovated. In general, since the provision of public services is mainly

funded by the municipality the local community should be more involved and have a stronger voice in decision-making on these matters.

Conclusions

1. Local government plays a very important role in ensuring and promoting well-being in municipalities, The local municipality is

responsible for effective and efficient use of natural resources, provision of public services, creation of job places, in general, for sustainable economic development of its territory. Municipal land and property use and lease, infrastructure renovation and investment plans are drawn up by the municipality with a view to developing public services and improving their quality.

2. Local community empowerment and involvement in decision-making on public service matters and opinion surveys help ensure that provided public services meet the needs of the local community.
3. The research on subjective well-being in Salaspils municipality showed that public services and their quality have a direct impact on general well-being. The indicators of well-being are present in all areas of public services. Participatory approaches to, empowerment of the public, its involvement in public services management, organisation, quality improvement are recommended.
4. The opinion survey carried out in Salaspils municipality showed that in general the local community is satisfied with the provided public services, they meet their expectations. It was found out that the community needs, for example, a free of charge access to the Botanical garden, a swimming pool, etc. The respondents agreed that joint efforts help improve the quality of public services.
5. Various public participation, active involvement and empowerment methods should be used in public services management, development and improvement with a view to raising subjective well-being.

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Предоставление муниципальных услуг для повышения уровня социального благополучия общества

Резюме

Муниципалитеты играют важную роль в повышении уровня социального благополучия общества в пределах местного самоуправления, так как они отвечают за эффективное использование природных ресурсов, за предоставление государственных услуг и за создание новых рабочих мест. Это осуществляется посредством землепользования, транзитного планирования, строительства и его инфраструктуры, реабилитации, инвестиций в энергетику, коммунальное хозяйство, а также посредством стратегии экономического развития. С учётом ведущей роли местных самоуправлений в деле оказания различных услуг оценка спроса на социальные услуги является чрезвычайно важной, особенно на местном уровне. В этой связи местные самоуправления должны регулярно проводить исследования степени удовлетворённости потребностей населения и повышать качество его обслуживания. Именно качество предоставляемых услуг является одним из самых значимых показателей уровня удовлетворённости граждан.

Нами были изучены эмпирические и нормативные концепции управления, а также факторы, влияющие на социальное благополучие общества на местном уровне. Обзор положительного опыта и комплексный сравнительный анализ послужили базой для оценки роли социального благополучия на муниципальном уровне. Кроме того, привлекалась концепция устойчивого развития, разработанная для сравнительного институционального исследования структур управления.

В 2010-2012 гг. в Саласпилсе (Латвия) апробирована методология SPIRAL, предназначенная для замера показателей субъективного благополучия на базе общей ответственности, что предопределяет более эффективный диалог с населением. Новизна настоящего исследования заключается в разработке модели для изучения жителей с изначальным низким уровнем гражданской активности. Результаты показали, что для граждан очень важным фактором субъективного благополучия являются взаимоотношения и инициа-

тивы жителей, а не только материальные доходы, как предполагалось. Настоящее исследование доказало, что под высоким уровнем субъективного благополучия подразумеваются гражданская активность, возможность принимать участие в процессе принятия местных решений и содействовать развитию определённых услуг или продуктов. Респондентами стали 25 различных однородных групп (фокус-групп) населения, представителей местной общины. Нами установлено, что ориентированная на жителей модель местного самоуправления способствует диалогу между местным самоуправлением и общественностью, принятию солидарной ответственности за решение местным самоуправлением различных проблем.

Цель статьи - анализ муниципальных социальных услуг по повышению благосостояния общества на основе апробации методологии субъективного благополучия.

Для достижения поставленной цели авторы выдвинули следующие задачи:

- 1) сделать обзор теоретической научной литературы, посвящённой роли муниципалитетов в деле обеспечения благополучия общества;
- 2) проанализировать структуру муниципальных социальных услуг, предусмотренных правовыми актами;
- 3) представить результаты эмпирического исследования, проведённого в соответствии с методологией SPIRAL, для оценки и улучшения субъективного благополучия в Саласпилсе (Латвия).

Использовались следующие методы исследования: изучение научной литературы по вопросам благополучия, его взаимосвязи с участием граждан в

процессе принятия решений; групповые дискуссии в Саласпилсе; статистический анализ данных; методы SPIRAL для замера показателей уровня субъективного благополучия.

Основные выводы:

- для оказания социальных услуг, соответствующих потребностям общества, муниципалитеты должны вовлекать общество в процессы принятия решений;
- очень часто потребности общества в социальных услугах отличаются от планируемых местными властями услуг;
- в целом граждане удовлетворены качеством предоставляемых социальных услуг. Тем не менее, был выявлен ряд конкретных услуг, которые являются пока недоступными: например, бесплатное посещение Ботанического сада, наличие бассейна. Администрация Саласпилса и участники исследования договорились работать в этом направлении;
- участие жителей в решении местным самоуправлением различных вопросов непосредственно связано с благополучием общества. В настоящее время на это обращают всё большее внимание местные власти, стремящиеся повысить благосостояние общества, принимать на себя солидарную ответственность за принятие актуальных на местном уровне решений.

Ключевые слова: субъективное благополучие, муниципалитет, участие граждан, социальные услуги.