

What Makes Citizens Satisfied? The Influence of Perceived Responsiveness of Local Administration on Satisfaction with Public Administration

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Abstract. There is no other institution that people regularly have so much direct contact with as public administration, although people have different experiences with public administration. Some citizens feel comfortable when making contact with bureaucracy; some have rather negative feelings. Besides the factors ‘trust’ and ‘satisfaction’ with public administration, there might be one other relevant factor: ‘responsiveness’. Based on representative population surveys, this paper can show that the perception of administration as responsive is directly related to the user’s satisfaction with it, and that the main factor explaining perceived satisfaction with public administration is the reputation of the local public administration.

Keywords. Public administration, Satisfaction, Responsiveness, Reputation.

JEL. H83, H76, C12.

1. Introduction

Today’s administration is being confronted with many challenges. On the one hand, bureaucracy must follow fixed rules and regulations, i.e. they must be ‘responsible’; on the other hand, bureaucracy cannot be detached from people’s wishes, so they must also be ‘responsive’. Administration research does not normally focus on the topic of whether a local public administration is responsive, or to be more precise, whether the administration is perceived as responsive. But if we ask if people have a good relationship with their civil service, we also must ask *how* positively (or negatively) they perceive the civil service and *why*.

The concept of responsiveness is an approved approach to researching attitudes towards political institutions. It has been developed mainly through parliamentary research and through political cultural research (see the next chapter). Responsiveness, in the context of public administration, is the perception by individual citizens of how public administration can include the demands of the citizen and how effectively public administration has succeeded in implementing these demands in their decisions. Or, in short, from the citizen’s perspective: Do citizens who are in contact with the civil service feel like partners, customers, or citizens – or do they feel like numbers? So it is important to ask people who are contacting administration if they perceive the administration’s contact as responsive. The central question is: How do people perceive that their concerns have been taken seriously by the administrative staff?

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These attitudes could be important in analysing mistrust in political institutions in general. Public administration has a special role in the political system. It acts as a connection between state authority and people, and thus makes democracy experienceable. However, there is no incentive for citizens to interact with administration – more than necessary – if they have negative experiences or negative attitudes in general towards administration.

This paper aims to tackle the issue of how this perceived responsiveness influences citizens' satisfaction with administration, and how this responsiveness is linked to other indicators that explain satisfaction with public administration. The data collection for the paper was carried out in Eastern Germany. The citizens–civil service relationship in East Germany has been re-developed since German Reunification in 1990. So it might be interesting to see if the East German administration has been changed from a rigid administration within an authoritarian regime to a responsive administration within a democratic system, during the past twenty years.

In the next section, the baseline of the concept of responsiveness is presented. Furthermore, its transferability to the field of public administration is discussed and the approach used is presented. The next chapter includes the hypotheses, a short presentation of the investigation area, the data, and the indicators used with respect to their operationalisation. The empirical results and their discussion complete the current paper.

2. About the concept of responsiveness and its transferability to public administration

The concept of responsiveness describes the feedback about (political) action by the representatives of the people's interests. From a system-theoretical perspective, it can therefore be seen as political input from the population, for example in the form of their articulation of interests and positions into a political institution or into the whole political system.

Fundamental studies about parliamentary responsiveness have been published by Miller & Stokes (1963), Eulau & Karps (1978), Putnam (1994), Diamond & Morlino (2005) and Powell (2004). They define responsiveness as fundamental to modern democracies. Diamond & Morlino (2005) even place responsiveness on the same level with democratic basic principles such as freedom and equality.

However, (perceived) responsiveness in the parliamentary research is not the same as the (perceived) responsiveness of public administration. Officials are neither re-elected by citizens, nor must they fear dismissal following challenging decisions. Besides, according to the differentiation by Hirschman (1970), no exit option and almost no option for citizens to have a voice exist in relation to contact with public administration. Overall, the transferability of parliamentary responsiveness concepts to public administration is limited.

2.1. Research on administrative responsiveness – State of the art

There have been some attempts to work with the concept of responsiveness in administration research. The responsiveness of public administration was first discussed within political culture research. In the early 1960s, based on the 'Civic Culture' study by Almond & Verba (1963: 214f.), responsiveness was interpreted as 'bureaucratic competence' and as output legitimacy. Almond and Verba were able to show that some very different levels of bureaucratic competence existed in the five examined nations. Besides the question of how concerns presented have been taken into account by the authorities, bureaucratic competence also includes the question of 'justified and fair treatment of citizens by the authorities'. Over the years, several authors have referred to the same subject using new terms. This progressed from 'managerial grid' or 'concern for production' and 'concern for people' (Blake, & Mouton, 1964) to the 'bureaucratic problem' (Wilson, 1967) and all the way up to the 'bureaucratic dilemma' (Steiss, & Daneke, 1980).

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Even the principal-agent theory, which is often used as a theoretical approach in administration research, cannot help us to study responsiveness. This approach concentrates on 'bureaucratic drift' (McCubbins, Noll & Weingast, 1989), meaning that discrepancies between the goals of policy and those of bureaucratic action may occur (Downs, 1967; Niskanen, 1971; Wood, 1988). The citizens are almost irrelevant.

Besides, from several studies, the concept of responsiveness has almost disappeared entirely from the focus of (empirical) administration research. In the few elaborations that were published in the last few decades, the responsiveness of the administration was mostly aligned normatively (see also Vigoda, 2000: 188). In German public administration research, responsiveness concepts were also usually normative. Behnke (2009: 61) discusses the need for 'active ethical management of public administration', a kind of responsibility of the administration. While some works regarded responsiveness as a 'necessary evil' that rather paralyses effective administration action (Rourke, 1992), others demand that the administration should indeed orientate itself towards the 'public will', so the public is both customer and citizen and the bureaucrats have to listen to them (Stivers, 2001; Stewart & Ranson, 1994). However, it is not easy to ascertain the public will. Once it is understood, one may ask: Does it refer to the articulated demands of society, general public opinion, or a combination of both (Saltzstein, 1985)?

Few studies have addressed responsive administration empirically in the subsequent period. Works such as those from Hadley & Young (1990), took specific consideration of the question of how a responsive administration is structured (in England), but they did not examine what citizens expect from the administration or how they perceive it (cf. the overview of the international research on responsiveness of administrations in Saltzstein (1992) and Vigoda (2000)). Among the first in Germany, Feick & Mayntz (1982) worked empirically with citizens' general attitudes to public administration. They also studied the effects of the public's contact with administration on the assessment of bureaucracy. Feick and Mayntz could show that the more positively administration contacts were considered, the more citizens thought their concerns had been taken seriously by the administrative staff.

In Germany, Derlien & Löwenhaupt (1997) investigated responsiveness and included attitudes empirically. In connection with the results of the transformation process after German Reunification, they used the indicators from the civic culture study by Almond and Verba, almost 35 years after its first use. They showed that responsiveness decreased the more authorities were contacted by citizens, irrespective of the type of administration. Some years later, Rölle (2010) investigated the responsiveness of public administration in Germany over some time. He found out that the number of people who perceived the administration as not responsive had significantly increased in the investigated period (1959-1995).

The administrative sciences literature about responsiveness shows two things: firstly, the administration's responsiveness has been studied mostly from the perspective of how responsive the governments' and the elected representatives' administrations are (Rourke, 1992: 46). The administration has the task of implementing the objectives of policy as a matter of fact, optimally and efficiently. Secondly, up to now, the published studies about bureaucratic responsiveness provide only minimal empirical evidence about citizens' experiences with administration. Almost nothing is known about the background to these experiences. The (negative) evaluation of the administration and of contacts with it, and the factors that underlie these attitudes, are still unknown.

2.2. Approach used

An approach to examining the responsiveness of public administration was introduced by Vigoda (2000: 171). Vigoda helped to develop the issue of bureaucratic responsiveness into a theoretical framework. Vigoda presented a

model for the classification of the administration's responsiveness in the relationship citizens–administration (cf. Figure 1).ⁱ

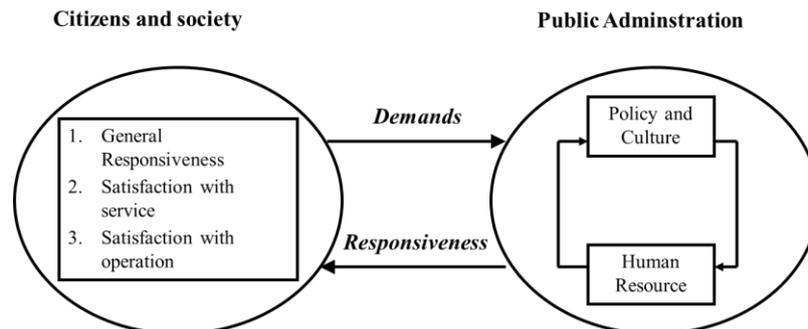


Figure 1. Responsiveness of the public administration

Responsiveness is therefore a synthesis of cultural, political and human factors, representing two groups of conditions that affect the responsiveness of the administration: on the one hand ‘Policy and Culture’ and on the other hand ‘Human Resource’. ‘Policy and Culture’, located at the macro level, includes questions about the role of ethics and fairness in the administration, as well as the question of the role of private sector elements there. The micro-level group of ‘Human Resource’, which means the professional and human quality of the administrative staff, comprises the administrative staff’s behaviour as it is perceived by the citizens, i.e. their assessment of the executives’ and other employees’ qualities, as well as their assessment of how much the citizens are distressed by administrative contacts.

When explaining bureaucratic responsiveness, Vigoda was able to show that the idea of the administration being perceived as responsive plays a more important role than the perceived qualifications of the staff. The perception of the administration’s overall orientation towards efficiency and effectiveness even has a negative impact on the perceived responsiveness of public administration. According to Vigoda (2000), these criteria are not rejected. Far from it, the citizens do demand the economical use of taxpayers’ money, even by the administration – but not at the expense of the perceived bureaucratic responsiveness.

3. Hypotheses

Relating to Vigoda’s distinction between responsiveness and satisfaction, we can assume that they correlate with each other. The perception of the local administration as not responsive is not only a ‘small niceness error’ in the citizen–administration relationship. It has a rather negative effect on the citizens’ satisfaction with the whole administration.

H1: Citizens who view their local public administration as responsive are satisfied with the work of public administration.

There is no (high) general dissatisfaction with public administration, compared with other political institutions, e.g. politicians, political parties or parliaments. Consequently, there is no general picture of local public administration that leads to a generally negative evaluation of local public administration as a whole (‘stereotype’). Instead, people have specific attitudes towards local public administration and they differentiate it from other agencies.

H2: Satisfaction with the work of public administration is specific; this satisfaction with the local administration does not correlate with the evaluation of other public agencies.

As Vigoda (2000) argued, the micro-level group of ‘Human Resource’ comprises satisfaction with local administrations’ performance (service and operation) and perceived general responsiveness. The question left open is how

these factors correlate with each other, by explaining the overall satisfaction with local public administration.

H3: Overall satisfaction with local public administration's work is affected more by the perceived responsiveness than by the rating of the specific performance of local administration (such as satisfaction with personal advice and processing time).

4. Investigation area, data and indicators usedⁱⁱ

The investigation area of this paper is the large East German city of Erfurt (about 210,000 inhabitants). Erfurt is the capital of the German Federal State of Thuringia and the main city nearest to the geographical centre of contemporary Germany. It is located 300 km south-west of Berlin. Since 1992 the city of Erfurt has conducted annually a 'flat and household survey' among its citizens. Every year a random sample of about 4,000 citizens receives a questionnaire sent by post. The response rate is about 40 per cent. On the one hand, the questionnaire treats different topics of the local government, like public transport, parks, and several parts of the civil service in Erfurt; on the other hand, it also includes questions about the person, household and housing conditions. The main interest of the survey is to make its administration work in a more citizen-friendly way.

By working with the data from Erfurt, this article can avoid the problem of the (few) empirical contributions which deal with the responsiveness of public administration. The studies on this subject in Germany were based solely on national surveys (Feick & Mayntz, 1982; Rölle, 2010). This leads to a question that has not been examined empirically so far: which administration do the respondents think about when they are asked, for example, about their trust in administration? The nationwide German surveys, such as ALLBUS, assumed that the citizens thought about their local government when they were asked about public administration. This might be plausible, but it is without empirical evidence. Therefore, possible statistical modifications of the survey data, e.g. the breaking down of national survey data to the local level in the form of various subsamples to compare with each other, usually fail to be small numbers of subsamples. In this paper, the sample size problem and the artificial transfer between local and national level accounts are not present, as the responsiveness of a local public administration was measured at local level in the form of several longitudinal representative surveys (N = 1, 800) in Erfurt. The data analyses are based upon surveys from 1996 and 2006 up to 2012. In particular, the data from 1996 and 2012 use the same questions. As analysis methods, correlation analyses and multiple regression analyses are used.

Regarding the representativeness of the data, the figures in Table 1 show that the respondent sample is mostly representative of the resident population of Erfurt. The characteristics 'age', 'sex' and 'settlement structure' correspond to the sample values of the population.

Table 1. Social and structural characteristics of the household survey compared with the population of the city of Erfurt (1996 and 2012, in per cent)

	Basic overall city of Erfurt	2012		1996		
		Respondent sample (unweighted)		Basic overall city of Erfurt	Respondent sample (unweighted)	
Sex	Female	52	49	Female	52	54
	Male	48	51	Male	48	45
Age	18-24 years	10	10	18-24 years	11	10
	25-34 years	18	17	25-34 years	21	21
	35-44 years	15	15	35-44 years	21	19
	45-54 years	19	20	45-54 years	17	14
	55-64 years	17	15	55-64 years	18	16
Settlement structure	65- years	22	22	65- years	18	20
	Urban	51	52	Urban	43	42
	Plattenbau *	27	24	Plattenbau	40	44
	Village	22	24	Village	17	14

Notes: * Plattenbau: panel flat (a building made from prefabricated slabs).

Sources: Erfurt statistics. Housing and Household Survey (1996) and (2012).

5. Operationalisation

Dependent variables. As dependent variables, the constructs of general satisfaction with the work of the local public administration (2012) and with the effectiveness of the public administration's work overall (1996) are used in this paper. Each item is operationalized one-dimensionally (scaled from 1 'very satisfied' to 5 'very unsatisfied').

Independent variables.

Measuring responsiveness leads us to the following two questions: What does responsiveness mean? How can we best define and operationalize responsiveness? In this paper, responsiveness is measured, according to Almond & Verba (1963) and Derlien & Löwenhaupt (1997), with an additive index consisting of three items: 'All people are treated equally by the public administration', 'Civil servants represent the interests of the people', 'Feeling equal when being in contact with public administration' (each coded: 1 'true' to 3 'not true').

Other independent variables in the model used consist essentially of the evaluation of other civil services, the perceived performance, the perceived reputation of the local administration, and of stereotypes (Grunow & Strüngmann, 2008). Some of the constructs are multidimensional. They are modelled in the analysis in the form of additive indices.

- 1) *Stereotypes:* An additive index consisting of the following two items: 'Local administration is bureaucratic' and 'Local administration is progressive'. Each item is coded: 1 'true' to 3 'not true'ⁱⁱⁱ
- 2) *Evaluation of the performance at the last administration contact:* An additive index of satisfaction consisting of three items: 'Satisfaction with personal advice', 'Satisfaction with processing time' and 'Satisfaction with professional/technical advice' (each coded: 1 'very satisfied' to 5 'very dissatisfied').
- 3) *Evaluation of other civil services:* An additive index consisting of the following five items (each coded: 1 'true' to 3 'not true'): 'Other civil services are more progressive than the local administration', 'Other civil services are more modern than the local administration', 'Other authorities are working faster than the local administration', 'Other civil services are more citizen-friendly than the local administration' and 'Other civil services are more flexible than the local administration'.
- 4) Finally, the *reputation of the public administration* is measured by two single items: 'What do you think of the reputation of the local administration in the population?' and 'What do you think about the local administration personally?' (each coded: 1 'very good' to 5 'very bad').

6. Results

6.1. Descriptive analyses

Looking at satisfaction with the administration in detail, Figure 2 shows typical results. Satisfaction with opening hours and with technical and personal advice is stable and in the middle range. In both surveys from 1996 and 2012, the respondents are dissatisfied with the understandability of forms and with the perceived effectiveness of the local administration's workings. The trend shows that the administration in 1996 is evaluated more positively than in 2012.

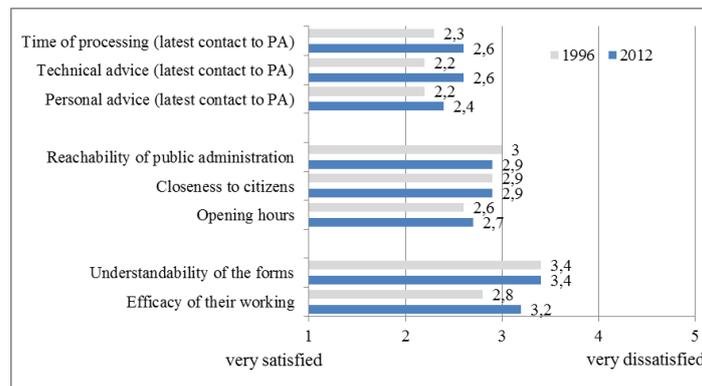


Figure 2. Satisfaction with the public administration in Erfurt, 1996 and 2012

Reputation, evaluation and perceived responsiveness. Next, we look at the reputation of the local administration in Erfurt: at its evaluation when compared to other authorities, and at its perceived responsiveness. Figure 3 shows interesting results: in 1996 as well as in 2012, the administration's reputation among the respondents is better than its perceived reputation among the public. All in all, the local administration achieves a better reputation between 1996 and 2012.

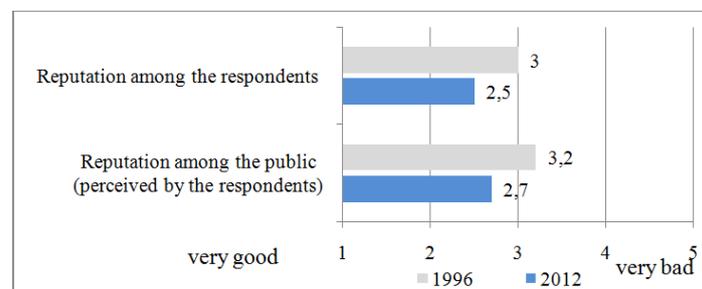


Figure 3. Reputation of the public administration in Erfurt, 1996 and 2012

The mainly positive image of the local administration in the eyes of the Erfurt population also illustrates the comparison with other authorities (cf. Figure 4). Other authorities are not considered to be more flexible, faster, or more modern. Again, the local administration is better evaluated in 2012 than in 1996.

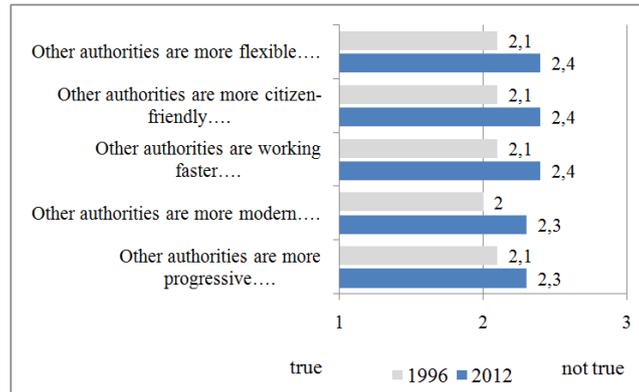


Figure 4. Evaluation of local administration in comparison with other authorities

Some results of the local administration’s perceived responsiveness and of some stereotypes are shown in Figure 5.

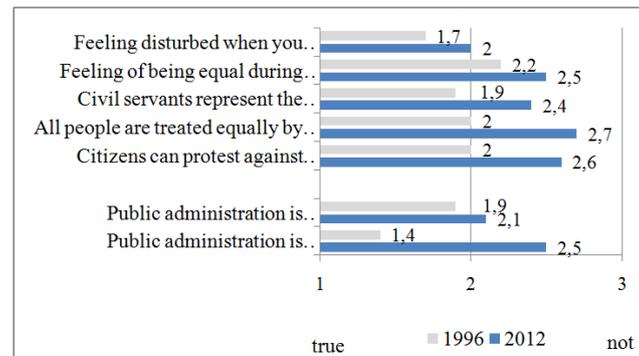


Figure 5. Perceived responsiveness and stereotypes of the local administration in Erfurt, 1996 and 2012

The mainly positive change in the evaluation of the local government in Erfurt between 1996 and 2012 was modified fundamentally. The public administration of Erfurt is perceived as becoming less responsive between 1996 and 2012. The respondents do not feel equal in contact with the public administration and they do not think that the civil servants represent the interests of the people. Further analyses must show which factors can explain these attitudes.

6.2. Further analyses

The analyses presented could show that there are some changes in the attitudes of the people in Erfurt towards public administration. The questions are now: What can explain these changes? What are the factors behind these attitudes and how do these factors correspond with each other?

Firstly, this section will analyse the relationship between satisfaction with the local administration and its perceived responsiveness. The relationships in the responsiveness index, including satisfaction and reputation among the respondents, were examined by correlation analysis (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation analysis of the administration's responsiveness index with satisfaction and reputation; 1996 and 2012

	Responsiveness (additive index); r (coefficient)
1996	
Satisfaction with the effectiveness of the public administration's work overall	.48***
Satisfaction with technical advice	.29***
Satisfaction with personal advice	.29***
Satisfaction with time of processing	.28***
Personal perception of the local public administration's reputation	.33***
Reputation of local public administration	.45***
2012	
Satisfaction with local public administration	.34***
Satisfaction with technical advice	.33***
Satisfaction with personal advice	.34***
Satisfaction with time of processing	.26***
Personal perception of the local public administration's reputation	.34***
Reputation of local public administration	.46***

Notes: Pearson-Bravais coefficients, double-sided. Level of significance: * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001

Source: Erfurt statistics. Housing and Household Survey 2012. Authors' calculations.

The analysis shows, firstly, that all items are highly significantly related to the index of responsiveness. The strongest item in 2012 is the reputation of the administration ($r = .46$). In 1996 this item is again very strong ($r = .45$); only a little bit stronger is the satisfaction with the effectiveness of the public administration's work overall. All the other items are less strong, but in the same range (r between .26 and .34). Secondly, it is striking that all factors in the investigation period are very stable.

The next step in the analysis is to find out if there are any relationships between satisfaction with the local administration on the one side and with the evaluation of other authorities and the reputation of their 'own' local administration on the other (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation analysis of satisfaction with local administration compared with other authorities and with its own reputation, 1996 and 2012

	General satisfaction with local PA; r (coefficient)
1996	
Other civil services are more progressive...	.39***
Other civil services are more modern42***
Other authorities are working faster37***
Other civil services are more citizen-friendly...	.40***
Other civil services are more flexible...	.43***
'Own' reputation of local public administration	.36***
Perceived reputation of local public administration among the population	.29***
2012	
Other civil services are more progressive...	-.09**
Other civil services are more modern ...	-.07*
Other authorities are working faster ...	-.10**
Other civil services are more citizen-friendly...	-.13***
Other civil services are more flexible...	-.10**
'Own' reputation of local public administration	.39***
Perceived reputation of local public administration among the population	.22***

Note: Pearson-Bravais coefficients, double-sided. Level of significance: * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001

Source: Erfurt statistics. Housing and Household Survey 2012. Authors calculations.

The analysis shows different results in the two research years. Compared with some of the preceding results, the local administration in Erfurt is better evaluated

in 2012 than in 1996. Corresponding to that, the comparison to other agencies influences the general satisfaction with their ‘own’ local administration much more strongly in 1996 than in 2012. Maybe the results are different because of the dissimilar wording of the dependent variables used.^{iv} But the important role of the two reputation variables is conspicuous. Not very surprisingly, the reputation among the people asked about themselves correlates higher with the satisfaction with the local administration than the perceived reputation in general in both years.

The final analytical step is to clarify the influence of other agencies’ evaluation, of reputation, of responsiveness and of the local government’s performance on satisfaction with the local administration in Erfurt.

According to Table 4, the most important variable is the subjective reputation. In both OLS regression analyses this variable is the strongest predictor of satisfaction with public administration. In 1996, there are no other significant factors in the model used. In 2012, stereotypes and satisfaction with the administration’s performance have a significant but weaker influence on satisfaction with the local administration in Erfurt. Surprisingly, the responsiveness – built by using an additive index – has no significant influence on satisfaction with administration.

Table 4. Findings from OLS multiple regression analyses about the effect of independent variables on satisfaction with PA in Erfurt, 1996 and 2012

	1996	2012
Reputation of local public administration	.37***	.34***
Personal perception of the local public administration’s reputation	.03ns	.08ns
Satisfaction with performance of public administration (index)	.04ns	.15**
Stereotypes (index)	.07ns	.14**
Evaluation of other agencies (index)	.09ns	-.06ns
Responsiveness (index)	.14ns	.01ns
R ²	.32	.33
Adjusted R ²	.29	.32
F	14,356***	35,336***

Note: The items ‘Satisfaction with personal advice’ and ‘Satisfaction with time of processing’ were not included in the analyses. Level of significance: * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001; n.s.: not significant. Beta-coefficients. Method: Enter.

Sources: Erfurt statistics. Housing and Household Survey 1996 and 2012. Authors’ calculations.

7. Discussion

In the beginning of the 1990s, Putnam (1994) identified the responsiveness of public administration as one of the four main explanatory factors for satisfaction with government performance. But until now, it has been unclear whether the perceived responsiveness of public administration could explain satisfaction with public administration. Many parts of the studies concerning satisfaction with public administration are limited. The questions about satisfaction with public administration often ask about opening times or the friendliness of the civil servants. However, this is only one side of the coin; on the other hand, numerous questions remain unanswered. For example, questions remain about how citizens’ attitudes towards public administration change after their contact with administration, or about what emotional associations citizens have when they think of public administration. Although responsiveness is not one of the central research topics in administration research, this concept might provide answers to these questions.

According to the research about the responsiveness of public administration, Saltzstein (1985, 1992) pointed out two aspects. First, the different approaches and models of responsiveness have not been convincing so far. Second, as Saltzstein (1985, p. 284) observed, the research on responsiveness should answer three questions or aspects: ‘To whom, to what, and in what form’? But there are still some further aspects, e.g. the connection between responsiveness and satisfaction with public administration.

This paper tries to answer the question of how perceived responsiveness influences citizens' satisfaction with administration, and how this responsiveness is linked to other indicators that explain satisfaction with public administration. In short: How strong is the factor 'responsiveness' in a multivariate model? How 'stable' are these results over the years? What are the central results?

1. There are relatively strong significant correlations between perceived responsiveness and satisfaction with public administration. Similarly to Vigoda (2000), the perception of the administration as responsive plays a more important role in explaining satisfaction with administration than the perceived qualifications of the staff. But in competition with other factors explaining this satisfaction, responsiveness loses its power.
2. People have other agencies in mind, and there might be negative clichés or stereotypes about administration. But neither the evaluation of other agencies nor stereotypes has a significant influence on satisfaction with their 'own' local administration. To be precise, the stereotype of a bureaucratic and non-progressive administration has, in 2012, a significant, but only a weak influence on satisfaction.
3. Finally, the analyses could show that there is a factor that explains the variance of satisfaction with public administration far better than responsiveness and other factors do: the reputation of the public administration. The reputation (or shall we say the 'prestige'?) is the most important factor in explaining satisfaction with the administration.

What are the conclusions of the results for further research concerning responsiveness and satisfaction with public administration?

1. Because of the more powerful explaining factor of 'own reputation' in comparison with the perceived reputation or the evaluation of other civil services, I think that we cannot find a 'general stereotype' of public administration; it is much more a specific evaluation of the 'own' public administration.

What exactly do we mean when we ask about 'reputation' or 'prestige'? Is it influenced by stereotypes of 'bureaucratic' administration? Interestingly, the correlation between reputation and responsiveness ($r=.46$) is much stronger than the correlation between reputation and stereotypes ($r=.23$).

2. But what are the factors behind this reputation? It is plausible to presume three factors lying behind the reputation of public administration: personal contacts, talking about administration in our peer groups, and the influence of mass/local media reporting.

However, there is only limited research about the influence of personal contacts on satisfaction with public administration (Feick, & Mayntz, 1982; Derlien, & Löwenhaupt, 1997), and about the influence of media usage on attitudes towards public administration (Grunow, & Strüngmann, 2008).

3. Another question relates to the correspondence between responsiveness and trust. Behnke (2009, p. 54) considers the low trust in public administration (in Germany) as their 'central problem'. Because of this low trust level, the public administration has to be more responsive to citizens, e.g. in the sense of more transparency.

Finally, it must be stressed that decisions by public administration are mainly based on laws, regulations, etc. and secondly on the attitudes of citizens. Recognizing these concerns, a trusting and responsive relationship between citizens and administration has many advantages. First of all, in times of increasing populism and mistrust in public institutions, it is important that citizens have trust in public administration and that they believe that their concerns are handled accurately *and* fairly. The baseline of responsiveness is the relationship between citizens and the civil service.

Second, a trusting relationship can, for citizens, also compensate to some extent for disappointing administrative contacts. A citizen-friendly administration output can be a benefit for citizens, but also for the administration itself. Some studies

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could show that efforts by the administration to simplify the form system or to generate a 'readable' form or leaflet, might lead to positive feelings among citizens (and the staff of the administration); this is also a prerequisite for increased citizen participation. Moreover, these attempts 'to make public administrations' output more understandable' also reduces questions, complaints etc., thus saving time and money (Giesen-Winkler, Margies, & Fisch, 2011).

There is still much further research to do to find more information about the citizen-administration relationship. Germany is not the only country where the public administration is criticized. Accordingly, comparative studies should be performed with other countries. However, this is not currently possible because of data availability. Perhaps it is also necessary to rethink and to differentiate the role of the public in public management, as Thomas (2013) suggests. People who are in contact with public administration have three different roles. They are citizens, and customers, and partners!

Notes

ⁱ Vigoda's model is based on a survey of nearly 300 residents of a major Israeli city.

ⁱⁱ Many thanks go to Mr. Schönheit (Statistical Office of Erfurt) for providing the data and to Mrs. Hettstaedt (Press Officer of Erfurt) for the establishment of important contacts.

ⁱⁱⁱ The correlation analysis within a factor analysis (principal component analysis) revealed these two items that had the highest correlation with each other (.37).

^{iv} As already mentioned, in 2012 the survey asked about satisfaction with public administration; in 1996 it had asked about satisfaction with the effectiveness of the public administration's work overall.

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