



Emerging Markets Queries in Finance and Business

Ethnicity and Citizen Satisfaction: A Study on Local Public Administration

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Abstract

Purpose - The main theme is to investigate whether various ethnic groups report different levels of customer satisfaction regarding the communication process within local public administration. **Design/methodology/approach** - The approach is survey research based on questionnaire used to assess the communication process within city halls and county councils from Crisana Region. Data from a representative sample were analyzed. **Findings-Research results** show that there is a significant difference between citizens perceptions and expectations regarding the communication process within city halls and county councils. By analyzing data it was possible to determine citizen satisfaction and to assess the relationship with specific different ethnic features. The results illustrate that on the responsiveness dimension of communication quality, satisfaction is significantly affected by the respondents' belonging to an ethnic group. **Research limitations/implications** - This study focused only on local public administration within Western Romania. Generalisability of results to other servicescapes in public sector remains to be tested. Therefore, further research should investigate the local public communication in other regions with different ethnic groups. **Practical implications** – In public policy making local public sector managers should recognize the importance of ethnic characteristics and grant weight to ethnic features of the community members they serve. **Originality/value**- The characteristics of ethnic groups received somewhat less attention from the academic researchers, there is a paucity of academic papers in this area, it has been neglected the relationship among ethnicity, service quality, and customer satisfaction in public sector. This has been identified as a need in the literature. Therefore, this paper presents a framework for evaluating local public communication within multi-ethnic communities.

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1. Introduction

In our globalized world ethnic contention is a primary source of conflict, instability and state failure (Jackson, Lyon, 2002, p.563).

Serb (2007, p.135) stated that ethnicity summarizes national cultural qualities besides the race leading to the identification of distinct groups in relation to others. In some situations ethnicity is synonymous with belonging to a national group.

Kundnami (2001, p.108) notes that in England a new class of 'ethnic representatives' entered the town halls from the mid 1980s onwards, who would be the surrogate voice for their own ethnically-defined fiefdoms. They entered into a pact with the authorities, for the best interest of the community. Parekh (2000, p.341) has suggested that it is possible to develop a political structure of multicultural and multi-ethnic society based on a strong sense of unity but also ingrained respect for diversity.

In Roumania the existent ethnic groups are relatively low compared to the majority group, but there some communities where the minority groups are more numerous than Romanian population.

In heterogeneous communities local public authorities have to adapt the services delivery characteristics to the multi- cultural and multi- ethnic populations in order to exist a good representation of all the community's members. The complexities of becoming involved in ethnically charged communities may prevent repeating past mistakes in the future interventions (Jackson, Lyon, 2002, p.580).

Unfortunately there are few studies that analyze the communication within public administration (Pandey, Garnett, 2006, Garnett et.al. 2008) and the factors that influence citizen satisfaction regarding the communication process within local authorities. About communication effective measures in local public administration written Melkers, Willoughby (2005).

This research is built upon work by Webb and Marshall (1995) which demonstrated that race/ethnicity is the single most important factor in predicting attitudes towards police. Accordingly, in banking services, Snow et. al. (1996) showed that Canadian retail bank costumers of different ethnicities had different service perceptions. Brown and Benedict (2002) summarized the findings of over 100 articles on public perceptions and attitudes towards the police and found that ethnicity is one most important predictors of satisfaction.

Despite the extensive discussions of politicians on TV, the international literature regarding specific of the communication process within heterogeneous ethnic communities is still insufficient.

A well planed communication design can be the solution to surpass communication difficulties even if we take into consideration the features of the communication process within public sector, cultural barriers, ethnic, linguistic or other barriers.

2. Methods of measuring the quality of public services

There are several methods of measuring service quality and among the most representative ones we can mention the following: SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Barry, 1988); SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), EP (Teas, 1993), SITEQUAL (You and Donthu, 2001), Webqual/eQUAL (Barnes and Vidgen, 2005), EtailQ (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2003), EWAM (Schubert, 2003), e-SERVQUAL (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Malhotra, 2002), ES- QUAL (Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., Malhotra, 2005), WebQEM (Olsina, Rossi, 2002).

SERVQUAL method was the first developed and applied in evaluating service quality and has been the subject of a large number of experiments reported in specialist publications. Also, the method was applied and experienced in services. Should be noted that all other methods have been developed based on SERVQUAL conceptual architecture.

Despite considerable work undertaken in this research stream, there is no consensus as to which of the measurement scales is best suited to measure service quality (Morrison, 2004).

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