

THE TRANSPORT POLICY IN ROMANIA- CITIZENS' SATISFACTION WITH ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate citizens' perceptions regarding the development of road transport infrastructure in Romania. The research is based on the following objectives: (1) To assess citizens' satisfaction regarding the development of road transport infrastructure in Romania; (2) To identify the main problems of the road infrastructure in Romania from citizens' perspective; (3) To identify the main solutions for the improvement of Romania's transport infrastructure.

The research methodology consists of an opinion survey, conducted among Romanian citizens in Bucharest-Ilfov region, in order to investigate their opinions regarding the road infrastructure. The study revealed a generally negative perception regarding the state of roads, the development of road infrastructure, and public transport. The participants in the study presented a low or a medium degree of satisfaction concerning all aspects analyzed in the research. They were satisfied the least regarding the price and quality of fuel and the most, with road infrastructure such as traffic signs or traffic lights.

KEYWORDS: *transport policy, road transport infrastructure, citizens' satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Transport represents one of the most important sectors of the economy due to its role in the provision of goods and services to people and enterprises. The development of transport infrastructure is based on investments in road and highway networks with the purpose of improving traffic flow and achieving easy access for the population as well as ensuring safe land transport networks that could reduce road accidents and travel time (Kanwal et al., 2020). Also, it requires important improvements in terms of traffic flow and citizens' satisfaction level with the time spent in traffic by developing pedestrian and motorway bypasses (Saw et al., 2020). Besides road infrastructure, the development of railways is of high importance being associated with regional development, due to its impact on the reduction of road traffic and pollution and the increase of passengers' safety and comfort (Zhai et al., 2021). More than that, the air transport infrastructure represents another important branch due to its impact on the development of tourism and hospitality, international connectivity as well as high economic and employment opportunities (Moon, Yoon & Han, 2016).

The development of all types of transport infrastructure is closely linked to regional growth because adequate transport infrastructure provides the necessary conditions for the development of the socio-economic system. From an economic perspective, the most important characteristic of transport infrastructure is the public character of the provided services and its impact on creating favorable conditions for the movement of people and goods (European Commission, 2018).

The changes occurring in telecommunications and transport systems, as a result of ongoing technological progress, are forcing the development of transport and communication infrastructure, leading to better connections of less developed areas to those with greater economic activity,

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contributing to an easier flow of factors of production, including knowledge and technology, opportunities to upgrade skills and raise employment. Transport infrastructure is considered essential, as the cost of transportation is critical in determining the location of firms and therefore the economic development of a region (Prus & Sikora, 2021).

Transport infrastructure is not related only to regional development, but also to the growth and expansion of any megalopolis which needs transport complex and infrastructure. The transport complex is the integration of interconnected means of transport capable of satisfying the requirements of the economy and population in passenger and freight transport. Transport infrastructure is a broader category, being the totality of all branches and enterprises of both passenger and freight transport (Mottaeva & Vasilyeva, 2018).

Transport infrastructure has also a significant influence on the economic indicators of megacities, regions, and the country as a whole. The poor quality of transport infrastructure, poor coherence of economic centers, and their remoteness from major transport arteries constrain investment activity in cities and their development (Skorobogatova & Kuzmina-Merlino, 2017).

In addition, transport infrastructure is an integral part of the transportation system of any city or state. In connection with societies' development and the intensification of international relations as a result of globalization processes, the importance of transport as a factor of economic and social development has increased (Skorobogatova & Kuzmina-Merlino, 2017).

Regarding Romania, since its access to the European Union, the transport infrastructure developed considerably due to investments in the road infrastructure that connects the state to the TEN-T network and also into the railway and air infrastructure. Even if major investments had been made and several projects had been implemented, the state of infrastructure still remains a major problem for transport development and economic competition (Criste & Baeră, 2021). It should be mentioned that the quality of infrastructure in Romania is considered quite low for all modes of transportation, but particular concern is on roads and railways where Romania ranks in the last places among European Member States (European Commission, 2018).

Due to its geographical position, Romania represents an important European centre of passenger and freight transport facilitating connectivity throughout Black Sea and Central Europe. However, its transport infrastructure is still not developed similar to countries from the West of Europe, remaining a major obstacle to economic development and growth. Romania still faces constraints on access and connectivity in all modes of transport. This situation can be attributed to the low quality of road infrastructure, the insufficient connectivity to the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) between the East and West of the country, and also to the slow pace of progress. Administrative flows in the maintenance and operation of infrastructure are also one of the causes that impede the smooth functioning of transport in Romania (Beniamin, 2016).

Considering the aforementioned, the present paper aims to analyse citizens' degree of satisfaction regarding the road transport infrastructure in Romania, in order to identify the best solutions for its improvement.

1. THE TRANSPORT POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The transport sector represents an important economic field in the European Member States providing around 5% of the workplaces for EU's population, representing approximately 11 million people. Also, this sector contributes with 7% to the Gross Domestic Product, having an important influence on the well-functioning of the European economy. Moreover, the transport system is efficient and sustainable, producing tangible advantages for Europe in competition with other countries outside the European Union's borders (European Commission, 2018).

EU's transport policy aims to guarantee the smooth, efficient, safe, and free movement of people and goods throughout the space of the 27 states, with the help of integrated networks that use all modes of transport: road, rail, water, and air. This policy also helps to keep the European economy moving

by developing a modern infrastructure network, resulting in faster and safer journeys, while promoting sustainable and digital solutions (European Commission, 2018).

Another important point of the European Union's transport policy highlights the broad issues of climate change, passenger rights, and clean fuels. They depict transport-related issues that can be better addressed at the EU's level. Transport policy has been one of the common policies of the European Union for more than 30 years. From the moment the transport markets opened and the trans-European transport network developed, the "sustainable mobility" model acquired even greater importance, especially considering the constant increase in greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector, which have constituted a danger in the efforts that the European Union put in reaching the climate objectives (European Commission, 2018).

The introduction of viable and renewable means of transport plays a significant role from the perspective of the European Union's energy and climate objectives. Of course, as the states become more and more mobile, the transport policy supports the transport systems to fight against certain major challenges such as: congestion, sustainability, air quality, infrastructure, and competition (European Commission, 2018).

2. THE TRANSPORT POLICY IN ROMANIA

Romania's transport policy is developed and implemented by the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. Its purpose is to create a modern, efficient, and sustainable transport system that supports economic growth and improves Romanian citizens' life quality. In addition, it is connected with the EU's transport policy.

Romania's transport policy aims the following (Ministry of Investments and European Projects, 2020):

- The development and modernization of the country's transport infrastructure, including roads, highways, railways, ports, and airports.
- To promote sustainable transport options such as public transport, cycling, and walking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality.
- The improvement of safety and security in the transport sector, including measures to reduce the number of road accidents and prevent theft and other forms of criminal activity.
- The improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of transport services, such as through the use of advanced technologies and data analytics.
- To address regional disparities in transport infrastructure and services, with a focus on improving connectivity in rural areas and less developed regions of the country.
- Promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship in the transportation sector, with the aim of developing new technologies and services that can stimulate economic growth and job creation.
- To ensure the sustainability and resilience of the transport system in face of climate changes and other environmental challenges.
- The improvement of international cooperation and coordination in the transport sector, with the aim of promoting trade and economic development, as well as addressing global challenges such as climate change and security.

Overall, Romania's transport policy is focused on creating a modern and sustainable transport system that supports economic growth, improves the quality of life and enhances the country's global competitiveness.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research aims to investigate citizens' perceptions regarding the development of road transport infrastructure in Romania.

The study is based on the following objectives: (1) To assess citizens' satisfaction regarding the development of road transport infrastructure in Romania; (2) To identify the main problems of the road infrastructure in Romania from citizens' perspective; (3) To identify the main solutions for the improvement of Romania's transport infrastructure.

The research started with the following research questions:

RS1: Which is the general perception of the citizens' regarding the road transport infrastructure in Romania?

RS2: What is the level of satisfaction regarding the road infrastructure in Romania?

RS3: Which are the main solutions that should be implemented by the local and central authorities in order to improve the road infrastructure?

The research methodology consists of an opinion survey, conducted among Romanian citizens in order to investigate their opinions regarding the road infrastructure. The sample of the study comprised 118 respondents from the Bucharest-Ilfov region, from rural and urban environments, of different ages and occupations. The participants in the study were chosen using the convenience sampling method.

4. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

First of all, respondents were asked about how frequently they use their personal cars or public transportation, in order to get to their jobs, to school, to shopping, or to solve other personal problems. As can be observed, the majority of the participants in the study- 83 (72.2%) declared that they use personal cars and public transportation daily, 17 (14.8%) weekly, and 6 (5.2%) respondents answered that they need a mean of transportation only several times a year. Only 5 persons (4.3%) used their cars or public transport only monthly and 4 persons (3.5%) declared that they do not need to use any type of transportation.

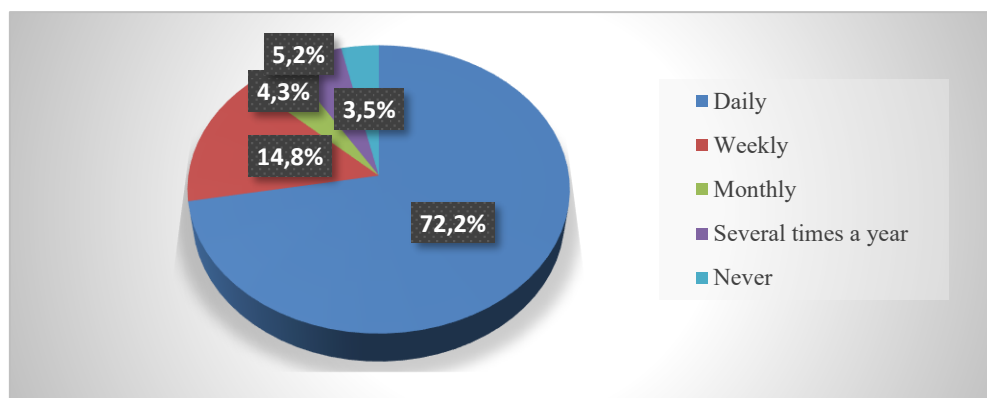


Figure 1. The frequency of car or public transportation use

Source: author, own processing, 2023

The results show that most of the respondents need to use means of transportation daily, while a smaller number of participants travel weekly, monthly, or a few times a year. Also, only a small number of people never travel by private car or public transportation. Considering the high number of respondents who use public roads frequently, they can provide an objective and pertinent opinion about the road infrastructure in their region and also in Romania.

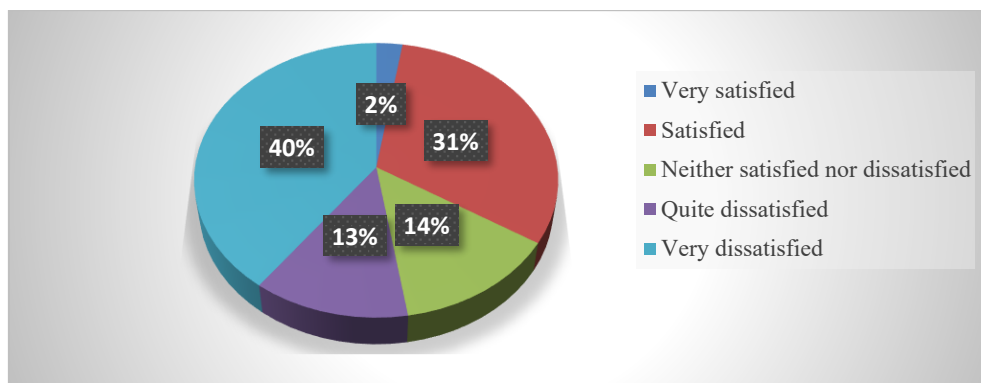


Figure 2. Respondents' degree of satisfaction regarding the state of roads in Romania

Source: author, own processing, 2023

Then, participants in the study were asked about how satisfied they were concerning the state of the Romanian roads (highways, national roads, county roads, and local roads). It can be observed that the majority of respondents declared to be very dissatisfied- 47 (40%) and quite dissatisfied- 16 (13%). Only 3 respondents (2%) revealed a high degree of satisfaction and only one-third (37,31%) considered themselves to be satisfied with the Romanian road infrastructure.

The responses reveal a negative perception regarding the state and degree of development of the Romanian road infrastructure as most of the respondents declared to be dissatisfied. Also, the results are surprising considering that in the last years, Romania made significant efforts to improve the transport infrastructure and many investments.

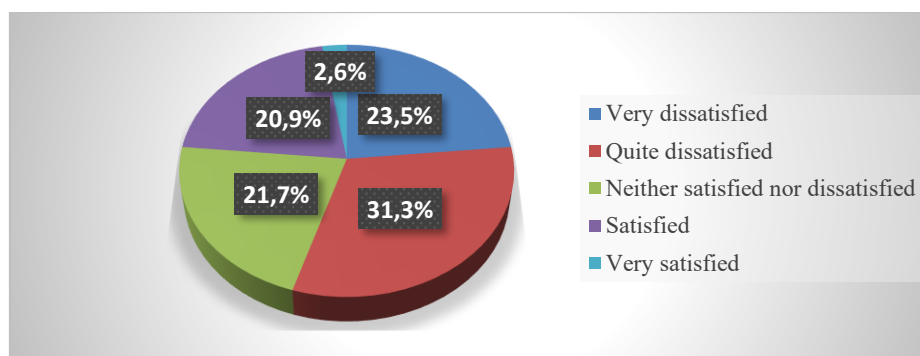


Figure 3. Respondents' level of satisfaction concerning the quality of public transport in Romania

Source: author, own processing, 2023

In addition, respondents' degree of satisfaction regarding the quality of public transport in Romania was measured. In this case, the participants in the study also showed a high level of dissatisfaction, even if considerable investments have been made in the region in order to buy new buses, trams, and metro wagons. The modernization of public transport has been in local authorities' attention in recent years, and despite their efforts, it seems that the general opinion remains quite negative.

Therefore, the results show that 36 (31.3%) respondents are quite dissatisfied and 27 (23.5%) are very dissatisfied indicating a generally negative perception. 25 (21.7%) respondents have a neutral opinion meaning that either in their territorial administrative units, no investments in public transportation have been made, or the implemented projects for public transport did not have the expected results. Only 27 (20,9%) respondents declared to be satisfied regarding the quality of the public transport. On a whole, the average of responses is 2.47 showing a high level of dissatisfaction among the participants in the study.

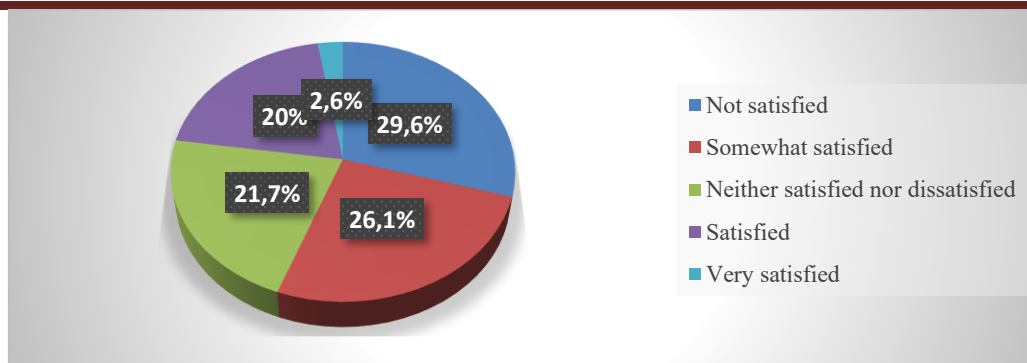


Figure 4. The perception regarding the safety in traffic

Source: author, own processing, 2023

Another question focused on citizens' satisfaction regarding the safety in traffic. The purpose was to find out if respondents were satisfied with the measures taken by the authorities to ensure safety in traffic. As it can be observed, the majority- 34 (29.6%) of respondents expressed a high degree of dissatisfaction. Then, 30 (26.1%) respondents expressed a moderate level of satisfaction, and 25 (21.7%) respondents had neither a positive nor a negative opinion. On the opposite end, 26 (22.6%) persons considered themselves to be satisfied and very satisfied meaning that they felt safe on the Romanian roads. The average of responses was 2.74, showing a low towards moderate level of satisfaction. However, the responses show a better perception compared to previous questions. This perception is based on several factors such as: even if Romanian legislation forbids the consumption of drugs and alcohol while driving, there is still a high number of drivers who use alcohol and forbidden substances, generating severe accidents. Also, there are still unmodernized roads and underdeveloped infrastructure that contribute to the general perception of a low level of safety on public roads.

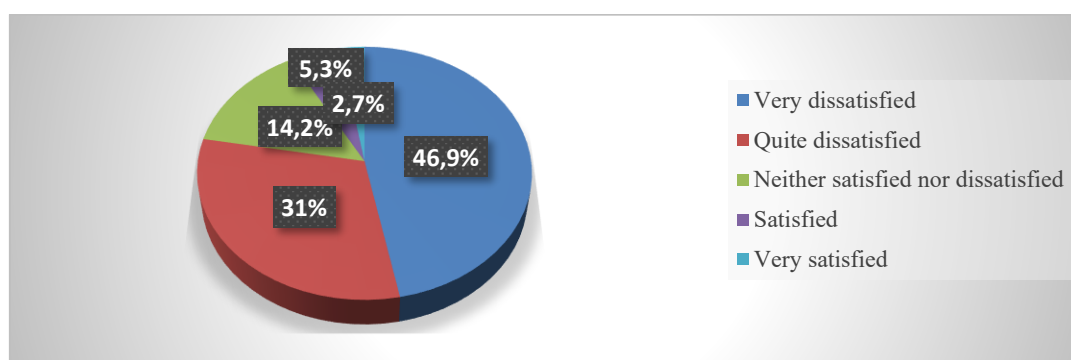


Figure 5. Degree of satisfaction regarding fuel quality and price

Source: author, own processing, 2023

In the last years, due to different internal and external causes, inflation raised, leading also to an increase in fuel prices. The government implemented some measures (e.g. a compensation of 0.50 RON per liter) for limited periods of time, which led to a small decrease in the prices, but on the whole, the price of fuel in Romania remained quite high. The analysis of responses showed that the price and quality of fuel are the aspects that raised the highest degree of dissatisfaction among all the elements taken into consideration in this research.

As can be observed in the distribution of responses presented above, 53 (46.9%) respondents were very dissatisfied, 35 (31%) were quite dissatisfied with the fuels' quality and price. Therefore, almost 80% of respondents declared to be unsatisfied. The rest of the participants in the study were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied- 16 (14.2%) persons and only 9 (8%) respondents were satisfied and very

satisfied. The average of responses was 1.98, revealing that totally, the respondents were quite dissatisfied regarding the studied aspect.

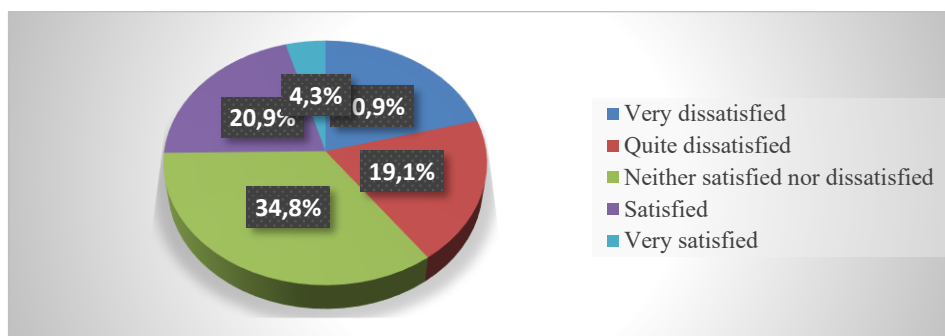


Figure 6. Respondents' satisfaction with road infrastructure such as road signs and traffic lights

Source: author, own processing, 2023

The data show the degree of satisfaction regarding road infrastructure in Romania, such as road signs and traffic lights. As can be observed, most of the respondents- 40 (34,8%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, indicating indifference or lack of opinion regarding the subject. 29 (25.2%) respondents expressed a high degree of satisfaction, while 44 (40%) expressed a high level of dissatisfaction. The average of the answers was 2.91, revealing that the participants in the study present a medium degree of satisfaction regarding road infrastructure, such as road signs and traffic lights.

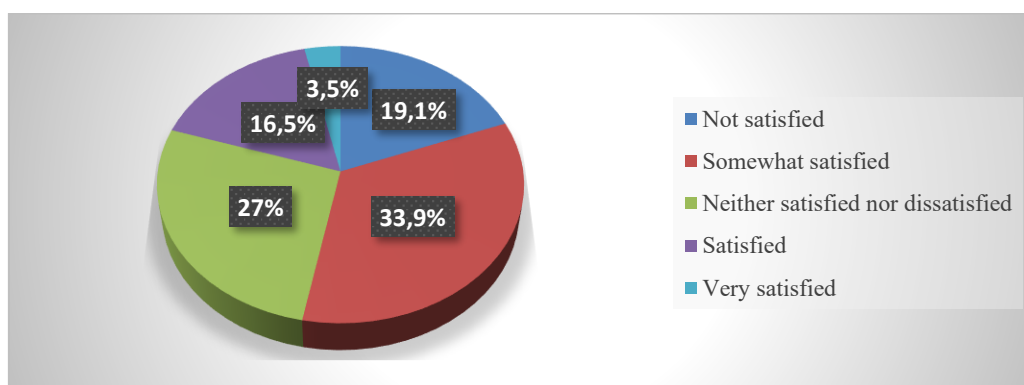


Figure 7. Degree of satisfaction regarding comfort and safety in public transport

Source: author, own processing, 2023

The last question focused on the perception regarding the comfort and safety of public transport. On this matter, the perception seems to be better than in the previously analyzed elements. The majority of the participants declared to be somewhat satisfied- 39 (33.9%). Then, 31 (27%) persons presented a medium degree of satisfaction, declaring to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 22 (19.1%) respondents were not satisfied at all, and at the opposite end, 23 (20%) respondents considered themselves to be satisfied and very satisfied. The average satisfaction of the participants with the degree of comfort and safety on public road transport in Romania is about 2.6, indicating again a low towards a medium degree of satisfaction.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The present research focused on citizens' perceptions regarding road infrastructure in Romania. The study revealed a generally negative perception regarding the state of roads, the development of road infrastructure, and public transport. Unfortunately, the participants in the study presented a low or a medium degree of satisfaction concerning all aspects analyzed in the research. They were the least

satisfied regarding the price and quality of fuel and the least dissatisfied with road infrastructure such as traffic signs or traffic lights.

In this respect, based on the results of the study, the following recommendations were designed:

- More investment projects are needed as well as the modernization of the existing infrastructure.
- New cycle paths, pedestrian zones, and public transport routes should be created, as well as initiatives to encourage the use of electric or hybrid vehicles.
- More road signs and lighting are needed, surveillance cameras should be installed and stricter rules should be implemented.
- Intelligent traffic management systems should be developed and implemented.
- The local public transport should be modernized.
- The government should find solutions to decrease the price of fuel.

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