

THE VOTERS' PRIORITIES FOR THE 2012-2016 MANDATE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN A JIU VALLEY COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper is part of a larger pre-election research report. For conducting the research we used a methodology tested four years ago during another pre-election research. We decided to use the same methodology because of the good results that it produced the last time we used it and also due to the low costs it implies. As expected, the results obtained were confirmed by the actual elections. Besides trying to figure out who will be the winner of the local elections, we also investigated some other problems. The results that we obtained were interesting. The current paper contains some of those results.*

KEYWORDS: *election; community; sample; distribution; need.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *D72*

The sample size required by the present research was of 130 respondents from a total population of about 4000 people, meaning approximately 3.25% of the total population. In the studied sample, people from all over the city, from all neighbourhoods and all the streets were included, according to their ratio of the total population of the city.

Due to the lack of accuracy of the voter lists, in addition to the main sample of 130 people, another back-up sample of the same size as the main one was considered. Of the cases reported by field operators regarding the lists errors we have to note that there were many people who went abroad - for work, people who have changed their residence (abroad or to a different city in the country), thus the real addresses do not match those from the list, plus the fact that some are deceased and let's not forget the people who were serving sentences of imprisonment.

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However, of the 130 addresses from the main sample, 20 addresses were not valid – meaning that about 15.5% of the respondents could not be contacted. These deficiencies were partially overcome by the use of the back-up sample, because of the 20 addresses needed to reach the proposed sample size; we were able to find only 16 people (from the back-up sample – knowing that 20% of the 20 people required could not be contacted). Thus, we were able to question 126 respondents.

The questionnaire was designed to cover both sexes in age groups of over 18 years old. We also took into account the education level of the respondents and the marital status of the people included in the sample. Among other general issues we were also interested in the voting intentions.

Next, we will present the structure of the sample of questioned subjects by the independent variables taken into consideration. The most important are the fundamental demographic variables: gender and age. In Figure 1 it can be noticed that the structure of the studied population is within normal limits, with a female population of 51% and a male population of 49%. Usually in mono-industrial areas, where heavy industry or mining are dominant, the gender ratio tends to reverse in favour of the male population.

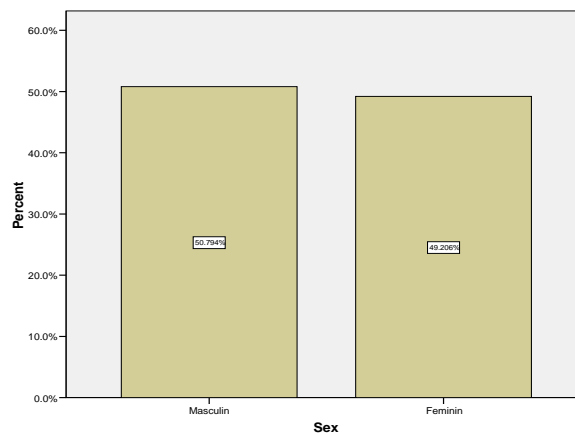


Figure 1. The Gender Distribution of the Sample

In Figure 2 it can be seen that the studied population is in an unstable balance regarding that, for now, the active age part of the population is predominant, but, in the future, if the same trend is kept, the studied population will be confronted with an acute aging process – the now active people will be pensioners and the lower age group will be the active people.

In Figure 3 we represented the age-sex pyramid. It exemplifies the severity of the problem and the future evolution possibilities of the population. As the name suggests, its shape should be like a pyramid.

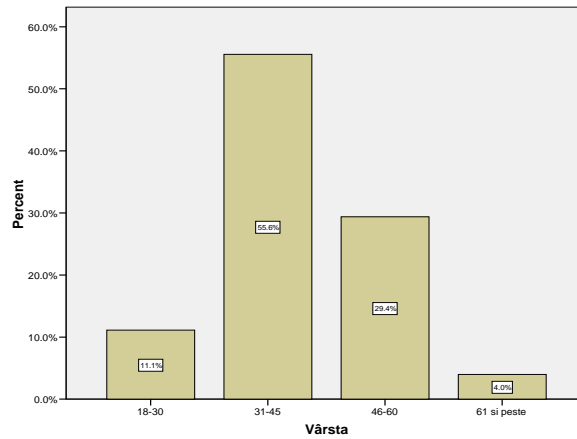


Figure 2. The Age Distribution of the Sample

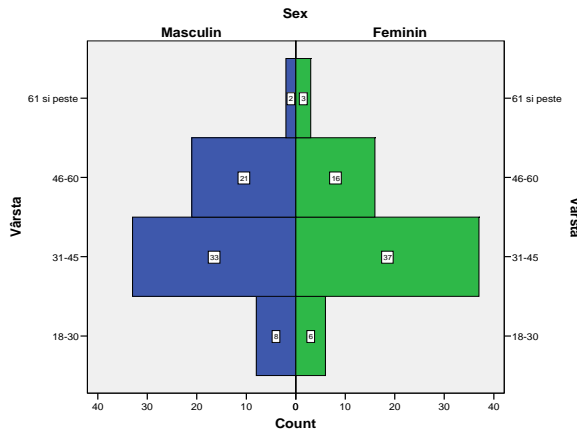


Figure 3. The Population Pyramid of the Sample

The education level of the respondents is presented next in Figure 4. It can be noticed that most of the respondents graduated high school (at rate of almost 37%), closely followed by those who graduated 10 classes (at rate of almost 30%). This indicates a population with a relatively low level of general knowledge (only 7% have a higher education) and a political culture according to the level of general knowledge.

Regarding the number of children, the distribution of the respondents can be seen in Figure 5. Given the shape of the age pyramid, the distribution that can be seen is relatively normal. People with one child as well as those with two children each make up 34.9% of the sample. This fact, coupled with the fact that the next position is taken by those without children, strengthens the hypothesis that the studied population is declining because it doesn't even ensure the simple reproduction of the population. In time this will lead, to the aging of the population. The negative effects will be felt by both the economic production that will continue to decline due to lack of workforce and also by the consumption that will increase due to the increased number of retired

people, which are dependent on pensions and aid from the state as well as from the local community.

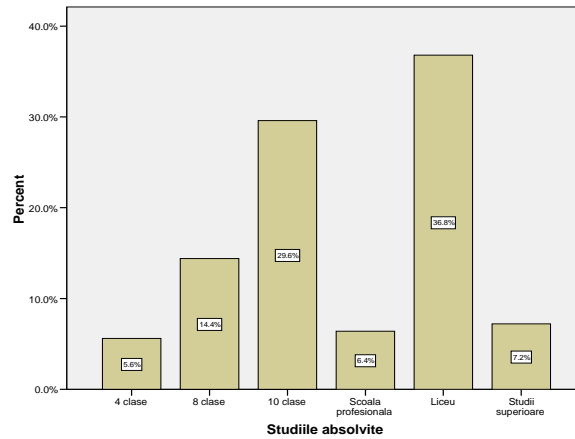


Figure 4. The Education Level Distribution of the Sample

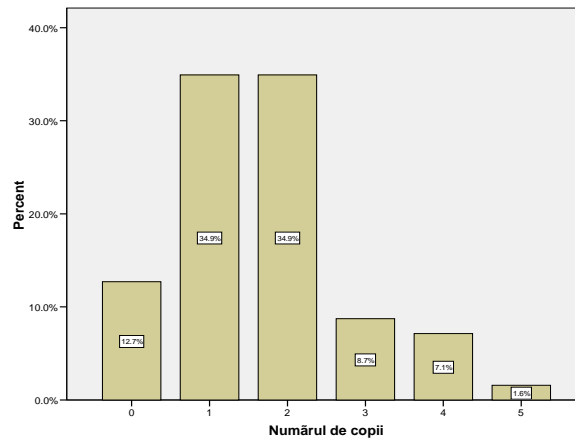


Figure 5. The Number of Children Distribution of the Sample

The distribution of the marital status of the sampled population, as it can be seen, is represented in Figure 6. In terms of marital status we can consider it to be a normal population. The largest category is made up of married people with a proportion of 77.8%. The proportion of divorced and widowed people is relatively low (4% and 3.2%). Given that the sample included only people of over 18 years of age, the number of single individuals is relatively high, with a proportion of 14.3%, which can be attributed to a certain state of poverty. Regarding concubinage, there was only one person that recognized this state - which we consider to be very little.

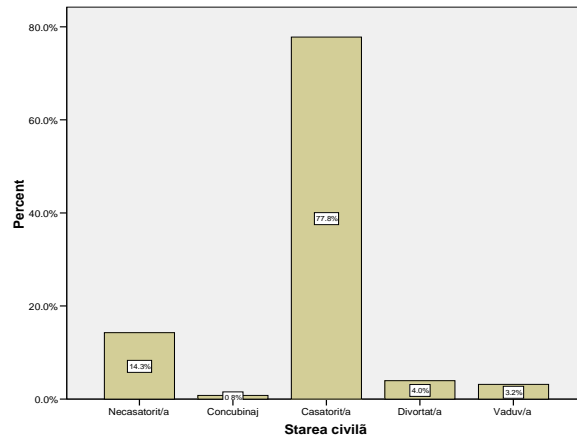


Figure 6. The Marital Status Distribution of the Sample

For a clearer explanation of the situation we correlated the distribution of the number of children with the marital status distribution, correlation shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Marital Status and the Number of Children Correlation

Starea civilă * Numărul de copii Crosstabulation									
		Numărul de copii						Total	
		0	1	2	3	4	5		
Starea civilă	Necasatorit/a	Count	10	2	2	1	2	1	18
		% within Starea civilă	55.6%	11.1%	11.1%	5.6%	11.1%	5.6%	100.0%
		% within Numărul de copii	62.5%	4.5%	4.5%	9.1%	22.2%	50.0%	14.3%
		% of Total	7.9%	1.6%	1.6%	.8%	1.6%	.8%	14.3%
	Concubinaj	Count	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		% within Starea civilă	100.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Numărul de copii	6.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.8%
		% of Total	.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.8%
	Casatorit/a	Count	4	40	39	7	7	1	98
		% within Starea civilă	4.1%	40.8%	39.8%	7.1%	7.1%	1.0%	100.0%
		% within Numărul de copii	25.0%	90.9%	88.6%	63.6%	77.8%	50.0%	77.8%
		% of Total	3.2%	31.7%	31.0%	5.6%	5.6%	.8%	77.8%
Divortat/a	Count	1	1	3	0	0	0	5	
	% within Starea civilă	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	
	% within Numărul de copii	6.3%	2.3%	6.8%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.0%	
	% of Total	.8%	.8%	2.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	4.0%	
Vaduv/a	Count	0	1	0	3	0	0	4	
	% within Starea civilă	.0%	25.0%	.0%	75.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%	
	% within Numărul de copii	.0%	2.3%	.0%	27.3%	.0%	.0%	3.2%	
	% of Total	.0%	.8%	.0%	2.4%	.0%	.0%	3.2%	
Total	Count	16	44	44	11	9	2	126	
	% within Starea civilă	12.7%	34.9%	34.9%	8.7%	7.1%	1.6%	100.0%	
	% within Numărul de copii	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	12.7%	34.9%	34.9%	8.7%	7.1%	1.6%	100.0%	

Table 2. The Correlation Coefficient of the Marital Status and the Number of Children Correlation

		Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.194	.119	2.203	.029 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.243	.111	2.787	.006 ^c
N of Valid Cases		126			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Also, to further clarify this issue, we performed the calculation of the correlation coefficient. In Table 2, as it can be seen, the correlation coefficient is positive, which means that the number of children is even greater as the person was married at least once, whether or not the marriage ended. On the other hand, it can be noticed that this coefficient is very small. This fact is due to the category of unmarried people, as it can be seen in Table No. 1, who has the highest proportion in the “0 children” category (55.6%), which leaves almost half of them with 1, 2, 3, 4 and even 5 children. This can be explained by a certain promiscuity given by the state of poverty, but also by a lack of sincerity, in terms of responses regarding the marital status and especially in the concubinage category.

Data on income perception is shown in Figure 7. As expected, we can see that almost 31% of respondents believe that their income is either low or very low. The category of people who believe that they have a very good income has no representatives. This can be interpreted by the fact that with an increased income, expenses increase as well, although we have sincere doubts about the second option. We can also notice the category of people that even though they are not satisfied with their income; they consider that it is enough to cover the daily expenses (48.4% of the respondents).

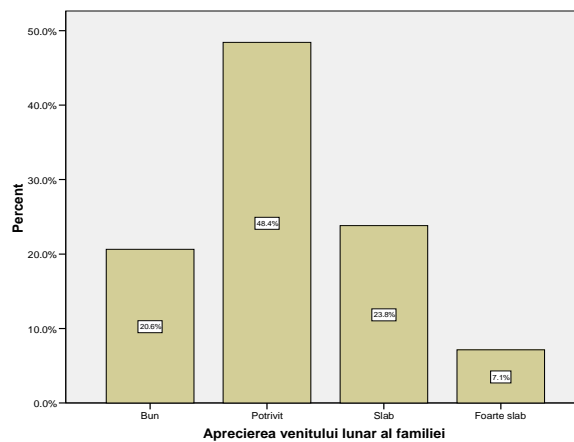


Figure 7. The Income Perception Distribution of the Sample

Regarding the actual value of their income we cannot show a conclusive statistic, because the respondents were very reluctant in answering this question. But through a calculation artifice, if we exclude those who did not want to give information on their income as being non-responses, out of a total of 126 respondents we are left with 74 cases - representing 58.7% that answered. Two important things need to be mentioned. First, we cannot check the income of our respondents or if what they declared is real - which leads us to believe that respondents who answered this question were honest. Second, the question was formulated in such a way as to provide data on the income of all members living in the same household with the respondent. Thus, responses ranged from a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 2600 RON. For a better understanding of this fact, we calculated that the average income of the respondents' families is 1298.77 RON.

To be able to get a better reflection of reality, we asked the respondents to specify the number of family members who are living in the same household. The distribution of respondents by the number of family members living in the same household is shown in Figure 8. We can notice a relatively normal distribution, with a maximum rate of 44.7% for the 3 family members living together category. Taking into consideration the distribution of the sample by the number of children and marital status, we can conclude that at least one family member is away at work in the country or abroad or left the household after getting married. This may be why the respondents were reluctant to declare the family's income. It is noted that there is a small number of non-responses (3), representing 2.4%. Continuing the calculation artifice used in calculating the average income, we get an average of 2.95 family members living in the same household. Reporting the average household income of 1298.77 RON to 2.95 family members living in the same household, we get an income of about 440 RON for each family member - which confirms the initial hypothesis of a state of poverty of the respondents in the studied group.

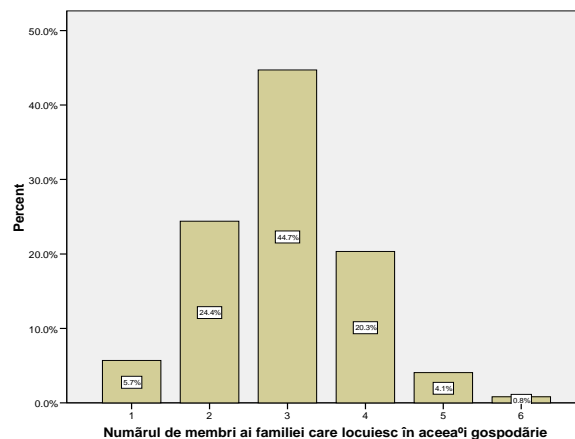


Figure 8. The Number of Family Members Living in the Same Household Distribution of the Sample

Voting absenteeism was another concern. To determine the impact of absenteeism we present the intention to vote in Figure 9.

As it can be seen in Figure 9, the intention to vote is 80%, while those determined not to vote represent 4% and the undecided and those who will not decline their intention to vote make up the remaining 16%. The experience of past elections and especially the number of people that were present at the last voting sessions, lead us to believe that the 80% is a bit exaggerated, which is why we used a control variable, namely the peoples' voting at the local elections in 2008. The answers to this question are presented in Figure 10.

Overall, it is noticeable that the frequency proportion of responses in terms of participation is similar 79.4%. Regarding absenteeism and not declaring the participation, there is almost a reversal of the proportions. People who did not participate make up less than 13% and people that are unwilling to declare less than 8%.

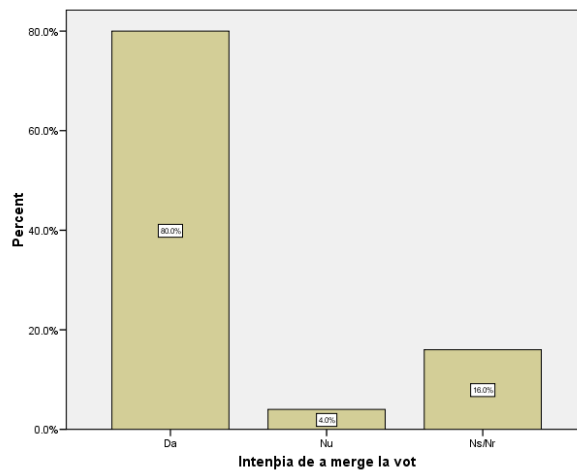


Figure 9. Voting Intention Distribution of the Sample

In an attempt to determine the cause and constancy of voting going we built the correlation between the participation intent in the local elections of 2012 and the participation in the local elections of 2008. The resulting table is Table 3.

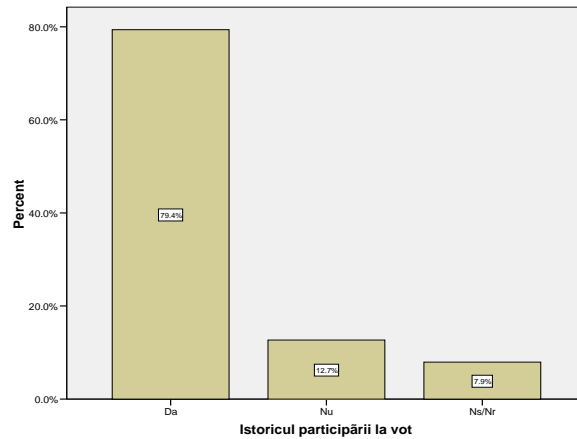


Figure 10. Vote Going in the 2008 Elections Distribution of the Sample

From Table 3. can be noticed that the constancy in expressing the right to vote is very low, as confirmed by the positive correlation indicator shown in Table No. 4, meaning that those who voted would be the ones that would keep voting in the future, but the indicator is very low - almost insignificant, because only 66.4% are in this position. This is the percentage of people that can be counted on and which can give a reference point on how the votes will be cast. The possible variations of the percentages will be due to the people who are not yet decided on their participation and on the candidate that they will support through the potential casting of their vote.

Table 3. The Voting Intention at the 2012 Local Elections and the Voting in the 2008 Local Elections Correlation

Intenția de a merge la vot * Istoricul participării la vot Crosstabulation

		Istoricul participării la vot			Total	
		Da	Nu	Ns/Nr		
Intenția de a merge la vot	Da	Count	83	10	7	100
		% of Total	66.4%	8.0%	5.6%	80.0%
	Nu	Count	4	1	0	5
		% of Total	3.2%	.8%	.0%	4.0%
	Ns/Nr	Count	12	5	3	20
		% of Total	9.6%	4.0%	2.4%	16.0%
Total	Count	99	16	10	125	
	% of Total	79.2%	12.8%	8.0%	100.0%	

Another important issue our research focused on was to measure the proportion of the sample population that considered being able to have a saying regarding the decisions made by the City Council. In this respect we made Figure 11. It is easy to notice that only 12% believe that they can influence the decisions of the City Council, while the great majority of 52.4% believe that they cannot influence the decisions of the local council. The rest of the respondents, representing 35.7% cannot decide.

Table 4. The Correlation Coefficient of the Voting Intention at the 2012 Local Elections and the Voting in the 2008 Local Elections Correlation

		Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.179	.104	2.020	.046 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.189	.101	2.135	.035 ^c
N of Valid Cases		125			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

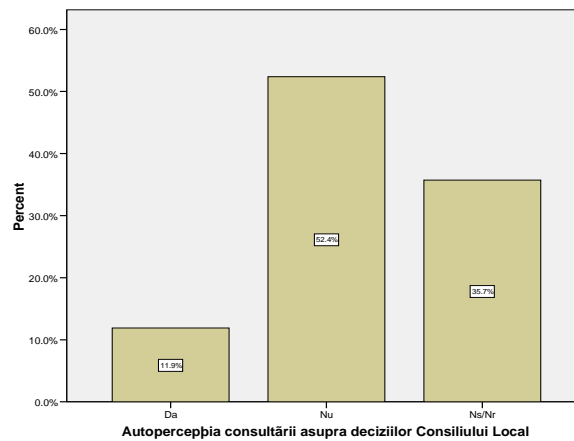


Figure 11. The Power to Influence the Decisions of the City Council Distribution of the Sample

The most important issue remains to be presented at the end of this study and it is related to the priorities that need to be addressed in the 2012-2016 mandate of the local government. This issue has been addressed in a more complex way – given the fact that it is a matter of great importance. Respondents, regardless of political preferences and likes or dislikes, have an idea, more or less well defined, as to what should be done - no matter by whom. Two questions were asked, that covered the same issue to see the differences between the way in which the choice is made when the available options are given to the respondents by the researchers compared to the way the choice is made when the question is an open one and the respondent may chose anything he/she likes, but the available options have to come from him/her.

First, the respondents were asked to rank a set of given problems according to their priorities, choosing only three of them. The first choice was regarded as being the most important one and was represented in Figure 12. The order in which the priorities are ranked is as follows: streets modernization (45.2%), job creating (28.6%), gas connection (11.1%), house building for the youth (7.1%), stray dogs problem solving (3.2%), sewerage expansion and modernization (2.4%), establishing an emergency

reception centre is requested by only 1,6%, and organizing cultural events is requested by only one respondent.

In order to better point out the opinion of our respondents regarding the second priority we made Figure 13. As it can be seen the list of problems is the same but the prioritization is radically different. After analyzing the hierarchy in peoples' opinion, the order is as follows: job creating 30.2%, house building for the youth 23%, streets modernization 16.7%, sewerage expansion and modernization 11.9%, gas connection 9.5%, establishing an emergency reception centre 4.8%, stray dogs problem solving 2.4%, playgrounds building 1.6%.

In Figure 14. we synthetically display the options for the third priority.

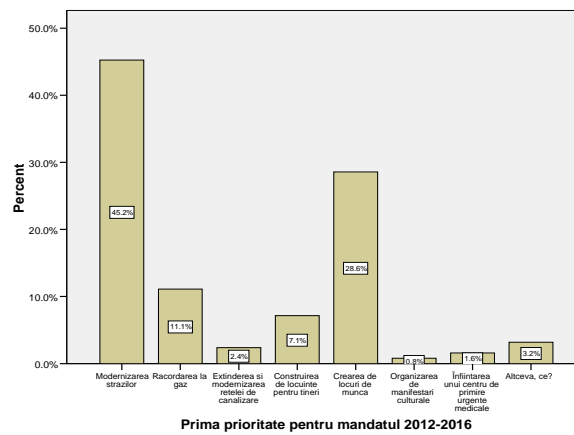


Figure 12. The Most Important Priority for the 2012-2016 Mandate Distribution of the Sample

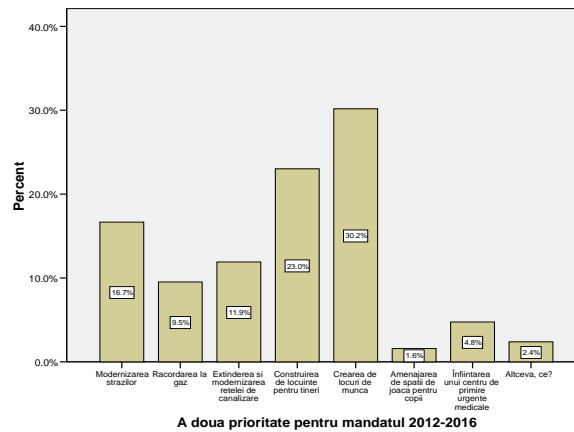


Figure 13. The Second Most Important Priority for the 2012-2016 Mandate Distribution of the Sample

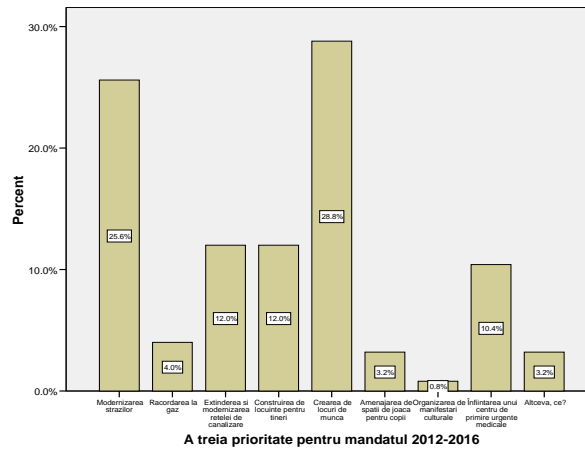


Figure 14. The Third Most Important Priority for the 2012-2016 Mandate Distribution of the Sample

As shown in Figure 14., the third most important priority is as follows: job creating 28.8%, streets modernization 25.6%, sewerage expansion and modernization and house building for the youth with 12% each, establishing an emergency reception centre 10.4%, gas connection 4%, playgrounds building and stray dogs problem solving with 3.2% each, and finally, one of the respondents said that he would like more cultural events.

After presenting the priorities ranked by the proportion of respondents that request each issue, we can now merge the three lists into one, also aided by a calculation artifice by weighting each issue inversely to its rank and also by the frequency that it is requested. Thus we are obtaining a rank for each problem that is pointing out its importance (see Table 5.).

The second method we proposed for questioning the problems of the respondents of our questionnaire was to ask an open question to which they could answer by any and all problems. Using this method we obtained almost the same results, but with some variations of the problems. Thus, after post-encoding we obtained the following problems and their intensities as presented in Table 6. It can be noticed that the problem with the street is maintained here also as being the main problem. Also, the second most important issue is the creation of jobs and employment opportunities in order to reduce poverty. In contrast, the third issue – the stray dogs, appears much earlier than in the case of the previous semi-closed question. The rehabilitation and expansion of the sewerage network is seen to be just as important as the stray dogs problem. Then, there is the gas connection problem, which can be easily introduced in the election speech, but because of the poverty it is actually a rising problem because there will be a big number of people that will encounter difficulties in paying their invoices. The last issue worth mentioning, although it is not strongly felt, is the demand for rehabilitation of the colonies and roofs. It should also be noted that among the needs and problems experienced by the studied population the emergency reception centre was not included.

Table 5. Priorities for the 2012-2016 Mandate (I)

Issue	Rank
Streets Modernization	245
Job Creating	220
House Building for the Youth	100
Gas Connection	71
Sewerage Expansion and Modernization	54
Establishing an Emergency Reception Centre	31
Stray Dogs	22
Playgrounds Building	8
Cultural Events Organizing	4

Table 6. Priorities for the 2012-2016 Mandate (II)

Issue	Rank
Street Paving	77
Job Creating and Poverty Reduction	61
Stray Dogs	15
Sewerage Rehabilitation and Expansion	15
Gas Connection	14
Colonies Rehabilitation and Roofs Repairing	11
Trash	3
House Building for the Youth	3
New Mayor	3
Playgrounds Building	2
Cultural Events Organizing	1
Everything	1