

“Comparing residents’ perceptions in townships and suburbs regarding service delivery by municipality under administration”

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SECTION 1. Macroeconomic processes and regional economies management

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Comparing residents' perceptions in townships and suburbs regarding service delivery by municipality under administration

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of residents staying in suburbs and townships regarding the service delivered by a municipality under administration. The South African literature shows that residents in different locations behave differently when they receive poor service delivery from municipalities. Internationally, service delivery by municipalities has been measured using two research instruments. The research design was a survey and the sample size was 522 respondents. The convenient sampling technique was used to select them. The primary data were collected via face-to-face interviews, and a validated services perception (SERVPERF) questionnaire, developed by Cronin and Taylor, was adapted and used to collect data. The main finding of the study was that residents in the townships did not organize themselves and voice their dissatisfaction by embarking on protests, and they significantly agreed (Odds ratio = 0.54; $P = 0.005$; 95 confidence interval = 0.3516; 0.8279), more than the suburbs residents, that in the past eight months the service had improved. The study concludes with recommendations for future research and implications for municipal managers.

Keywords: Hirschman theory, service delivery, SERVPERF, suburbs and townships residents.

JEL Classification: M31.

Introduction

There is available legislation that guides municipalities in terms of rendering services to communities. In South Africa, municipalities must comply with the Local Government Systems Act of 2000. When municipalities plan service delivery, they must consult the communities (Tsheola, Ramonyai & Segage, 2014). Municipal managers who offer the following services excellently: sanitation, electricity, solid waste disposal, and construction and maintenance of roads, are in compliance with Section 152 of the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996).

Despite the promulgation of legislation to provide excellent service delivery in South Africa, there are reasons for municipalities not rendering services as expected. This has resulted in them being negatively perceived by residents. In terms of the latter, Khale and Worku (2013) found that municipal employees lacked the technical skills required to render effective services, such as artisan work, engineering and town planning. In another study, it emerged that employees did not have skills that enabled them to treat residents with care (Danzi & Danzi, 2010). Corruption and political appointments were other reasons for municipalities not performing as expected (Khale & Worku, 2013; Tshishonga, 2014).

It was also found that the irregular appointment of service providers (Bizana, Naude & Ambe, 2015) and non-involvement of communities in the planning of service delivery had a negative impact (Dale, 2004).

Although service delivery has been researched in South Africa, the literature review revealed that there is a lack of research which focuses on comparing residents' perceptions in townships and suburbs regarding service delivery by municipalities. According to the White Paper on Local Government (1998), townships are locations that were built far away from the metropolitan cities and industrial areas and were less developed, whereas the suburbs were built closer to the metropolitan cities. Prior to the 1994 democratic elections, the apartheid regime used the Group Areas Act of 1971 to remove Blacks and Coloureds staying near metropolitan cities. Therefore, even today, most blacks still stay in the townships. In the suburbs, residents pay tax at exorbitant rates and in exchange for excellent service delivery, whereas residents of townships are known for not paying rates and taxes. It was found that residents in townships are more likely to embark on service delivery protests than those in suburbs (Alexander, 2010), because "they are deprived of the means to meet the needs of local residents" (White Paper on Local Government, 1998, p.13).

Thus, the research problem of this study was to determine the perceptions of residents staying in suburbs and townships, who are serviced by one municipality. At the time that this study was conducted, the

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municipality was under administration. It was reported that two municipalities were under administration in Mpumalanga, because they were unable to meet their financial obligations towards their creditors (Makwetu, 2014). Despite this, there were no service delivery protests in the townships that were serviced by one of the abovementioned municipalities. The research question in this study was therefore the following: What are the perceptions regarding service delivery of the residents of suburbs and townships in the municipality under administration?

In this study, the issue of service delivery, as well as different theories and the methodology used in the study, are discussed. The descriptive and inferential findings are also presented. In the discussion section, the results of this study are compared and contrasted with previous research in the field. The study concludes with recommendations for future research, and also considers the practical implications for municipal managers.

1. Theoretical framework

Service delivery is defined as an “outcome, of which the quality depends on factors such as: clear and realistic policies; appropriate allocation of powers, functions and financial resources; performance and accountability of State organs to implement policies; co-ordination between organs of State; public participation and involvement, as well as the level of self-reliance of communities” (White Paper of Local Government, 1998, p.8). Another definition of service delivery is providing residents with recreational facilities (Goslin & Kluka, 2015), ensuring that they are not exposed to crime (Mogajane, Meyer, Toriolo, Amusa & Monyeke, 2014) and supplying them with water, electricity, healthcare facilities, and sanitation (Tsheola et al., 2014). These services, if not rendered, will cause dissatisfaction and endanger the lives of residents (Municipal Finance Management Act, 2007).

Internationally, service delivery by municipalities has been measured using two research instruments, viz. SERVQUAL (i.e. service quality measuring expectation minus perceptions) and SERVPERF (i.e. perceptions-based approach). The former was developed in the mid-eighties by Parasuraman, Zeithman and Berry (1985). Research has revealed that expectations exceed perceptions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Donnelly & Shiu, 1999). In light of this, Cronin and Taylor recommended that when measuring service delivery, the focus should only be on measuring perceptions. Despite the SERVQUAL being criticized (Ladhari, 2009), it is still used globally to measure service delivery in municipalities (Bryslant & Curry, 2001; Gaster, 1996; Mokhlis, Aleesa & Mamat, 2011; Rodríguez, Burguete, Vaughan & Edwards, 2009).

A meta-analysis study found that both the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are valid questionnaires for data collection (Carillat, Jaramillo & Mulki, 2007). In this study, the researchers aligned themselves with the perceptions-based approach, because their focus was only on measuring the perceptions of residents, and not their expectations.

Most of the service delivery studies have focused on homogenous samples, and the literature review showed that there was a lack of research conducted on a comparison of the perceptions of residents in different locations (Akinboade, Mokwena & Kinck, 2014; Alexander, 2010; Artinskon, 2007; Booysen, 2007). In the South African context, research on service delivery has mainly focused on townships (Alexander, 2010, p. 25). South African research points in one direction, namely that when residents in townships are disaffected with service delivery, they embark on protests (Artinskon, 2007; Booysen, 2007), and in some instances do not pay monthly municipal rates and taxes (Shongwe, 2007). On the contrary, research done within the suburbs seems to suggest that residents complain individually (Alexander, 2010). It can therefore be deduced that residents in different locations behave differently when they receive poor service delivery from municipalities.

There are theories to explain how residents can respond to poor service delivery (see Dowding, John, Mergoupis & van Vugt, 2000; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996), but for the purposes of this study, only Hirschman's theory will be discussed, because it can be contextualized to the South African situation. In his classical work published in 1970, Hirschman stated that when residents are unhappy with poor service delivery, they will form a group and voice their opinion or leave the location (Gehlbach, 2000). In applying Hirschman's theory to the South African context, this means that the residents who are not satisfied with service delivery will move from the townships to the suburbs. However, the key driver for their movement is affordability, since property is more expensive and rates and taxes are higher in the suburbs than the townships. If residents of townships cannot move to the suburbs, they voice their dissatisfaction by embarking on service delivery protests (Akinboade et al., 2014).

From the abovementioned literature, it can be deduced that service delivery to residents is their constitutional right. Furthermore, service delivery has been researched internationally since 1970, but in South Africa, most of the research has focused on townships. In order to close this gap, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of residents staying in suburbs and townships regarding service delivery by a municipality under administration.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design. In order to answer the research question, the research design that was used in this study was a survey and cross-sectional design. In terms of the former, the researchers wanted to quantify the responses (Creswell, 2014). A research design is defined as a plan or structure of the study (Spector, 2011). The reasons for conducting a survey were as follows:

- ◆ it is easier and quicker for respondents to answer;
- ◆ the answers of different respondents are easier to compare;
- ◆ data is collected from a larger sample; and
- ◆ answers are easier to code and statistically analyze (Neuman, 2014, p. 205).

As the research design was a survey, the epistemology of the study was positivistic. The notion of positivism was developed by a sociologist by the name of Augusto Comte in the 1800s (Babbie, 2013), who believed that knowledge can be generated from natural science (i.e. statistics) laws (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016), and that data are used to generate new knowledge (Creswell, 2014). Since the researchers were influenced by positivism, their ontological viewpoint was to collect data by being detached from respondents (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2011).

2.2. Research methodology. While the research design is a plan or structure of the study, the research methodology is the how of doing research (Quinlan, 2011), and comprises the population, sampling technique, and data analysis:

2.2.1. Population and sampling technique. Population is defined as the total number of individuals targeted by researchers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In this study, the researchers accessed information about the population size from the census website, which showed that there were almost four hundred thousand residents in the suburbs and townships of the municipality where the study was conducted (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

The convenience sampling technique was used to select respondents based on the geographical locations of the researchers (Kumar, 2014), as well as on those respondents who were readily available (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2015). Some of the researchers stayed in the suburbs and others in the townships, and it was therefore easy and convenient for them to collect data in those areas. Only 522 respondents participated in the study. This number (i.e. 522) is higher than the number recommended by Leedy and Ormrod (2014), who argued that if the population is 5000, the researchers should sample only 400 respondents.

2.2.2. Data collection. A 22-item close-ended validated service perception (SERVPERF) questionnaire (see Llusar & Zornoza, 2000) was adapted and used in this study. As discussed earlier, it does not focus on expectations, but rather perceptions. Since the questionnaire was used in an international context, it was adapted to suit the South African situation. The questionnaire was categorized as follows: Section A dealt with biographical information, and section B contained service delivery-related questions. The questionnaire had a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = "Strongly disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3 = "Agree", 4 = "Strongly agree") and measured the following dimensions: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. A scale of 1 to 4 was used because it assisted the researchers to group 1 and 2 into disagree, and 3 and 4 into agree. Before the analysis stage, the scale of 1 to 4 was collapsed into two groups, where 1 to 2 was disagree and 3 to 4 was agree.

Primary data were collected through face-to-face interviews, and the remaining respondents were given the questionnaire to complete on their own. Since most the respondents understood English, they did not have problems completing the questionnaire. The primary data were collected by five staff members from Tshwane University of Technology and two research assistants. Once the data were collected, the research assistants coded raw data in Excel. Since this study was quantitative, the coding was in the form of numbers (Struwig & Stead, 2013).

2.2.3. Data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to measure respondents' biographical information (refer to Table 2). Inferential statistics were calculated in Stata. In this study, odds ratios were used to compare the perceptions of residents in the suburbs and townships regarding service delivery by the municipality (refer to Table 3). Logistic regression is a mathematical modelling approach that can be used to describe the relationship of several independent variables to a binary dependent variable (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2002). The logistic function:

$$f(z) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}}, \quad (1)$$

where $-\infty \leq z \leq \infty$ describes the mathematical form on which the logistic model is based (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2002). When $z = -\infty$ the logistic function is $f(z) = 0$, and when $z = \infty$ the logistic function is $f(z) = 1$ (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2002). Given

$$z = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k = \alpha + \sum \beta_i X_i, \quad (2)$$

where α and $\beta_{i's}$ are unknown parameters (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2002) that can be estimated by maximum likelihood, the logistic function becomes:

$$f(z) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\alpha + \sum \beta_i X_i)}} \tag{3}$$

The logistic model can be denoted by the conditional probability statement

$$P(R = 1 | X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\alpha + \sum \beta_i X_i)}} \tag{4}$$

where $R = 1$ if the respondent resides in the townships, and $R = 0$ if the respondent resides in the suburbs (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2002). Logistic regression is used to analyze the data when the dependent variable is binary. The dependent variable of the data is place of residence, which is binary because the respondent can either reside in the townships or the suburbs. Logistic regression is the most appropriate statistical technique for analyzing data. One of the advantages of using logistic regression is that non-statisticians can understand it and interpret the results from it. The variables considered in the study are all important, and are simultaneously included in the logistic regression model.

2.2.4. Reliability and validity. In this study, the overall Cronbach’s alpha was 0.905 (refer to Table 1). Since this number is close to 1, this means that the instrument used in this study has a high reliability (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013).

Table 1. Overall reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha based on standardized Items	N
	.905	22

In view of the fact that the instrument has been previously validated, construct validity was not measured, only content and face validity were conducted. In terms of the latter, the instrument was taken to the statistician, who gave expert advice on the scale of measurement, which enabled the researchers to use logistic regression (Cooper & Schindler, 2010). Face validity was done by pre-testing the instrument on twenty respondents. External validity was not achieved, however, because the sampling technique used was not representative (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

2.2.5. Ethical considerations. Prior to the commencement of the study, the researchers were given a permission letter by the municipality. In the letter, it was clearly stated that the researchers must not mention the name of the municipality when the study is published. In addition, respondents were not coerced to participate in the study, and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable. The researchers adhered to all the ethical principles stipulated by the Tshwane University of Technology.

3. Findings

The study results comprise two sections viz. descriptive and inferential statistics. In terms of the former, the biographical information of the respondents is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Biographical information

Variable		Townships (%)	Suburbs (%)	N
Gender	Male	58.4	41.6	214
	Female	65.6	34.4	308
Employment status	Employed	68.1	31.9	354
	Retired	73.7	26.3	19
	Unemployed	48.7	51.4	148
Family income	R0 – R3000	47.5	52.5	141
	R3001 – R10 000	54.1	45.9	122
	R10 001+	74.7	25.3	257
Education level	Matric	56.0	44.0	218
	Certificate/Diploma	65.2	34.8	184
	Degree	70.8	29.2	120
Duration	0 – 1 year	58.4	41.6	89
	1 – 3 years	66.7	33.3	120
	3 years or more	62.3	37.7	313
Tenure status	Own	61.5	38.5	265
	Rent	63.8	36.2	257
Age	18 – 24	50.3	49.7	149
	25 – 44	64.4	35.6	225
	45 – 54	67.6	32.4	74
	55+	77.0	23.0	74

A total of 522 residents of eMalahleni local municipality were interviewed. Of these 522 residents, 327 (62.6%) resided in the suburbs, while 195 (37.4%) resided in the townships. The majority of the respondents (43.1%) were aged between 25 and 44 years, followed by those aged 18 to 24 years, and the proportion of those aged 45 to 54 and 55 years and more was the same (14.2%). About 354 (68.0%) of the respondents were employed, while 19 (3.7%) and 148 (28.4%) were retired and unemployed respectively. The majority of the respondents (49.4%) earned more than R10 000.00, while 23.5% of them earned between R3 001.00 and R10 000.00, and 27.1% earned less than R3000.00. Approximately 120 (23.0%) of the residents had a degree or postgraduate qualifications, while 184 (35.3%) of them had certificates or diplomas, and 218 (41.8%) had matric. Roughly 313 (60.0%) of the residents had been staying in the municipality for five years or more, while 120 (23.0%) of them had been staying in the municipality for a period of between one and three years, and 89 (17.1%) had been staying in the municipality for less than a year. With regard to tenure status, 257 (49.2%) were renting and 265 (50.8%) owned the properties where they were staying.

3.1. Inferential statistics. Table 3 shows the multivariate logistic model used in this study.

Table 3. Results from the multivariate logistic models

Variable		OR	p-value	95% CI
Service points to pay municipality accounts	Agree	(-)		
	Disagree	0.64	0.020	(0.4337; 0.9299)
Marketing materials associated with service to residents	Agree	(-)		
	Disagree	1.64	0.02	(1.0810; 2.4894)
Road maintenance	Agree	(-)		
	Disagree	1.55	0.129	(0.8792; 2.7491)
Service improved in the last 8 months	Agree	(-)		
	Disagree	0.54	0.005	(0.3516; 0.8279)
Municipality provides error-free bills.	Agree	(-)		
	Disagree	1.68	0.022	(1.0769; 2.6355)
I smell sewerage in my area.	Agree	(-)		
	Disagree	1.32	0.141	(0.9129; 1.8969)

The odds ratio of the variable “service points to pay municipality accounts” is 0.64. This implies that townships residents are 0.64 times more likely to disagree than suburbs residents that the municipality has enough service points to pay municipality accounts. Townships residents are significantly less likely to disagree that the municipality has enough service points to pay municipal accounts than suburbs residents.

The odds ratio of the variable “marketing materials associated with service to residents” is 1.64. This implies that township residents are 1.64 times more likely to disagree than suburbs residents that the municipality uses marketing materials related to the services that it renders. Townships residents are significantly more likely to disagree that the municipality uses marketing materials related to services it renders than suburbs residents.

The odds ratio of the variable “road maintenance” is 1.55. This implies that township residents are 1.55 times more likely to disagree than suburbs residents that the municipality maintains the road, but this is not significant. Townships residents are more likely to disagree that the municipality maintains the roads than suburbs residents.

The odds ratio of the variable “service improved in the last eight (8) months” is 0.54. This implies that townships residents are 0.54 times more likely to disagree than suburbs residents that the municipality has improved the services in the last eight (8) months prior to the survey. Townships residents are significantly less likely to disagree that the municipality has improved the services in the last eight (8) months prior to the survey than suburbs residents.

The odds ratio of the variable “municipality provides error-free bills” is 1.68. This implies that townships residents are 1.68 times more likely to disagree than suburbs residents that the municipality provides error-free bills. Townships residents are thus more likely to disagree that the municipality provides error-free bills than suburbs residents.

The odds ratio of the variable “I smell sewerage in my area” is 1.32. This implies that townships residents are 1.38 times more likely to disagree than suburbs residents that they can smell sewerage. Township residents are more likely to disagree that they smell sewerage than suburbs residents.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to compare the perceptions of suburbs and townships residents with regard to services rendered by a municipality under administration. The results of the study showed that there were differences in these residents’ perceptions.

It was found that the perceptions of residents regarding whether the municipality had enough service points to pay municipality accounts were significantly different – townships residents agreed that the municipality had enough service points to pay municipality accounts, while suburbs residents disagreed. The perceptions of residents regarding error-free bills were significantly different – townships residents disagreed that the municipality provides error-free bills, while suburbs residents agreed that the municipality provides error-free bills. The perceptions of residents regarding road maintenance also differed: townships residents disagreed that the roads were maintained, while suburbs residents agreed, but the difference was not significant. The perceptions of residents regarding the smell of sewerage in their respective areas were not the same: townships residents disagreed that they smelt sewerage in their area, while suburbs residents agreed, but the difference was not significant. These results imply that the municipality lacks technically skilled workers. Khale and Worku (2013) found that in North-West and Gauteng provinces, the municipality failed to deliver excellent service because they did not have technically skilled workers. Internationally, it was also found that a municipality that had employees with technical skills rendered an excellent service to its residents (Alroaia & Najafi, 2012).

The perceptions of residents regarding whether marketing materials associated with services offered were informative were significantly different: township residents disagreed that marketing materials associated with services were informative, while suburb residents agreed. Similarly, it was found that township

residents prefer direct marketing methods (face-to-face) to other marketing methods, such as the sending of pamphlets (Pretorius & Schurink, 2007).

It also emerged from the data that the perceptions of residents regarding whether the municipality's services had improved in the last eight months prior to the survey were significantly different: township residents agreed that the municipality's services improved in the last eight months prior to the survey, while suburb residents disagreed. There is evidence to show that in townships prior to elections, service improves, and other methods, such as giving residents food parcels, are used to influence service delivery perceptions (Mail & Guardian, 2014). This study was conducted after the 2014 national elections.

5. Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study is that it used the non-probability sampling technique, and its results cannot therefore be generalised. In addition, the research design of the study was cross-sectional, and the sample was skewed towards suburb respondents. However, this shed some light on how residents voice their discontent without acting violently, as was observed by other scholars who conducted studies in the townships.

6. Recommendations for the municipality and future research

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made for the municipality which, if implemented, might be positively perceived:

- ◆ hire or train more staff to handle technical problems;
- ◆ send residents error-free bills;
- ◆ work on reducing the smell of sewerage; and
- ◆ use appropriate marketing methods.

In terms of future research, scholars could consider doing research in other locations where the municipalities are under administration. Furthermore,

future research could use representative sampling techniques, so that the results can be generalised to the population.

Conclusion

The study findings are similar to studies done in other municipalities. In this regard, it was found that municipalities in South Africa did not have employees who can handle technical problems. The contribution of the study is the finding that residents in townships who receive poor service from the municipality do not always embark on protests. In terms of theory, allowing residents to participate in this study is in line with Hirschman's theory. It was mentioned earlier that "voice" is a dimension of Hirschman's theory, and international scholars have used the SERVPERF to measure residents' perceptions regarding the service that they received from municipalities.

With regard to managerial implications, municipal managers might continue to be faced with disaffected residents in suburbs and townships. In terms of the literature, the latter, in other locations, organized themselves into groups and used protests to voice their dissatisfaction. In addition, in terms of suburb residents, they might not continue to pay their rates and taxes, which could have negative financial consequences. In conclusion, this study has shown that if the municipality does not render service equally to both townships and suburbs residents, they will be perceived in a negative light, and will not be in compliance with their legislative obligations.

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