

## THE ROLE OF FEMALE LEADERS IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

### **Abstract**

Contemporary organizations need leaders who possess feminine characteristics, like: motivation, concern for others, team work and a consensus style of management. From this perspective, in an environment which is continuously changing, it is considered that women became more suited for leadership positions than men are, and the impact of gender over leadership became a subject which should be analyzed from the management of change perspective.

This paper studies the role of female leaders in management of change in order to discover if the public organizations, such as city halls, led by female leaders are more opened towards change. The main objective of the paper is the analysis of female leaders' role in management of change in the city halls of Romania. The research methodology consists of documents analysis method. The study analyses the situation from several city halls led by female mayors, in order to establish the amount of change projects developed and if female leaders are adopting more efficient and rapidly, the process of change. The result of the study should reveal a different perspective concerning female leaders in the context of organizational changes in public administration.

**Keywords:** leadership, management of change, female leaders, city halls, public administration

**JEL CODES:** M1, M5

## ROLUL FEMEII LIDER DIN PERSPECTIVA MANAGEMENTULUI SCHIMBĂRII ÎN ORGANIZAȚIILE PUBLICE

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### **Rezumat**

Organizațiile contemporane au nevoie de lideri care să posede caracteristici considerate a fi feminine, precum: motivația, preocuparea pentru membrii echipei, capacitatea de lucru în echipă sau consensul. Din această perspectivă, într-un mediu aflat într-o continuă schimbare, se consideră că femeile au devenit mai potrivite pentru ocuparea poziției de lider, decât bărbații și impactul genului asupra leadership-ului a devenit un subiect ce trebuie analizat și din perspectiva managementului schimbării.

Această lucrare are drept scop studierea rolului femeii lider în contextul managementului schimbării, pentru a descoperi dacă organizațiile publice conduse de către femei, precum primăriile, sunt mai deschise către schimbare. Obiectivul general al lucrării este analiza rolului femeii lider în schimbarea organizațională, în primăriile din România. Metodologia cercetării constă în utilizarea metodei de analiză a documentelor. Studiul analizează situația din unele primării din Romania, conduse de către femei, pentru a descoperi proiectele de schimbare pe care acestea le-au implementat și pentru a vedea dacă femeile lider adoptă mai eficient și mai rapid, procesul de schimbare. Rezultatele studiului aduc o perspectivă nouă privind femeile lider în contextul managementului schimbării și rolul acestora în procesul de schimbare organizațională.

**Cuvinte cheie:** cheie: leadership, managementul schimbării, femei în rolul de lider, primării, administrație publică.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper gathers three concepts that are rarely put together in the same place, the role of female leaders, change management and public administration. If the first one was very discussed in the academic area and a lot of studies have been conducted until present, now is time to discuss about leadership and gender from the management of change perspective. Change is needed nowadays, in all environments, because everything from economic context, to social context is changing, so the organizations must keep up with the new trends. And leaders' behavior and actions must be in concordance with the new situations that appear in order for organizations to resist into an environment which is continuously changing. If organizations from private sector can keep up with innovation and changes, public administration has always had problems with adopting change. Institutions from public administration are still functioning in “an old fashion way”, because of bureaucracy, legislation and the inflexible behavior of leaders and civil servants. Leaders from public organizations are the key for reforming the public administration and for improving the social and economic conditions from a country, county or city.

Based on the fact that in contemporary organizations, a leadership style based on characteristics shown by female leaders, like motivation, concern for others, team work and consensus style of management is required, women became more suited than men to serve as leaders in an environment which is continuously changing. In this context, leaders and the organizations they manage, no matter if they are public or private, will be evaluated based on the ability of managing change effectively and efficiently. Therefore, the impact of gender over leadership should be analyzed from the management of change perspective and the role of female leaders in the management of change context should be a very important one.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper studies the role of female mayors in management of change in order to discover if the city halls led by female leaders are more opened towards change. The main objective of the paper is the analysis of female mayors' role in management of change in city halls of Romania. The second objective of this article is the study of female leaders' role in literature review. The research methodology consists of documents analysis method which will be gathering data from official and unofficial documents and studies on the subject. We will analyse the situation from several city halls led by women, in order to establish the projects developed by female leaders and if they are more efficient

and fast in the process of change. The result of the study should reveal a different perspective concerning female leaders in the context of organizational changes.

### 3. THE LITERATURE REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND GENDER. THEORIES AND STUDIES

This study firstly approaches the role of female leaders in the literature review. When women became interested in occupying decision-making positions, the situation has drawn the attention of many researchers who wanted to reveal if women were suitable for these positions and if they could lead organizations in the same way or differently as men could do it. The idea that women could carry out a leadership position in a different manner that men would do it became rapidly the purpose of many research papers which revealed different results (Cuadrado, Morales and Recio, 2008, Eagly and Carli, 2003a, 2003b, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, Wood and Eagly, 2010). The studies regarding gender differences in leadership styles revealed from the incongruity between female role and leader role (Eagly and Karau, 2002) to the idea that women could become better leaders than men (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Loden, 1985; Rosener, 1995).

Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen (2003) affirmed that “the possibility that women and men differ in their typical leadership behavior is important because leaders’ own behavior is a major determinant of their effectiveness and chances for advancement”. Reviewing the literature, it could be observed that the perception about women as leaders, changed, as many new variables had been included in the realized studies. Female leaders did not behave different from their male counterparts only because of their gender and variables as the organizational culture, the position of women in society, the political, economic and cultural context, the masculine values which dominate societies, the hierarchic level on which female leaders are positioned, the stereotypes and gender roles, must be taken into account when studying the leadership styles of men and women and the roles of female leaders.

The problem of underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions cannot be explained by women’s lack of training or professional experience or by discriminatory labor legislation (Powell and Butterfield, 1994), but can be attributed to the differences between men and women regarding leadership styles, to the “glass ceiling”, a term which was defined at the end of the 1980s to describe the existence of a set of invisible barriers which are an impediment for many qualified women to reach leadership positions in organizations, which is still used in the present (Morrison, White and Van Versol, 1987) or to the double standards which exist for the evaluation of female leaders.

During time, researchers had different opinions regarding the gender influence over leadership styles. Some of them considered that there was no difference between the leadership styles of men and women (e.g., Bartol and Martin, 1986; Nieva and Gutek, 1981; van Engen, van der Leeden, Willemsen, 2001), others claimed that the differences were insignificant (Powell, 1990; Mendez and Busenbark, 2013) and other authors argued that women lead differently and have the chance to become better leaders than their males colleagues. (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Loden 1985; Rosener, 1995).

This difference of opinions could be explained by the way society apprehends women and their roles. People can perceive differently, according to gender, the same behavior, situation caused by stereotypes, social values and social roles. (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Fiske, 1998; Cole, 2004). Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, van Engen (2003) and Northouse (2007) claimed that men and women in leadership positions are more effective when practicing a leadership style in concordance with their gender. In general, male leaders are expected to be more oriented toward achievement and are viewed as competent, aggressive, independent, decisive and forceful, characteristics considered as being agentic (Abele, 2003; Bakan, 1966; Fiske and Stevens, 1993) while women are expected to be relationship-oriented, which makes them kind, nurturing, helpful, concerned, and sympathetic to others' needs, behavior described as being communal (Abele, 2003; Bakan, 1966; Fiske and Stevens, 1993).

Researches have shown that female leaders are disadvantaged because of the disparity between the agentic traits assigned to the prototypical leader and the communal traits associated with the female gender (Eagly and Karau, 1991, 2002; Eagly, Karau and Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky, 1992; Heilman, 2001). Because of this disparity, being a woman and a leader is generally viewed as incongruous and researches based on role congruity theory have shown that this perception of role incompatibility has negative effects for women concerning leadership effectiveness (Eagly et al., 1995) and evaluations of leadership abilities (Eagly et al., 1992), and perceptions of leadership styles (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen, 2003; Eagly and Johnson, 1990). The same theory shows that when women exhibit agentic behaviors, they are evaluated as less communal because they are considered to have transgressed their gender role expectations (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Rudman and Glick, 1999, 2001).

Starting with 1990, researches revealed gender differences in leadership styles and female leaders were described as being participative and democratic leaders. (Jogulu et al., 2006). Other studies revealed that female leaders, compared with male leaders, are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others' self-worth. (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990; Loden, 1985; Rosener, 1995). Same authors have also claimed that these types of behavior make women

superior leaders for contemporary organizations. More recent studies showed that women exhibit more transformational leadership traits than their male colleagues and this is equated with effective leadership (Jogulu et al., 2006).

#### 4. FEMALE LEADERS AND MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

Studying the female leader role in management of change, we can start from Bernard Bass opinion (1990) who argued that transformational leadership is “a behavioral process of being learned and managed. It's a leadership process that is systematic, consisting of purposeful and organized search for changes, systematic analysis, and the capacity to move resources from areas of lesser to greater productivity” (Bass, 1990). Leaders achieve this stimulation by creating an awareness of the mission of the organization and develop followers to a “higher level of ability and potential” (Mandell and Pherwani, 2003). More than that, transformational leaders have the ability to motivate, inspire and support creativity in their followers, because they present a high degree of “individualized consideration”, which is “the degree to which the leader attends to each follower's needs” and listens to their concerns by acting as a mentor (Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

Transformational leadership theory was considered by management writers in the 1980s, as an effective way of bringing change in an organization. (Avolio, Waldman, Yammarino, 1991; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Tichy and Devanna, 1986; Tichy and Ulrich, 1984). These researchers argued that “transformational leaders help to realign the values and norms” (Avolio et al., 1991) of an organization to promote change. These values and norms are important when an organization encounters severe crises in motivating employees or in engaging creative problem solving methods (Avolio, Waldman, Yammarino 1991).

Organizational change can be achieved with the help of transformational leaders which can create awareness of the goals and mission of the organization, and according to Mandell and Pherwani (2003), this awareness allows subordinates to look beyond their own interests, which firstly benefits the group and secondly the organization (Jogulu et al., 2006).

Transformational leadership can be described also as “a feminine model of leadership, built around cooperation, lower levels of control, collaboration, and collective problem solving and decision-making” (Jogulu et al., 2006). An empirical study on managers conducted by Mandell and Pherwani (2003) showed that females score higher on the transformational leadership scale compared to males (Mandell and Pherwani, 2003). Hence, it is obvious that women possess the qualities of a transformational leader and it is believed that these traits are required in today's organizations, which are flatter and less

hierarchical in structure (Jogulu et al., 2006). Organizations nowadays need a consensus style of management (Wajcman, 1996) and women in leadership roles exhibit these “feminized leader behaviors” according to Omar and Davidson (2001). Therefore, a leadership style based on characteristics such as caring, concern for others and nurturing is necessary in contemporary organizations.

Another important finding of the transactional and transformational theories of leadership is the possibility that transformational leadership, more than transactional leadership, could be related to leadership effectiveness, so women in management positions tend to be more transformational and more proactive in resolving problems. As a consequence, they could be seen as more effective and satisfying as leaders by both their male and female subordinates (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

At the same time, some authors suggested the potential existence of a female leadership advantage. They have argued that women may be in favor of leading in ways that are particularly effective in contemporary organizations (Eagly, 2007; Eagly and Carli, 2003a, 2003b; Vecchio, 2002, 2003).

## **5. FEMALE LEADERS IN THE CITY HALLS OF ROMANIA. EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF CHANGE**

Taking into consideration the main recommendations of gender policies and the European and national legislation considering gender equality, women participation in the political life must be stimulated as part of a democratic and transparent country. In Romania, as in the majority of European countries, the number of women occupying elected positions as mayor, ministry or parliamentary have started to grow, but not considerably.

The mayor is the main leader who can bring change in a city, town or commune, because he/she can apply successfully the subsidiary principle of governing near the citizens and he/she is the main contributor to the welfare and development of the municipality. Considering mayors as being the main agents of change in cities, towns or communes, we analysed how the number of female mayors in Romania, evolved from 2008 to 2016.

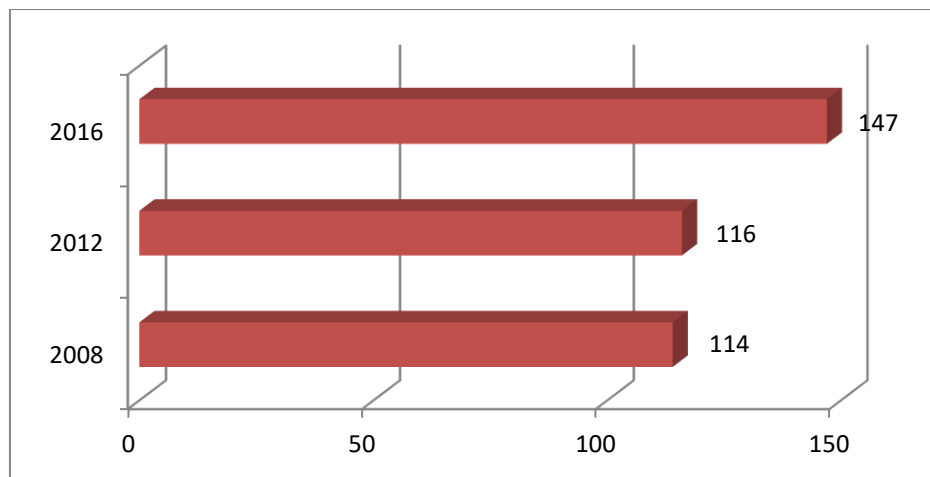


FIGURE 1 - THE NUMBER OF ELECTED FEMALE MAYORS IN ROMANIA  
Source: Author

In 2008 elections, 114 women were elected as mayors from a total number of 3184 of elected mayors. Female mayors represented 3,5% of the elected mayors in cities, towns and communes. In Bucharest and in cities and towns from the 41 counties of Romania, for the position of mayor, only men were elected. The female mayors were elected only in communes and there were counties as Brasov, Bistrița-Năsăud, Covasna, Olt or Mehedinți where there was no woman elected. (Ministry of Labour, 2012)

In 2012, at the local elections, 116 mayors from 3186 elected mayors, were women, representing 3,64% of the total number of elected mayors. There were 6 counties with no female mayor: Bistrița Năsăud, Brașov, Covasna, Harghita, Mehedinți și Olt and at the city hall of Bucharest, as at previous elections from 2012, a man was elected. Most of female mayors were elected in communes (3,84%), two women were elected in cities: Reghin and Craiova (1,87%) and 5 women were elected in towns: Abrud (Alba county), Budești (Calarasi county), Negrești-Oaş (Satu Mare county), Dumbrăveni (Sibiu county) and Dolhasca (Suceava county), representing 2,29% of the elected mayors (Ministry of Labour, 2013).

In 2016 at the local administration elections the number of elected female mayors raised to 147, from 1185 female candidates, representing 4,6% of 3186 elected mayors. There were 4 counties with no female mayor: Bistrița, Timiș, Brașov and Harghita. If in 2008, no women were elected as mayors in cities and towns, in 2016, 5 cities elected female mayors: Aiud, Craiova, Reghin, Sibiu and Bucharest, and in 4 towns female mayors were elected: Ștefănești (Argeș county), Turceni (Gorj county), Seini (Maramureș county), Negrești-Oaş (Satu Mare county) (Central Electoral Bureau, 2016).

It could be observed an evolution of the number of elected female mayors, but even if the number is constantly growing, women are very little represented in this position that suppose power of decision

and it is important for the development of municipalities, that more women to be elected. In the context of a public administration which is continuously changing and taking into account the need for improvements and new approaches of leadership and visionary leaders who can apply the management of change in institutions that are rigid and bureaucratic, women have dramatically less power, because they are represented in very few administrative territorial units, in mayor position.

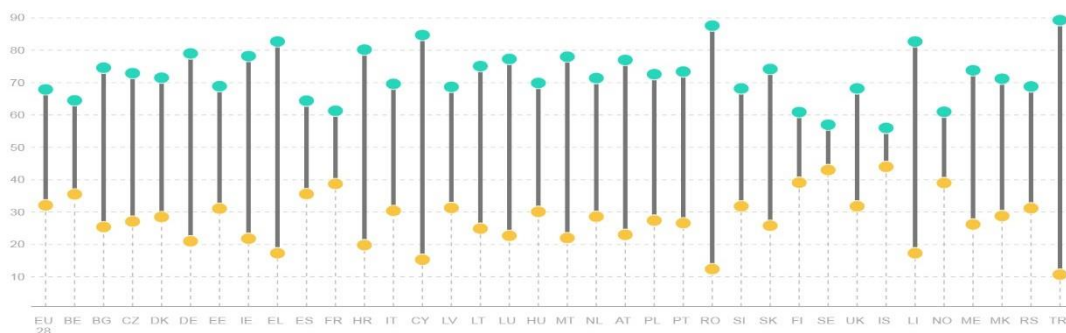


FIGURE 2 - LOCAL/MUNICIPAL COUNCILS: NUMBER OF MAYORS OR OTHER LEADERS AND MEMBER  
 Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017

The most recent data about female leaders in local public administration, are presented in the chart below, which contains data updated from February 2017, from The Gender Statistics Database (GSD) of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The Gender Statistics Database contains data about women and men in key decision-making positions, in this case the number of women elected mayor or other council leaders and female members of the local/municipal council (councillors). The data shows that in Romania 87,6% of mayors and councilors are represented by men (represented in chart with the green colour) and 12,4% of these positions are occupied by women (represented in chart with the yellow colour). From all the countries included in the database, a worse situation is met only in Turkey, where only 10,7% of women are mayors or councillors. These situation holds Romania at the bottom of this hierarchy and shows that women are dramatically underrepresented in decision-making positions, fact that is concerning for the situation of women in Romania. In times when women are considered agents of change, in Romania women cannot realize change in public administration because they are not situated in positions with this kind of power.

## 6. FEMALE LEADERS IN MUNICIPALITIES AND THEIR POWER OF CHANGING THE COMMUNITY

We took as study case, the mayors elected in 2012 and 2016 in the cities of Romania: Aiud, Craiova, Reghin, Sibiu and Bucharest. We wanted to observe the changes implemented in city halls, from 2012 until 2016 in the two cities analysed: Reghin and Craiova and if in a year from the 2016 local



administration elections, the women elected as mayors in cities, developed or started projects meant to bring change in their communities. From the five mayors elected in 2016, only four remained in this position, because after being named as ministry of labour, the mayor of Craiova was replaced with a man. We did not want to analyse the projects implemented in the communities from transport infrastructure, education or health fields, but we wanted to observe if they approached this fields in a different manner, meant to change the perspective about running a city hall.

Firstly, we took as a case of study, Bucharest City Hall, an institution led by a female mayor. The City Hall is led by a female leader since 5 June 2016. We made a summing-up of the projects started and implemented by the mayor from the beginning of her mandate, until present. The first results of the analysis showed new ideas and new perspectives of ruling. In 2017, the mayor started the implementation of 58 investment projects in different fields: transport, culture, education, health and three of them are innovative programs for Bucharest. (Bucharest City Hall, 2017).

Gabriela Firea is the first mayor of Bucharest who started a campaign named “Propose for Bucharest”, where citizens were invited to propose projects that might be implemented in Bucharest. After voting, the actions needed for implementing the first twenty most important projects, will be included in the project of the 2018 budget. She is the only mayor of Bucharest who had this idea and the second mayor in the country, after the mayor of Cluj-Napoca (Bucharest City Hall, 2017).

Another innovative project is a pilot project created after models from western countries. The purpose of the project is traffic reduction in Bucharest. The project is implemented in partnership with the local transport company of Bucharest and proposes that children should be transported to schools with buses, in order for parents not to use their cars. This initiative will be implemented only on one school with 400 students and if the results will show an improvement of traffic conditions, the project will be extended. The most innovative project was setting up a Municipal Holding created from 21 companies which would provide all the public services in Bucharest (Bucharest City Hall, 2017). The mayor wanted to create an European model of leading the local administration and declared that it was time to make things in a new modern way, not in an old-fashioned way, so she created municipal companies for information technology, advertising, sport, civil protection and volunteering, durable development, security, healthcare or management of transport. In her first year as mayor, we could observe that her leadership style was oriented towards change. She wanted to implement new projects, different from her predecessors and she came with a new vision meant to make Bucharest an European capital ruled by a modern administration built after European models.

The former mayor of Craiova, was deputy of Dolj County from 2000 until 2008, senator of Dolj County from 2008 until 2012, mayor of Craiova from 2012 until 2017, when she resigned, because she was appointed ministry of labour. She implemented many projects for developing the health, education, transport and social infrastructure of the city, but her main projects of change are the construction of a municipal hospital and the Central Stadium, built by the model of National Arena from Bucharest. These projects were the mayor's ideas and were started on her mandate and finished after she resigned. The municipal hospital is the biggest hospital built in Romania, after 1989. After she rehabilitated all the hospitals in Craiova, in 2013 she began the procedures for building a new, modern hospital, alike European hospitals. She wanted her projects to have regional impact and she succeeded to implement new, modern projects (Craiova City Hall, 2017).

Reghin City Hall is being ruled by the same mayor from 2012 till present. She won the elections two times in a row. In her first mandate as mayor, 36 from 156 streets were asphalted and 40 more were in plan. She ensured the development of educational and health infrastructure, by allocating financial resources for rehabilitation of schools, acquisition of an emergency care unit and writing projects for obtaining European funds in order to build a new hospital and rehabilitate public buildings. She developed a project with Norwegian funds in order to build a nursery school, project which is being implemented. There have been initiated the procedures for three important development projects: the construction of an agro-food hall, the rehabilitation of the city's cinema and the construction of a block with 36 public houses. The rehabilitation of the city's sports facility with European funds was in the mayor's plan and other projects for developing areas for spending free time, as improving the conditions from the most important parks in the area. National funds were used in order to rehabilitate the House of Culture of the city, projects that proved the mayor's interest into the cultural life of the city. From the beginning of her second mandate till present, the mayor continued the investment projects started in her first term, focusing her attention on developing the transport, education, health, cultural and social infrastructure of Reghin city (Reghin City Hall, 2017).

The mayor of Aiud is a former secretary of state from the Ministry of Education and the first female mayor elected into a city or town from Alba County, since 1989. She declared that in a world which belongs to men "mrs good mayor" truly exists (Pro Alba editorial, 2017). In her first mandate as mayor, she adopted a budget which should allow the development of many investment projects, such as: the construction of a cultural center, the modernization of the streets from every neighborhood of the city, the replacement of many distribution channels such as gas or lighting. She continued the rehabilitation process of the city's fortress, the most important touristic attraction in the area and took measures for reducing traffic congestion, like assembling synchronized traffic lights. (Aiud City Hall, 2017). The mayor

considered that “in Aiud everything needs to be done and nothing can wait a delay” (Pro Alba editorial, 2017) and even if only a year and a half passed from the elections, she finds solutions in order to change the citizens lives.

Sibiu City Hall is being run by a female mayor who was named interim mayor before the elections from 2016. Her strategy consists of making Sibiu the regional leader of the south of Transylvania, until 2023, by implementing projects with European funding. The projects which will be implemented in order to spend the 33,5 million lei which is the budget allocation from European funds for Sibiu, are mentioned into the Integrated Strategy of Urban Development. The strategy was adopted after public consultation which shows the mayor’s concern about citizens’ implication in decision-making process. The main objectives of the mayor’s development strategy are: making Sibiu a regional leader, the development of life quality in the city in order to attract human capital and good local governance. The projects from the strategy will be submitted until December 2018 (Deleanu, 2017). In her first year of mandate, the concrete results of the mayor’s activity, cannot be seen, but she started activities, in order to implement major investment projects, like: creating Sibiu Metropolitan Area, rehabilitating neighborhoods, asphaltting land streets, building a theatre, a new road for reducing traffic congestion, an aqua land and a recreation area. The mayor claims that bureaucracy is a major problem in implementing investment projects and the European funds should be attributed in concordance with Romania’s needs. More than that, the investment projects for Sibiu need a long period of time for implementation, so the results will be seen at the end of her mandate or further (Maier, 2017).

The female mayors of Romanian cities have different approaches on the development of their communities and they face different situations and realities. It can be observed that in the city halls where female mayors are at their second mandate, change can be observed much better than in the communities where women are at the beginning of this experience. We cannot draw the conclusion that female mayors cannot bring change in their communities or that they are not suitable for these positions. More than that, we did not analyse female mayors from the organization performance perspective, because we could maybe observe, that they are efficient and performant leaders.

Research limitations: The present study included in the sample, only female mayors from cities, but in the future, this study should be continued in all city halls conducted by female mayors, including the city halls of communes. Because these female mayors are leading the city halls included in this study for a short period of time, we cannot draw final conclusions about their role in changing the community and the way of ruling an institution. A new study should be conducted at the end of their mandate.

## CONCLUSIONS

During the time, the perception about women as leaders has changed from the incongruity of female role with leader role, to the belief that "women are better suited than men to serve as leaders in the ways required in the global economy" (Powell and Graves, 2003, p. 153). If transformational leadership is considered the most effective way of leading an organization and leaders who are behaving in a transformational way are the most capable of bringing change in contemporary organizations, female leaders, which according to the studies presented below, are using this style of leadership, should be the most capable for leading in an innovative way and bring change into the institutions they lead.

In the local public administration of Romania we cannot conclude that women are the best leaders who can bring change and lead in an innovative way, because women are at the beginning of their experience as mayors or in other elected positions. In a society still ruled by men, women do not have experience yet, in ruling and changing the situation from public administration' institutions. More than that, even if they had the needed experience, they still not have access to this kind of power, because the number of mayors and local councillors is reduced. In the moment when the number of elected women will raise, they will occupy positions with power of decision and they will have the opportunity to bring innovation and change in institutions and communities.

Taking into consideration that the female mayors studied are still at the beginning of their mandate, we cannot affirm that they are better and more innovative leaders than men and that they are agents of change. Their evolution as mayors should be observed until the end of their mandate, and then, a real conclusion, about the role of female leaders in management of change in public institutions from Romania, could be drawn.

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