

The Impact of the Ukrainian War on the Resilience and Sustainability of the Local Public Administration in Romania: An Exploratory Study

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***Abstract:** This article presents applied-theoretical research, based on a quantitative and qualitative methodology, regarding the institutional transformations produced at the level of a representative sample of local public authorities in Romania, in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Furthermore, this paper highlights the difficulties of meeting the functional requirements (human resources, logistics, etc.) for the proper provision of public services. It proposes a set of recommendations for increasing the administrative capacity of local public authorities in crisis situations in order to ensure their organisational resilience and the sustainability of responses offered to the communities they represent. The article is based on the assumption that the war in Ukraine had a significant impact on the current activities of local public institutions, local budgets, investments, and public procurement procedures. It aims to identify the transformations that occurred at the level of local public institutions in the past year, as well as the nature and size of the impact.*

***Keywords:** Russian-Ukrainian war, impact, local public administration, institutional resilience, sustainability.*

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the entire international community witnessed a historic event, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The war has already caused tens of thousands of deaths and led millions of refugees to cross the borders into neighbouring countries, including Romania (UNCHR, 2023). The armed conflict in Ukraine has produced global effects, both economic – inflation, banking system (Dario, *et al.*, 2022) – and social (Stukalo and Simakkhova, 2018, as it affected the security and stability of Europe and of the entire world, while also generating an energy crisis and affecting the labour market (Hutter and Weber, 2022). The European Union and its member states, like

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many other countries of the world, are committed to supporting Ukraine in various ways: i.e., by imposing economic sanctions on Russia (European Union, 2023), aimed at diminishing its armed capability; by offering military support to Ukraine (Ukraine Support Tracker, 2023), or aiding its population (European Commission, 2023). This has led to the direct involvement of the public administration in supporting the Ukrainian population at various levels.

In this context, in Romania the localities and public authorities were faced with a challenging situation (the arrival of refugees, the explosion in the prices of energy, fuels and building materials), as Romania shares a border of 649.4 km with Ukraine, more precisely, 273.8 km of land border, 343.9 km of river border and 31.7 km of maritime border (Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2020). Moreover, being characterised by a high degree of complexity and uncertainty, these developments could not have been anticipated by public policy makers, so as to include appropriate procedures in local public policy documents (strategies, public policy proposals, plans), or other programmatic documents (risk/emergency plan). Thus, the Romanian central and local public administrations were compelled to adapt to the new context, to update their strategic and operational management measures (investments, resource allocation, etc.). In this paper our research question is: why has the local public administration responded using complementary measures in the context of the Ukrainian refugees' crisis in order to see how resilient it was. We have seen that at the governmental level, several types/sets of measures have been taken since then.

A first type consisted of organisational measures taken to establish coordination and supervision structures (*decisional structure / task-force*) under the authority of the Prime Minister, who plays a coordinating role at national level: *The Commission of Ukraine*, a task-force led by the Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, who has the role of supervising the activities of the ministries involved in managing the influx of refugees; *The Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group*, “led by a Counsellor of State, has been established to ensure the strategic framework of humanitarian response and to facilitate cooperation between agencies and partners at national, European and international levels”.

The second set of measures consists of planning measures: *The National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine who benefit from temporary protection in Romania* (OUG, no. 100, 2022) supplemented by the operational intervention plans of the territorial and administrative divisions (based on the local needs assessment).

Another type of measures are the intervention measures, that fall into two categories:

- *emergency assistance* for newly arrived refugees from Ukraine, coordinated by the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU), that covers transport, emergency shelter, food, healthcare services, etc. The initiative has also received support from the population, NGOs, or the business environment;
- *protection of the refugee population from Ukraine*, who decided to settle in Romania. It ensures their inclusion in the medium and long term. The interventions focused on *healthcare services, education, jobs, housing, social policy, youth policies*.

The fourth set of measures comprised measures for the transfer of competences to local public administration authorities. It established which categories of actions centred on Ukrainian refugees should be under the responsibility of the local public administration (OUG, no.100, 2022). The following actions are mentioned: courses on entrepreneurship in Romania designed for the target group; consultancy for establishing a business or a start-up; training and support sessions for employers interested in foreign labour; identification of buildings owned by public authorities that could be employed for housing services; identifying premises and logistical support for children who want to benefit from schooling in the Ukrainian system; ensuring access to digital education and technology (including access technology) for students; developing skills in coping with and managing trauma situations at the target group level; information activities, methodological guidance of local public administration authorities, to speed up the response and increase the capacity of managing the assistance provided to the target group.

On the whole, the measures were mainly aimed at the social and family integration of the refugees, as well as the provision of primary assistance, development of their skills in various fields of activity, the facilitation and integration of their entrepreneurial initiative.

To fulfil these responsibilities, the Romanian local authorities have used (depending on the requests) the available resources previously allocated to other ends, thus impacting current activities, local budgets, investments, or public procurement procedures.

As an element of novelty, the article provides an integrated analysis (the first of its kind) of the sustainability and resilience of the Romanian local public administration in a crisis situation generated by a massive influx of refugees. In this analysis we have taken into account the fact that Romania is not a country of destination, but rather a country of transit for the refugees.

Specialised literature review

The responses that the public authorities (from the national, local, and European levels) provided to the crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine have been unprecedented and have resulted in rapid changes in the local public administrations, in terms of their policies and practices. Thus, the immediate concern has been to guarantee the protection and fundamental rights of those fleeing the war in Ukraine. Yet, the solidarity underlying the European response has put the local and regional infrastructure of the border towns and regions to the test (CoR, 2022, p. 1). Consequently, the wave of refugees from Ukraine has placed the local public administration in Romania on the front line. Moreover, the latter had to adapt to a new reality marked by uncertainties and to manage the influx of refugees, while continuing to provide services to its own citizens under sustainable conditions. Therefore, the local public administrations had to deal with the constant changes currently affecting the society, while ensuring the well-being of the citizens. However, achieving an effective governance is more than a technical matter for the public administration (Meuleman, 2021, p. 5). In this context, we aim to pinpoint the various methods employed by Romanian local public administrations in coping with the refugee crisis and to measure their impact on the

organisational sustainability and resilience through an exploratory study.

The literature presents different approaches to the concept of resilience, for example, the technical perspective (Peng *et al.*, 2017), the ecosystem perspective (Holling, 1973; Gunderson, 2000), the social science perspective (De Bruijne, Boin and Van Eeten, 2010), without, however, providing a universally accepted definition of this concept. In fact, Bruneckiene *et al.* (2018) state that “resilience is a complex concept that cannot be analysed from a single perspective.” One of the most well-known definitions of the resilience refers to the ability of a system to manage shocks from the external environment (Bruneckiene *et al.*, 2018; Wojtowicz, 2020; Gunderson, 2000), by implementing changes and maintaining its basic functions and structures. Moreover, when crises occur, the system will try to use all existing resources to develop itself. The Resilience Alliance defines resilience as “the capability of a system to suffer shocks while essentially maintaining the same function, structure, feedback and, hence, its identity” (Kirchhoff *et al.*, 2010).

The emergence of resilience in governance studies coincided with an increased focus on the impact of crises, disasters and security. The literature dedicated to organisational management (Hoegl and Hartmann, 2021; Boin and Lodge, 2016; Boin and Van Eeten, 2013; Lengnick-Hall, Beck and Lengnick-Hall, 2011) provides a comprehensive perspective on the concept of resilience. From the perspective of the studies on governance and organisations, two main directions can be outlined (Lengnick-Hall, Beck and Lengnick-Hall, 2011):

- **Bouncing back** – the ability of an organisation to recover and return to its pre-crisis state which, in principle, is considered to be a state of equilibrium;
- **Bouncing forward** – an organisation’s ability not only to return to its pre-crisis state, but also to capitalise on new opportunities, going beyond a simple recovery plan, and to develop new capabilities.

This paper adopts Edson’s definition of resilience (Edson, 2012), namely “adaptation that supports both successful achievement of objectives and learning for future training and planning”. This definition is consistent with the views of authors such as Brand and Jax (2007), De Bruijne, Boin and Van Eeten, (2010), who included adaptability, learning, and transformation in the connotation of this concept, thus shifting from the metaphor of “bouncing back” to that of “bouncing forward”, or Giustiniano *et al.* (2018), who stated that, in the case of organisations, “resilience involves not only resilience to stress factors, but also learning from them”.

And even though, for a significant period of time, the use of this concept was limited to the academic community, the recent crises have prompted its introduction into public policies (the responses to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine, including at the level of the Romanian local public administrations, serve as an example). With regard to the public administration, the concept of resilience was utilised to explain how administrations manage crises or extreme events. At the local level, research (Shae and Maythorne, 2013; Lambrou and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2022; Therrien, *et al.*, 2021; Sakurai and Chughtai, 2020; Duchek, 2020) has shown that resilience can be employed as a comprehensive strategic framework that connects different responsibilities of various local public authorities, assesses their strategic elements, or, in the sense of a proactive approach, the ability to prepare for future crises.

Some theorists in the field have viewed resilience as an “important tool for measuring sustainability” (Brand and Jax (2007). The adaptation and transformation abilities are key concepts of resilient thinking (Walker, *et al.*, 2004), but so far, they have rarely been approached together, albeit the cumulative treatment of these concepts could help us understand the capabilities needed to overcome blockages, or create and implement new desirable trajectories (Elmqvist *et al.*, 2019, p. 271). Anderson (2010, p. 778) referred to resilience and sustainability as being a “paradoxical process”, because on the one hand, the anticipated future becomes “the cause and justification of certain actions, in the here and now”, and on the other hand “the future can be influenced by these actions”.

The sustainability of the responses and the resilience of the local public authorities have become even more important, given the uncertainty over the consequences of the war and the influx of refugees. The governance must be adaptive and resilient in the face of various crises. Moreover, during crises, public institutions must assist all the members of the society. They should provide support and protection not only to vulnerable groups and to those at risk, but also to other citizens who can contribute to managing the situation (Profiroiu and Nastacă, 2021, p. 2). In this context, by developing their resilience capacity, the local public administrations can provide answers for sustainable development.

The organisational principles of the local public administration and their proximity to the needs and expectations of citizens justify why the local level has significant competencies and influence in determining whether or not policies and programmes under their supervision create conditions for sustainability. Moreover, a sustainable public administration is a prerequisite for providing public services at adequate quality standards. It is generally accepted that sustainability is composed of the economic, environmental, and social dimensions, and these three pillars have been used for the sustainability analysis also in the field of administration and public policies (Fiorino, 2010; Hawkins and Wang, 2012; Keen, Mahanty and Sauvage, 2006; Devashree and Paterson, 2008). As a result, when discussing the sustainability of the public administration, given the previous research, two directions can be identified:

- The extent to which sustainability is included in the public policy process, as a tool for holistic societal planning;
- Ensuring the sustainability of the organisation and functioning of the administrative apparatus.

In this paper, the focus will be on the analysis of the impact of crises (especially, the one triggered by the war in Ukraine), on the sustainability of the Romanian local public administrations, and more specifically on their functioning.

From Žurga’s perspective (2017), sustainable public administration is defined as “public administration that is able to continuously sustain its management, both in turbulent and normal times.” The same author considers that sustainable public administration is indispensably connected to social responsibility and its basic principles: responsibility, transparency, ethical behaviour, efficiency and effectiveness, respect for stakeholders’ interests, etc. In searching for the attributes of a sustainable public administration or a sustainability-focused management model at the local public administration level, some authors (Žurga, 2017; Pînzaru, Săniuță and Sălăgeanu, 2022)

have outlined the following elements:

- Innovation;
- Continuous improvement at the organisational level;
- Structural changes in the system.

However, the sustainability of local public administrations depends on a number of internal factors, such as the maturity, agility and typology of the organisation (e.g., organisations that learn or do not learn), the profile of its human resources, internal processes, etc. Therefore, in order to cope with the complex problems of sustainability, local public administrations must benefit from good institutional capacity, i.e., institutions should have sufficient human, financial, information, and material resources, skills, mechanisms, and procedures, to make decisions oriented towards institutional performance, integrating all the dimensions of sustainability (human, social, economic, and environmental). In this paper, the institutional capacity refers to an organisation's ability to set goals, acquire resources, satisfy its customers or citizens, configure, or reconfigure internal processes and make decisions, or adapt to change.

Regarding the sustainable governance indicators (SGI), for Romania they indicate a slight decrease in the components of consolidated democracy and good governance and an almost insignificant increase in the sustainable policy component (SGI, 2022). However, Romania is one of the most low-ranking of all the 41 monitored states. The SGI' analysis released in 2022, provides the following scores for Romania: (a) sustainable policies (economic, social and environmental policies) - 5.10 (rank 37); (b) robust democracy (electoral processes, access to information, rule of law, civil rights and political liberties) - 4.90 (rank 38) and (c) good governance (executive capacity and executive accountability) - 4.68 (rank 38). Romania fell into the bottom ranks internationally in the areas of economic and social policies and into the lower-middle ranks for environmental policies. A similar situation is with regard to democracy quality. Its score on this measure has declined by 0.3 points since 2014. The lowest score is for executive capacity, one of the good governance components, particularly because the policymaking has suffered from a lack of strategic planning.

This highlights the need to strengthen the efforts of the Romanian public administration, including the local ones, to improve administrative capacity and integrate the reform elements specific to a sustainable and resilient public administration. Both the crisis of the Ukrainian refugees and the previous crises (COVID-19, the financial and economic crisis of 2008) have shown that local public administrations (that are at the forefront of the emergency response, given their direct interaction with the beneficiaries) must learn to respond appropriately to various problems in their field of activity, in a short time, under pressure and uncertainty and with sustainable solutions. Moreover, in times of crisis, the need to learn from potential failures becomes essential for the Romanian public organisations, faced with a major lack of resources and a predominantly bureaucratic culture (Dogaru (Cruceanu), 2021).

Methodology

Data collection

For testing the research hypothesis, a mixed, quantitative, and qualitative methodology was chosen to respond to the exploratory and theoretical-empirical approach of the study. The primary data collection techniques and tools used were the questionnaire and analysis of documents (public policy documents). In the first stage, a systematic review of the specialised literature was carried out, aiming to identify the convergence elements for the concepts “organisational resilience” and “sustainability” in the case of public administration in general, and of local public administration in particular. The results of this phase informed the second stage of the research, namely the construction and application of the research tool for the collection and analysis of empirical data.

The empirical research was conducted through an anonymous online survey, self-administered through a survey platform. The platform centralised the data and generated the graphs.

Measures

The questionnaire used is an omnibus type and comprises a total of 14 questions, including four close-ended, five open-ended questions, and five semi-open questions. It is structured into four parts.

The first part of the questionnaire (4 questions) is dedicated to analysing the resilience of the local public administration under the socio-economic impact of the war in Ukraine. The section starts with a semi-open question measuring the respondents' perception of the extent to which the main areas of activity / development projects that fall within their exclusive competence (collection of revenues to the local budget, administrative works, social assistance, public procurement / investments, repayment of loans) or shared competence (public order, education, housing, emergency situations) of local authorities have been affected. The question thus measures also the impact of the armed conflict in Ukraine on the public procurement/investments carried out by the institution, the answers being of great relevance because they come from the budget managers themselves. Also in this section, to establish the possible direct/indirect causality between the consequences of this war and the organisational and functional problems faced by the local administration, the respondents mentioned whether or not there were refugees from Ukraine in the locality they represent. If the answer was yes, by means of a semi-open question, respondents indicated whether they had provided food, accommodation, clothing and personal items, educational support, health care services, legal assistance, guidance and orientation, community integration (on the labour market) services, transfer to other localities/countries, and they also specified the number of beneficiaries.

The second part of the questionnaire (4 questions) focused on identifying the type and level of resources used and intended both for managing the refugee problem in the locality and for providing aid to Ukraine. Furthermore, through a semi-open question, respondents were invited to identify the main institutional transformations (organisational and functional) generated at the level of the institution for managing the problem of Ukrainian refugees in the locality.

The third part of the questionnaire (3 questions) focused on the connection between the resilience of the local public administration and the sustainability of its actions, with reference to the resources committed in 2023 to managing the refugee problem. It also collected the respondents' comments on the effects of the war in Ukraine on the institution they manage.

The last section of the questionnaire (3 questions) aimed to identify certain characteristics of the sample represented by administrative-territorial units (UATs) (rank of the locality, number of inhabitants and proximity to border crossing points with Ukraine).

Sample demographics

The data from UNHCR shows that as of mid-March 2023 there were 8,113,170 registered Ukrainian refugees. Concerning this issue, in Romania the situation was as follows: 120,787 refugees from Ukraine had applied for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes; 110,106 individual refugees from Ukraine had been registered in the country; 2,091,044 refugees had entered Romania through the border crossings with Ukraine (since February 28, 2022), while 1,700,818 had entered Ukraine through those border crossings (since February 28, 2022) (UNHCR). The total length of Romania's border with Ukraine is 649.4 km, of which 273.8 km constitutes the land border, 343.9 km the river border, and 31.7 km the maritime border (Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2020 p.111).

In this context, the sample of the study was represented by 76 administrative-territorial units (15 municipalities, 3 cities, and 58 communes), and their representatives, more specifically mayors (respondents from his/her specialised body), who also act as the principal credit officers.

The funnel filter technique was used to gather more specific details from various geographic areas. Firstly, the aim was to cover all 8 NUTS 2 regions of Romania (development regions, without legal personality): North-West, North-East, South-West, South-East, South, West, Centre, Bucharest and Ilfov.

Subsequently, the counties concerned by the refugees' influx and comprising the 6 border points with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova were considered because they were more likely to receive a large number of refugees. Thus, two development regions (North-East and South-East) were covered. Subsequently, the counties targeted by the outflow of refugees and comprising the 20 border points with Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary were considered. Four other development regions were also covered (North-West, South-West, South, West).

For each border point 3 municipalities/towns/communes were selected. Similarly, for each of the two Development Regions, Centre and Bucharest and Ilfov, 3 municipalities/towns/communes were selected (including Bucharest as the capital of Romania). We choose this number in order to ensure a broader representativity.

Therefore, 90 municipalities/cities/communes were selected. The final sample of the study consisted of 76 administrative-territorial units (15 municipalities, 3 cities and 58 communes) and their representatives, namely mayors (respondents from his/her specialised body), who also act as main credit release authority.

In terms of proximity, 10 administrative-territorial units represented by the respondents are located in the immediate vicinity of the border crossing points with Ukraine, eight administrative-territorial units are at a distance ranging from 51 to 100 km, twelve administrative-territorial units are located at a distance between 101-200 km from the border with Ukraine, while 9 administrative-territorial units are within the range of 201-300 km away from that border, 21 administrative-territorial units within the range of 301-500 km, and 12 administrative-territorial units are located at more than 500 km away (4 respondents have been unable to estimate the distance). The data was collected in the period 10-31.01.2023.

Results

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, we have tried to reveal, on the one hand, the extent to which the local public administration reacted to the external challenge generated by the refugee crisis, what the said reaction consisted of, whether the local authorities have taken administrative measures specific to the situation under consideration, and what priority areas and public services have been directly and indirectly impacted in their attempt to provide specialised assistance to refugees.

In shaping the above objectives, we have started from a brief analysis of the intervention capacity of the local public administration, grounded on the collected data, fact which allowed us to identify possible costs and reallocations of resources, generated by the new administrative challenges.

The structure of the questionnaires has been especially designed to pinpoint the affected areas, and to identify the measures adopted, the budgetary impact and the degree to which the institution's development projects have been impaired.

Regarding the typology of the administrative-territorial units where the questionnaire has been completed, it can be observed that the vast majority of the answers, namely 76 respondents, have come from the communes (76 respondent administrative- territorial units), which were followed by the municipalities (19 respondents) and cities (3 respondents).

The above information is relevant for this research, as it indicates the administrative-territorial units with the largest number of respondents. Those units have different limitations in terms of their administrative capacity, their human and financial resources, and knowing these aspects allows for a correct dimensioning of the analysed responses, since 50% of the Romanian administrative-territorial units respondents have been directly affected by the hosting of refugees and the provision of specialised services, while the remaining 50% have been indirectly affected, as they had to provide only administrative/logistical support.

In order to identify the main areas affected by the refugee crisis during the period under assessment, we defined a summary characteristic according to 9 components: c1. Collection of revenues to the local budget, c2. Administrative, c3. Social assistance, c4. Public order, c5. Education, c6. Housing, c7. Emergency situations, c8. Public procurement, c9. Repayment of loans.

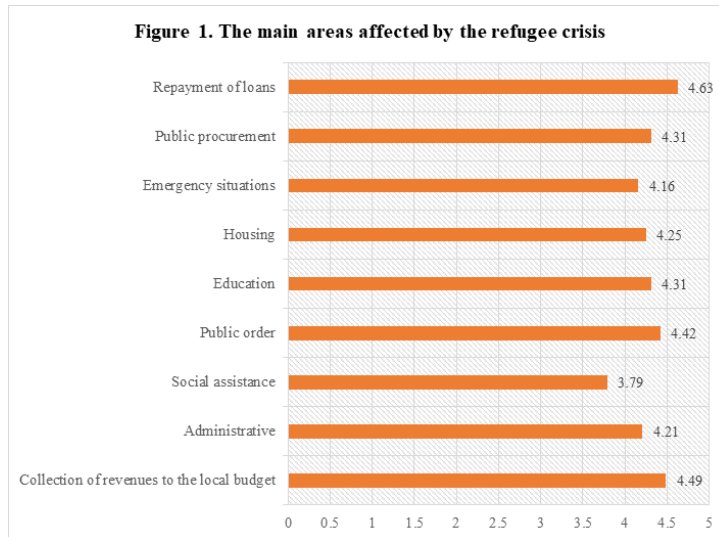
For each of the nine variables the values assigned are in the range {0,1,2,3,4,5}:

if the value of this variable is equal to zero it shows no influence on the area; if the value is 1 it shows very little influence; if the value is 2 it shows little influence; if the value is 3 it shows moderate influence; if the value is 4 it shows influence to a large extent; if the value is 5 it shows influence to a very large extent. Therefore, the higher the value of the variable V, the greater the impact on the area.

The means of the nine primary variables calculated based on the recorded values are:

C1 Collection of revenues to the local budget	4,49
C2 Administrative	4,21
C3 Social assistance	3,79
C4 Public order	4,42
C5 Education	4,31
C6 Housing	4,25
C7 Emergency situations	4,16
C8 Public procurement	4,31
C9 Repayment of loans	4,63

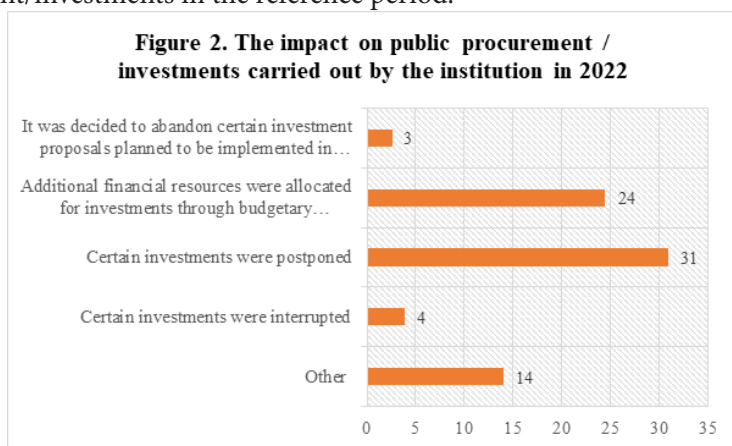
During the reference period, the main area affected by the refugee crisis was the financial/budgetary area, the local public administrations in Romania signalling difficulties in terms of repayment of loans ($V=4.63$), and collection of revenues to the local budget ($V=4.49$). (Figure 1)



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

The two aforementioned problems are interdependent and indicate pressure on the local budgets, which is evidenced by the dynamic of providing public services such as: public order ($V=4.42$), education ($V=4.31$), response to emergency situations ($V=4.16$). This is also validated by an increase in the support activities for the provision of public services, namely in the administrative sector ($V=4.21$), and in the public procurement/investment sector ($V=4.31$).

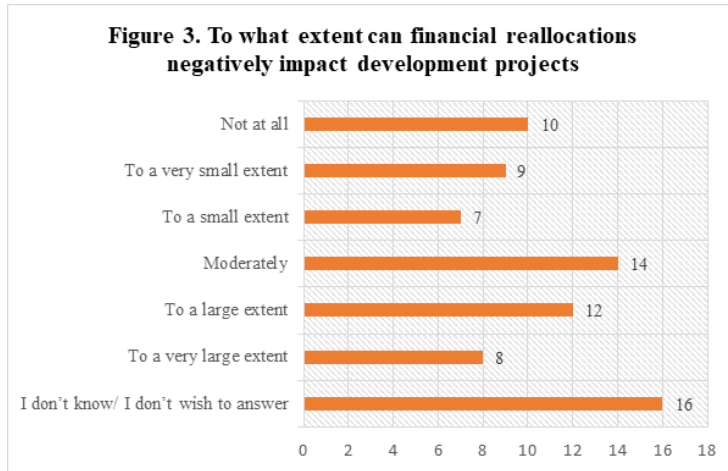
The initial analysis showed that the local public administrations have been compelled to rethink their priorities and short-term objectives, by reallocating budgetary sources and prioritising activities aimed at addressing the administrative challenges posed by the refugee crisis. Moreover, we consider that this is backed by the data (provided by the local public administrations) regarding the impact on public procurement/investments in the reference period.



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

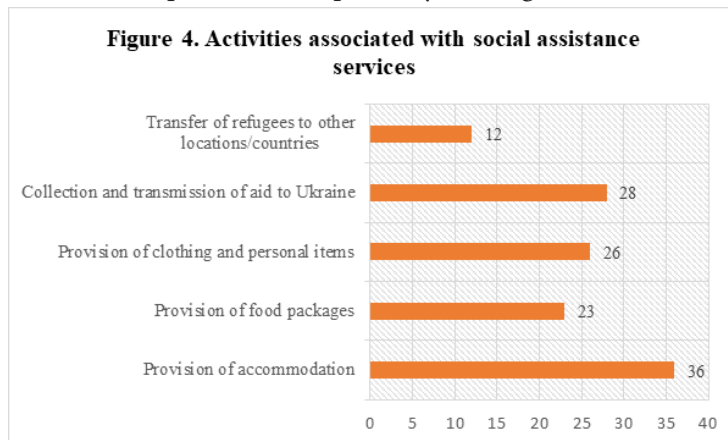
The data analysis revealed that the most significant impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war / the Ukrainian refugee crisis on public procurement consisted in the postponement of certain scheduled / budgeted investments (31 respondents said that). This has affected most of the Romanian administrative-territorial units that took part in the survey. 24 of the respondents indicated that a reallocation of budgetary resources had been necessary, and thus budgetary corrections were required. Furthermore, the information on the cessation (4 respondents), or abandonment (3 respondents) of certain investments only confirms a reclassification of priorities at the local level, at least in the short term (See *Figure 2*).

The analysis also highlighted that the majority of respondents (more than half of them) perceived, to a lesser or greater extent, the risks associated with the allocation of funds from the institution's budget to manage the refugee problem: this reallocation was deemed to affect the institution's capacity to finance development projects in the medium- and long-term (See *Figure 3*).



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

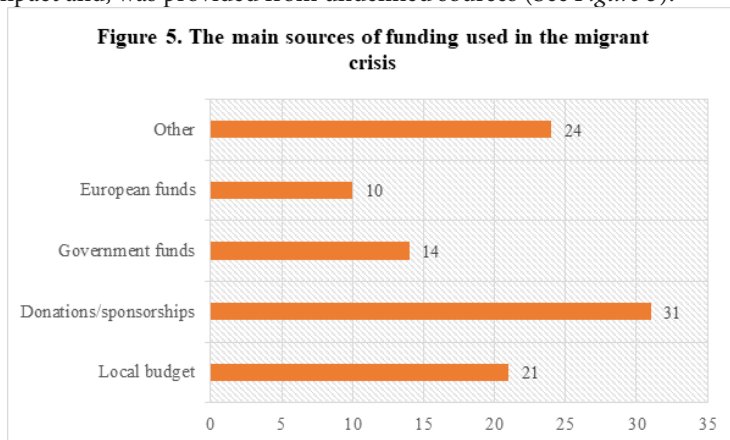
According to the information presented in Figure 1, social assistance services have also been requested ($V=3.79$) and as regards the activities related to them, the analysis of the results obtained showed that it was necessary to provide accommodation (almost half of the respondents), and food packages (23 respondents). The efforts have also been channelled towards providing personal goods (26 respondents), collecting and sending aid to Ukraine (28 respondents), and transferring the refugees to other localities/countries (12 respondents), respectively (See Figure 4).



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

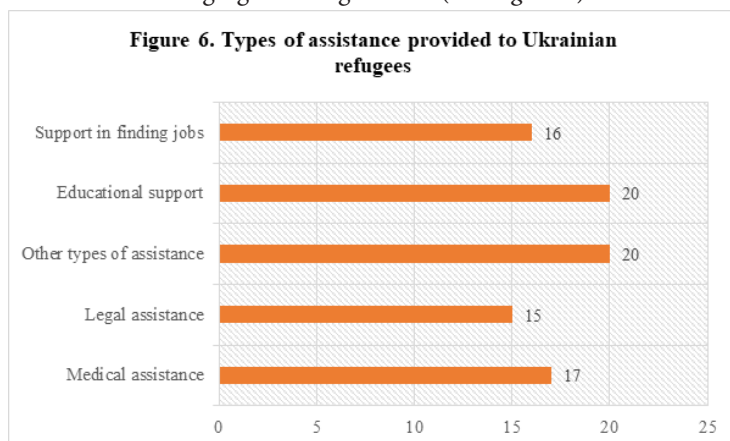
It can be noted that, initially, the assistance offered by the Romanian local public administrations (both directly and indirectly involved in the management of the refugee crisis), focused on the essential public services, designed to meet several primary needs, and to ensure a safety and stability framework for the persons concerned. This activity involved both an administrative/logistical effort and a financial/budgetary effort. As regards the financial effort,

according to the analysed data, the main source of funding was represented by donations (31 respondents), fact which indicates an extensive involvement of the civil society in the process of assisting the refugees. while the second source of funding (representing 24 respondents), with a significant impact and, was provided from undefined sources (See Figure 5).



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

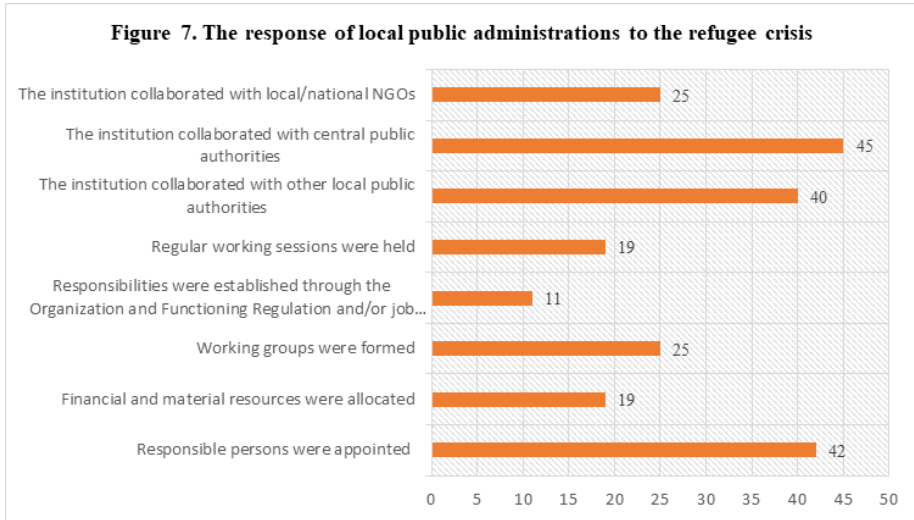
With regard to public resources, it can be seen that the main financial resources have been sourced from local budgets (21 respondents), followed by government funds (14 respondents), and European funds (10 respondents). Secondly, it may be observed that the local public administrations have also been involved in providing educational (20 respondents), medical (17 respondents), legal (15 respondents), and other types of assistance (20 respondents), facts which illustrate the cross-sectoral character of the engagement of the Romanian local public administrations in managing the refugee crisis (See Figure 6).



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

Concerning the responsiveness of the local public administrations, which refers to the activation of the internal working procedures, their functioning, the mobilisation of the administrative apparatus and of the human resources, the cooperation at the level of the

administrative territorial units analysed, one can observe the existence of a rapid and integrated reaction at the level of the administrative system (Figure 7).



Source: Authors' representation based on questionnaire responses.

Given the existing legal framework, that requires mandatory compliance with specific rules and administrative procedures for the human resources departments, adequate administrative involvement could be ensured in order to assign additional responsibilities to employees able to manage the situation. A first measure identified implied the modification of the job descriptions for certain categories of civil servants (11 respondents). This allowed for the designation of persons directly responsible for managing activities specific to the refugee crisis (42 respondents). The two integrated measures had been preceded by the establishment of working groups (25 respondents), regular work meetings (19 respondents), activities that ensured the financial and material resources needed to manage the situation (19 respondents). Furthermore, the activation of the collaboration mechanisms has made possible a wide cooperation within the administrative system, both at the local and central levels (40 respondents, 45 respondents), as well as the involvement of the civil society through the development of partnership relations with NGOs (25 respondents).

There was therefore a form of coordination from the central level, as demonstrated by the high percentage of localities that collaborated with the central authorities, but also a rapid adaptation of local institutions to the new context generated by the armed conflict, as demonstrated by internal organisational measures, adaptation of working procedures or allocation of resources. There is also a strong collaboration with NGOs and civil society in general, which was less noticeable in previous activity at local level.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the sustainability and resilience of the Romanian public organisations in an integrated approach. We have carried out an exploratory study at the level of the local public administrations, given the incomplete covering of these

issues at this level, despite the existence of a vast literature dedicated to both resilience and sustainability. The relevance of this theme is evidenced by the fact that many of the strategic and public policy documents of the European Union and NATO mention the concepts of resilience and sustainability. Our research question was: why has the local public administration responded using complementary measures in the context of the Ukrainian refugees' crisis. Our goal was to understand how resilient the local administrations have been during the crisis.

In this context, the study succinctly presents the way in which the local public administration structures in Romania have reacted, in their attempt to deal with the complex administrative challenges posed by the crisis of the Ukrainian refugees generated by the Russian-Ukrainian war.

From the very beginning, the qualitative research has highlighted that, although the concept of resilience is not new, there is no single definition for it. Its meaning depends on the scientific branch where it is used. At organisational level, studies have focused on the organisation's ability to cope with an uncertain environment, requiring that the organisation adopts new characteristics, among which adaptability and flexibility. Therefore, under such conditions (uncertain environment), the capacity for ensuring sustainability/a sustainable development can be an indicator of the organisational resilience and of the decision-makers' strategic outlook.

The organisational resilience refers to an organisation's ability to handle challenging situations through rapid response and recovery, and/or further development. However, when it comes to public organisations, the characteristics of the above definition must be correlated with the principles and values of the public sector, ultimately aimed at ensuring a sustainable development. Therefore, in order to be resilient, public organisations must function properly and smoothly, so as to ensure the security and safety of the society as a whole. Moreover, they must have the ability and necessary agility to cope with threats from the internal and the external environment.

We understand that the organisational resilience is interconnected with the sustainability, all the more since, as early as 2006, Bartle and Leuenberger (2006) described sustainable development as "the new perspective of public policy and administration".

As regards the factors and elements conducive to organisational resilience, there are several studies dedicated to this subject that have been conducted previously (Tierney, 2003; Kantur and Isery-Say, 2015; McManus, 2008).

Both the current research and prior research studies have highlighted that, in an ever-changing environment, organisations in general, and public organisations, in particular, must respond quickly to challenges, and enhance their capacity to be resilient. The latter enables them to prepare for unforeseen events and to recover from crises. Therefore, the development and implementation of public policies aimed both at mitigating the risks associated with serious crises and at preventing their collateral effects can be a way to strengthen resilience and sustainability. Furthermore, developing a culture that incorporates continuous improvement, through the implementation of the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, and a practice geared toward organisational resilience can help strengthen sustainable development, and the sustainability of decision-making.

The capacity for resilience of the local public administration has thus been analysed from an empirical perspective. More precisely, it has been assessed from the perspective of the respondents to the applied questionnaire. Their subjective perceptions and appraisals of the

intervention of the administrative structures in the management of the refugee crisis represent also one of the limitations of this research.

It is necessary to specify that most of the respondents to the questionnaire, namely 58, come from rural areas, i.e., from territorial-administrative units designated as communes within the Romanian administrative system. We consider that our analysis is all the more important since its underlying data has been provided by representatives of the local public administrations. It offers an overview of the responsiveness of the local administrative structures, that are not usually characterised by a high degree of flexibility and adaptability in managing such complex situations. However, the data presented here showcases the rapid response of the administrative structures to the refugee crisis. The management of this crisis has required an integrated and interdisciplinary approach, which would not have been possible without the active and sustained involvement of citizens and non-profit organisations.

Nevertheless, the reaction of the administrative structures was enabled by the changes to the budget structure, which allowed the reallocation of funds, and their channelling into public services directly involved in the management of the crisis. The reallocation of financial and human resources empowered a large part of the logistic-administrative apparatus to engage in the crisis management, fact which had a negative collateral effect represented by the risk of delaying or cancelling certain development projects (*Figure 2* and *Figure 3*). Those delays have generated costs that cannot be quantified in correlation with the impact on the local development process, and even less assumed by the exogenous triggers. It should be noted, however, that the measure targeting budget reallocations was strictly limited in time, i.e., for 2022, while for the year 2023 most of the respondents (67 respondents) declared that they would not include amounts for the management of the refugee crisis in the draft budget for 2023.

We can therefore infer that the measures identified through the questionnaire have enabled the local administrative structures and public services to provide a quick and appropriate response to the refugee crisis, and to adequately manage the situation.

This empirical study reaffirms the conclusions of previous research (Pal, Torstenson and Matilla, 2014), namely that crises primarily affect the material and financial resources of an organisation, and then its capacity to utilise its human resources. Thus, the availability of resources, along with the procedures and human resource policies can affect the resilience and long-term sustainability. As this was an exploratory study the data and conclusions from the article can help understand the responses of local public administration from Eastern and Central Europe to the Ukrainian crisis, including through comparative analysis between the states in the region.

In this world full of uncertainty and turbulence, public organisations must become learning organisations, characterised by adaptability, flexibility, agility, and responsiveness, in order to pursue their mission unabated.

This study has highlighted that resilience and sustainability are becoming important for individuals, organisations, and society as a whole. It presents some of the steps taken by the Romanian public administration to put these aspects into practice. This has entailed, for example, the development of the Romanian Sustainability Code (2022), following the German model. And yet, the research emphasises that the local public administration in Romania, despite its relatively prompt response to the challenges of the crisis of the Ukrainian refugees, cannot be labelled as a resilient *bouncing-forward system*, since the collected data does not reveal the lessons learned and their incorporation in the public policy process. On the contrary,

a significant part of the sample respondents stated that they were not considering any future measures, including financial one.

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