ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF ROMANIAN LOCAL PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

CULTURĂ ORGANIZAȚIOANALĂ ÎN ADMINISTRAȚIA PUBLICĂ LOCALĂ DIN ROMÂNIA

Adrian Hudrea

Research assistant PhD., Department of Public Administration and Management, College of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
E-mail: hudrea@fspac.ro

Abstract

Organizational culture has become one of the most important aspects of management. Organizational culture refers to the symbolic side of the organization, the less visible part of it, the side which is more difficult to understand, but which has a vital role in the success of the organization. Culture is for the organization what personality is for an individual: it defines it yet it is hidden, hard to understand, defined by the experiences the organization went through since its birth, hard to change and has a key role in achieving the organization's objectives.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the organizational culture (using Daniel Denison's Organizational Culture Model) of the Romanian local public administration, focusing especially on three types of organizations (County Council, City Hall and Prefecture) from five different counties (Cluj, Sălaj, Bistrița Năsăud, Satu Mare, Covasna).

Keywords: organizational culture, Romanian local public administration, Denison culture model

JEL CODES: D73, D23, H83

Rezumat

Cultura organizațională (construirea, întreținerea, dezvoltarea ei) a devenit unul dintre cele mai importante aspecte în managementul organizațiilor. Cultura organizațională se referă la latura simbolică a organizației, partea mai puțin vizibilă a acesteia, mai greu de descifrat, mai greu de înțeles, dar care are un rol vital în succesul organizației. Cultura este pentru organizație ceea ce personalitatea este pentru individ: definitorie, ascunsă, greu de înțeles, formată în timp, definită de experiențe prin care a trecut încă de la apariție, greu de schimbat și având un rol fundamental în atingerea obiectivelor.

Scopul acestei cercetări a fost să analizeze cultura organizațională (plecând de la modelul lui Denison) din administrația publică locală din România, cu precădere în trei tipuri de instituții: consilii județele, primării și prefecturi. Toate aceste trei tipuri de instituții publice aparțin administrației publice locale, dar sunt diferite între ele, atât prin funcții și formă, cât și prin dimensiune, subordonare, legislație, arie de deservire, public țintă etc.

Cuvinte cheie: cultură organizațională, organizații publice, administrație publică locală, modelul Denison

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture has become one of the most important aspects of management. Organizational culture refers to the symbolic side of the organization, the less visible part of it, the side which is more difficult to understand, but which has a vital role in the success of the organization. Culture is for the organization what personality is for an individual: it defines it yet it is hidden, hard to understand, defined by the experiences the organization went through since its birth, hard to change and has a key role in achieving the organization's objectives.

Large private companies (multinational corporations), to which we turn whenever we seek performance benchmarks, in their constant pursuit of profit and hence performance and efficiency, began to value the human resource so much and the role that the organizational culture can play in the success of the organization that, when recruiting, they put more emphasis on the compatibility between the individual and the organization's values than they do on the education, experience or skills that that individual has.

Often, these organizations prefer to recruit (especially for entry level positions) young people, just out of university or even students, individuals in training without a value system yet fully formed, immature, without their personality traits fully contoured. The dream of any organization of this kind is to have a place in which employees share the values of the organization and even identify with them (and the organization itself), where employees talk about the organization in terms of "we", not "them", in which individuals understand the organization's objectives and the role each of them plays in achieving these objectives, an organization in which these individuals see the connection between the work of each of them and the results achieved and personal satisfaction.

Nowadays this aspect of organizations came to be so important to the success of the organization that large companies make considerable efforts (including financial efforts) to build and maintain a culture that supports performance: from how they recruit and select human resources (they create a psychological profile, they check the compatibility between the individual and the organization's values, etc.), to how they organize the work environment, and interact with their employees, to how that involve them in decision making , and even go as far as to offer them facilities that allow them to develop within the company and allow them to engage in charitable activities or develop their own projects to implement their own ideas.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As in many other areas, the concern for organizational culture first emerged and developed better in the private sector because they always seek ways to increase their profits, thus becoming more effective,

making them more prone to use their assets in order to maximize their return on investment. Once with the change of paradigm in public administration (the development of the New Public Management), characterized in particular by the desire to take over some ideas, concepts, techniques, tools from the private sector in order to adapt them to the public sector began an increased interest in organizational culture in the public organizations. However, we cannot see the same effort in the public sector as we do in the private sector regarding organizational culture and its role in the success of the entire organization. Although other countries, western and especially northern ones, are much better than Romania (and Eastern Europe in general) in using the principles of organizational culture, there are still differences in which this theory is regarded in the public sector versus the private one.

The concern of the corporations for organizational culture has developed an increase of the academic interest on this subject also, which began researching this aspect in an effort to better understand what it is, how it works and what connection exists between it and organizational performance. As usual, in the social studies field, there were heated debates on the subject, such as from which perspective should organizational culture be studied (sociological, psychological, anthropological etc.) or what methods should be used in its study (quantitative, qualitative).

The literature presents several models of analysis of the organizational culture, some based on simple models, such Edgar Schein's model (1990), which presents three levels of the organizational culture starting with a visible level and ending with the level that holds all the values and the basic assumptions and which is more difficult to approach, or Geert Hofstede's (2010) model of national culture which consists of six dimensions that represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other (Power Distance Index, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation, Indulgence versus Restraint).

 Others are based on more complex models such as Geert Hofstede's (2015) Multi-Focus Model, which consists of six autonomous dimensions or variables and two semi-autonomous dimensions (Means-oriented vs. Goal-oriented, Internally driven vs. Externally driven, Easygoing work discipline vs. Strict work discipline, Local vs. Professional, Open system vs. Closed system, Employee-oriented vs. Work-oriented, Degree of acceptance of leadership style, Degree of identification with your organization), or the model of Kim Cameron and Robert Quinn (2011), which claim that there are four major types of organizational cultures (Clan, Adhocracy, Market and Hierarchy) or that of Daniel Denison (1990), which identifies a single type of organizational culture, but characterized by four main traits (Adaptability, Mission,

Involvement and Consistency), each of the four having three sub-dimensions which lead to the study of 12 dimensions that help us have a complete picture of the culture of an organization.

3. DANIEL DENISON'S MODEL

The model developed by Daniel R. Denison has a bottom-up approach, starting at the level of the employees in order to establish the cultural profile of the organization – defined as a result of all individual values and behaviors. Unlike Geert Hofstede's famous national culture model, Denison focused mainly on the analysis and evaluation of organizational culture at the level of the whole organization. The bulk of his research study was conducted on the impact of organizational culture on the organizations' performance and effectiveness over time, in a context in which many organizational culture researchers focused on the importance of values and beliefs, and on the way organizations developed these values and conveyed them to others.

Graphically, Denison's model is represented by a straight-forward diagram (see Figure 1) that allows a fast comprehension and interpretation of organizational culture, with its four main dimensions.
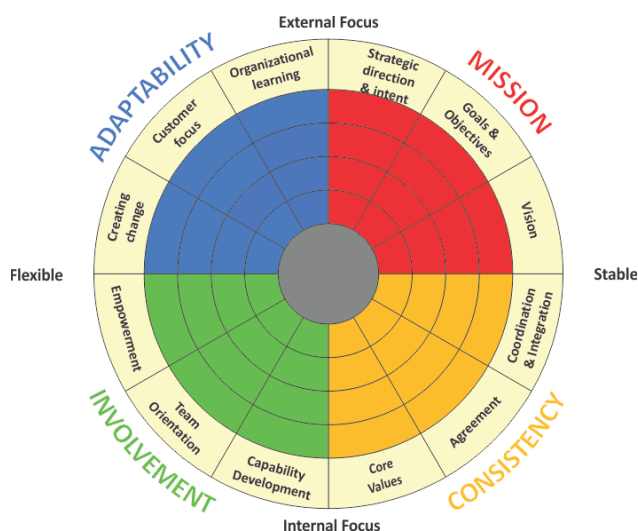

FIGURE 1. THE DENISON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE MODEL
Source: adapted from Denison (2005)

Involvement (1) is one of the main conditions that organizations realized they had to fulfill and that, when exploited, led to success. Denison talked about two types of approach regarding involvement: on the one hand, involvement meant capability development, and the accountability of each individual to the smooth running of the organization; on the other hand, involvement led individuals to identify with the organization, and developed their sense of belonging, both of which greatly influenced the members' motivation.

Besides involvement, the development of a system of shared values, certainties, and symbols is highly important for any organization. Denison gathered these aspects under the umbrella of **Consistency (2)** (Denison, 1990, pp. 8-11) and emphasized the importance of a strong culture in reaching effectiveness. A system of beliefs, values, and symbols, which was accepted by all the members of the organization, has a positive impact on their ability to reach consensus.

The first two cultural traits of Denison's model are all about the organizations' internal environment; the author believed that effective organizations seemed to combine the two principles – that of involvement and that of consistency. Involvement was used to generate ideas and solutions, which were then transposed into a more specific set of principles, accepted by all organization members. Measuring these two concepts should allow an overview of the degree of their internal integration.

Adaptability (3) is necessary to any organization if effectiveness is to be reached; if the aspect of adaptability is not considered, we are dealing with a rigid, bureaucratic system, based on values and beliefs that are stability-oriented.

The last component of Denison's model is **Mission (4)**. First of all, the Mission of an organization offers it meaning and purpose – implicitly, a purpose other than financial wellbeing, in order to understand the importance of work in an organization. In other words, it defines the social role of the organization. However, the role of the Mission is to also define the values on which the bureaucratic system relies, and that lead the actions of individuals towards reaching the organization's purpose, through the accomplishment of its objectives.

Adaptability and Mission (Denison, 1990, pp. 11-15) are dimensions that emphasize the organizations' capacity to adapt to their external environment.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The goal of this paper is to analyze organizational culture (based on Denison's model) of the local public administration from Romania, focusing especially in three types of institutions: the County Council, City Hall and Prefectures. All three types of public institutions belong to the local administration (there are other types of institutions that are a part of the public administration system, but I chose only these three types because they are the most important ones), these three types of institutions are very different one form the other, both in features and form and size, and also in aspects regarding their subordination, the legislation they must obey, the are they service, and their target audience, etc.

The research is a quantitative one and aims to find out whether there are significant differences in organizational culture based on (1) Type of organization – Do different organization from the same county

have different cultures? – (2) Location – Do similar organizations from different counties have different cultures? Does local culture influence the organizational culture? – (3) System – Is there a shared culture of the Romanian local administration?

Without claiming that the results of this thesis are representative for the entire local public administration in Romania, mainly because the research is not exhaustive (I analyzed three types of organizations in just five of the 41 counties of Romania: Cluj, Sălaj, Bistrița Năsăud, Satu Mare, Covasna), it is however particularly important given that in Romania there is no research on organizational culture of the local public administration (there are only a few research papers done related to the academic environment).

The research is based on a quantitative method using a sociological survey based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire used is a version translated and adapted by me of the one developed by Daniel Denison and his organization. The instrument was offered to me, at my request, by the organization led by Daniel Denison (Denison Consulting) together with their agreement to allow me the use the tool for academic purposes.

As discussed in the methodology, the questionnaire has a number of 60 statements, each with five possible answers (1-strong disagreement, 2-disagree, 3 neutral, 4-agree, 5 strong agreement). Each of the 12 dimensions of Denison's model is measured by 5 questions out of 60. To calculate the average scores, I did an average for each of the 60 statements and then the average of groups of five questions to obtain a result for the 12 dimensions and then an average for the three dimensions to obtain a result for the four traits. The questionnaire comprises eight more questions related to age, sex, education level, work experience etc.

The questionnaires were distributed to a large number of employees from the 15 selected institutions; the sample is one of convenience because it was not possible otherwise (due to the lack of human resources, poor cooperation from the institutions, the reluctance of employees etc.). The number of questionnaires received is 534, which represent approximately 22% of the total number of employees from the 15 organizations. In some organizations I have managed to cover a large number of employees (77% - from the County Council of Bistrița, 70% from the Sălaj Prefecture, 52% from the County Council of Cluj), but in others the response rate was very low (8% in the City Hall of Satu Mare, 10% in the City Hall of Bistrița, 13% in the Cluj-Napoca City Hall).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

City Halls

Figure 2 shows a general overview of organizational culture for the five City Halls. A first observation would be the fact that there are no significant differences among them, and that none of them stands out in any way – quite the contrary, they almost overlap; their cultures are somewhat similar, and balanced, as none reached maximum or minimum rates on any dimension.
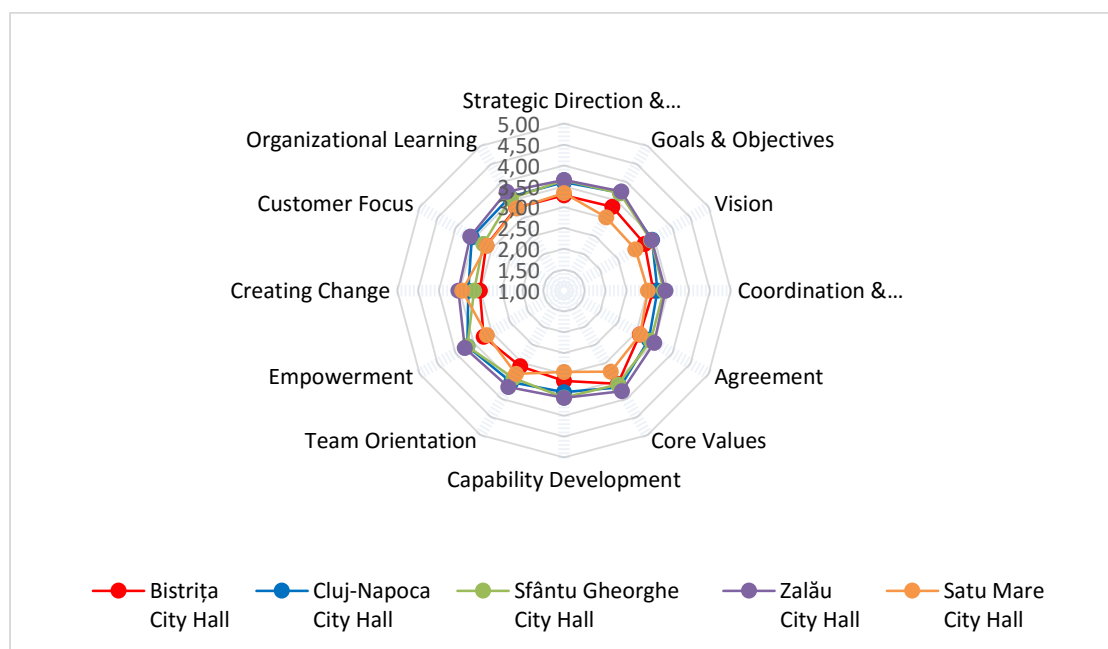

FIGURE 2. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF CITY HALLS

By analyzing the score of each City Hall, I noticed that they are all within the interval 3.01-3.78, meaning slightly above average, which, according to Denison's research (Denison D., 1990; Denison, Haaland, & Goelzer, 2004), implies sound grounds for good performance. What is surprising is not only that all dimensions scored above average (we would have expected customer focus, at least, to score lower, given the nature of these institutions), but also the fact that there were no major differences between them, although they are in five separate counties, in separate geographical areas, with separate regional cultures.

County Councils

Figure 3 shows a general overview of organizational culture regarding the five County Councils. Once again, we witness an almost total overlap of the five cultures, as the differences actually seem smaller than in the case of City Halls; as shown above, there is a balance between the 12 dimensions in each

case, with no major discrepancies.

FIGURE 3. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES OF COUNTY COUNCILS (CC)

If we take a look at the score of each County Council, we will notice that they are all situated between 3.00-3.82, meaning slightly above average, a fact which, according to Denison's research (Denison D., 1990; Denison, Haaland, & Goelzer, 2004), represents sound grounds for good performance. The highest score was reached by the Bistrița County Council, with a general average of 3.49 and with 5 highest-scoring dimensions; the lowest score was reached by the Covasna County Council, with an average of 3.25 and with 3 of the lowest scoring dimensions.

Prefectures

Figure 4 shows a general overview of organizational culture for the five Prefectures. We notice that all five cultures are extremely close to one another in the median area, with no major variances; the difference between the highest-rated and the lowest-rated Prefecture is quite small, but still visible on the graph.
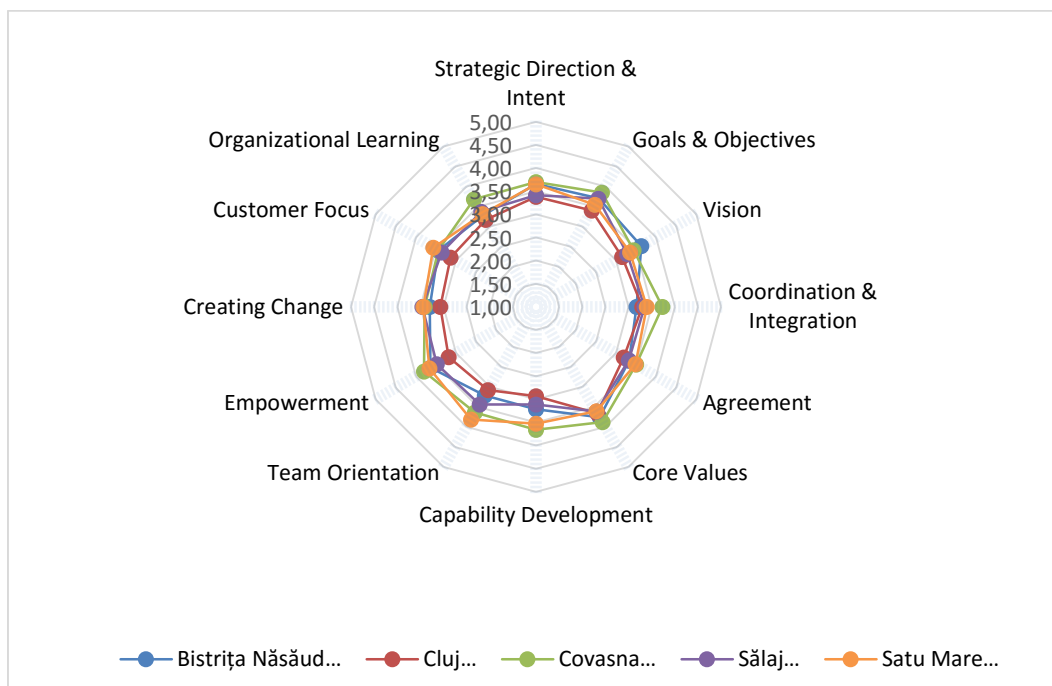
FIGURE 4. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF PREFECTURES

All organizations

By analyzing all 15 organizations on a single graph (see Figure 5), it is plain to see, even without their respective scores, how much alike these cultures are. Not only do we have 15 lines that are quite hard to distinguish, but all 15 are also bundled in the same interval (2.9-3.9), namely the median one. All cultures are balanced, without high or low values, without a defining, dominant dimension.
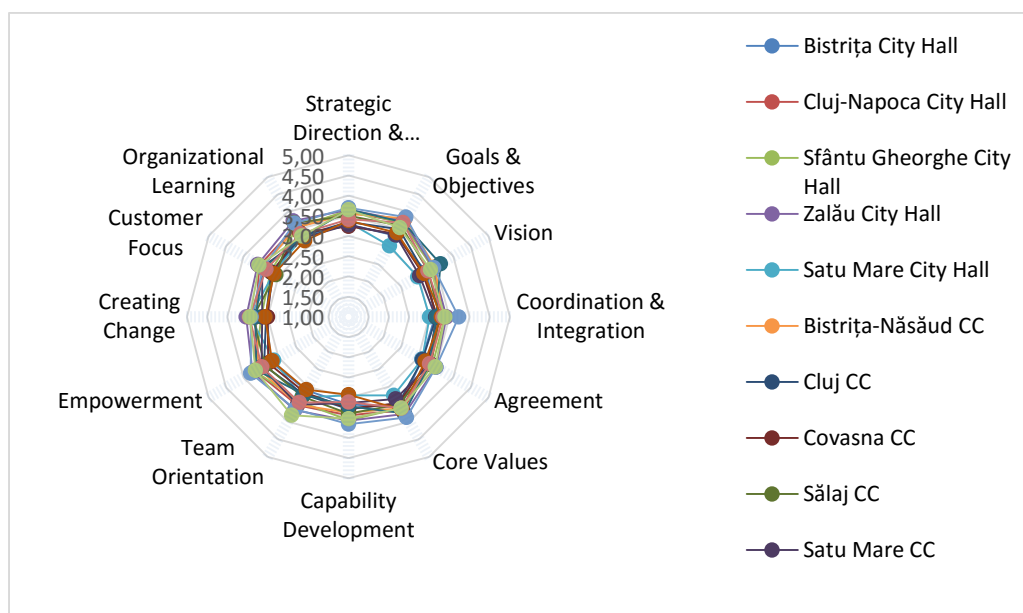

FIGURE 5. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF LOCAL PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

The data becomes even clearer in Table 1, which shows that the difference between the total score of organizational culture of all the institutions studied is very small, from a statistical point of view, more specifically between 3.16 and 3.64. Therefore, we are talking about a variation of under 0.50 on a scale of 1 to 5. That cluster of values is extremely tight and, considering all the endo- and exogenous differences between the 15 organizations, unexpected.

TABLE 1. THE TOTAL SCORE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES, ACCORDING TO TYPE OF INSTITUTION

No.	Type of institution	Total
1.	Bistrița City Hall	3.22
2.	Cluj-Napoca City Hall	3.51
3.	Sfântu Gheorghe City Hall	3.48
4.	Zalău City Hall	3.62
5.	Satu Mare City Hall	**3.16**
6.	Bistrița-Năsăud County Council	3.49
7.	Cluj County Council	3.27
8.	Covasna County Council	3.25
9.	Sălaj County Council	3.39
10.	Satu Mare County Council	3.29
11.	Bistrița Năsăud Prefecture	3.44
12.	Cluj Prefecture	3.22
13.	Covasna Prefecture	**3.64**
14.	Sălaj Prefecture	3.41
15.	Satu Mare Prefecture	3.53

Surprisingly enough, the hypothesis that organizational culture was influenced by local culture and peculiarities, as well as by the size of the organization was not confirmed, as all three types of organizations (City Halls, County Councils, and Prefectures) had similar organizational culture traits, regardless of the county (host culture) they came from, as well as of their size. There are indeed some dissimilarities, but they are not noteworthy. Romanian local public organizations seems to have a common culture, perhaps a bureaucratic culture that is specific rather to the system than to a certain institution, or region; moreover, it does not seem influenced by factors such as size or type of activity, either.

CONCLUSIONS

Surprisingly, my hypothesis were not confirmed, apparently all organizations studied have very similar cultures, despite their differences in type, size, shape, purpose, subordination or location. They seem to have a strong bureaucratic culture with significant premises towards organizational performance.

The first hypothesis (which stated that the organizational culture is influenced by the local culture and local specificities) was not confirmed; in all three types of organizations (County Council, City Hall and Prefectures) I have identified similar traits of organizational culture regardless of county of origin. The small differences that I found are not significant.

The second hypothesis, that said that the type of organization (purpose, tasks, structure, size, etc.) influences organizational culture, was not confirmed either; the paradox is that in each of the five counties, the organizational culture from the County Council, City Hall and Prefecture is similar, sometimes almost overlapped, all revolving around the median, and the differences are not significant at all. Even if the three institutions are different in so many ways (goals, tasks, procedures, subordination, size, number of employees, coverage etc.) their cultures are similar.

The analysis of all 15 institutions from the perspective of this model reveals that they are very similar. Not only do we have 15 cultures that almost merge with each other, but all 15 are cramped, considering the scores they got, in the same range (2.9 to 3.9), the medium value range. All cultures are balanced without very high or very low values, without a striking feature, to define them.

We cannot find any differences in terms of the type of institution (County Council, City Hall and Prefectures) or based on their geographical location (different counties). Romanian local public administration seems to have a common culture; perhaps a bureaucratic culture is more specific to the entire system rather than a specific institution or a particular region of the country.

At a more in depth analysis, we find that the Prefecture of Covasna County stands out a bit more from the rest of organizations testing the higher values at 9 from the 12 dimensions described in the questionnaire while the City Hall from Satu Mare and the Prefecture of Cluj are at the opposite side of the range with a higher number of small scoring.

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