COMMUNITY AND RELIGION
IN URBAN SPACE

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Abstract: *The first two sections of this paper describe some theoretical areas, covering the concept of community and an analysis of the reports between the religious and the territorial communities in the urban space. The third section reviews the results from a research study of the associations between religious affiliation and other community-related issues, like community attachment and the propensity towards participation in community activities (i.e. community involvement). The differential analysis of these aspects leads to a series of conclusions of practical value for both the secular and religious institutions.*

Keywords: *community, religious affiliation, community activities.*

1. Introduction

The urban space in particular, constitutes a place of intersection of diverse, dynamically intertwined communities. Both the territorial and religious communities – often mediated by the ethnic community – went through a particular evolution process during the last decades. This happened everywhere in the world due to urbanisation, and so did in Romania.

We'll be starting by reviewing some of the main issues related to the concept of community, mentioning some well-known constructs from Ferdinand Tönnies. We will then be inserting, synthetically, a series of analyses and considerations about religion in urban space as formulated during the latter half of the last century.

The core of our work surrounds the results of a research we undertook in the city of Alba Iulia, Romania, part of a municipal local development strategy project. The research team included "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia's Lecturers Vlad Millea, PhD., and Rodica Silvia Stânea, PhD. Out of all findings, we will focus only on the associations between religious affiliation and the three above mentioned community issues of attachment, safety and community involvement. Our conclusions will cover both practical aspects of our analysis and future opportunities for research of the relationships between religious and territorial communities in the urban space.

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2. Community and Society: Types of Communities

Starting with Greek antiquity and all the way through Enlightenment - Gerard Delanty observed that community expresses the essence of the society and not its antithesis. During the early modern times the concepts of community and of society were used virtually interchangeably, the community signifying the social domain of daily life. During later times, the two concepts were to become opposable (Delanty, 2008, p. 8). This happened especially after the publication of Ferdinand Tönnies' now famous treatise on community and society *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* in 1887.

In it, Tönnies identified three general types of communities: 1) the community of blood (kinship), 2) the community of place (vicinity) and the community of spirit (friendship). The author went further and described the connections between these three communities. The community of blood, as a unit of the essence - the German sociologist considered - develops and takes shape in a community of place, as an instant expression of communal life, and the community of place develops into a community of spirit, purely and simply as common action and common direction towards the same goal (Tönnies, 2016[1887], p. 63).

In sociology, the community of place (the vicinity) evolved towards the concept of a territorial community, a concept more encompassing, but less faithful to the original Tönniesian understanding. The Romanian sociologist Ion Mihăilescu proposed the following definition of a territorial community: "A group of people living under a particular social division of work, in a particular geographical area, having a common culture and a social system for organising activities, and who are conscious of belonging to the respective community (Mihăilescu, 2003, p. 264).

The concept of belonging to the community (the sense of community) is being approached through accents on social attachment, on solidarity, on clear emotional connections, on partnerships, on the common use and sharing of symbols, and on a common identity that can be used for the characterisation and the promotion of productive relationships in certain communitarian contexts. The value of these forms of community experience is considerable. Nevertheless, Hughey and Speer claimed, the image of the community that is being transmitted through this approach is incomplete, one finding himself unable to ignore the reality of both intra- and inter-community conflicts (Hughey & Speer, 2002, pp. 71-72). That may be one reason why, as Omoto and Snyder remarked, some theories of community belonging involve a more encompassing and potentially more flexible conception of community. The authors recommend shifting the comprehension of the concept of community from a geographically, spatially determined perspective, towards a more psychologically determined frame of reference (Omoto & Snyder, 2002, p. 848).

Invoking Tönnies once again, one can say that in both rural and urban communities one can encounter all three forms of Tönniessian communities: kinship, vicinity and friendship. However, as Tönnies himself puts it, vicinity tends to be more specific to the village, rather than friendship - which tends to be more specific to the city (Tönnies, 2016[1887], p. 64). Friendship, the German sociologist appreciated, develops independently from kinship and vicinity, especially through work relationships and

common interests - that is through the identities and similarities in the professions or the arts (Tönnies, 2016[1887], p. 64). One form of spiritual community (friendship), Tönnies suggests, is the religious community. In his famous treatise on community and society, he remarks that Divinity, when celebrated in common, achieves an important role in maintaining the communitarian linkage, for it only, or at least more so than other features, confers it a lively and durable form (Tönnies, 2016[1887], p. 64).

3. Religion and Community in Urban Space – Some Aspects of their Relationship

Starting in the 70s several studies of the relationship between religion and community in urban space focused on churches' adaptation strategies to the reality of increased mobility between city centres and the suburbs (Carlos, 1970; Gannon, 1978). The churches, Carlos contends, had to migrate with their parishes in order to survive (Carlos, 1970, p. 745). In this ample process of church migration, the role of the Church in community reconstruction was notable, for the need of community was stronger in the suburbs. Gannon states that the fixed territorial parishes, as traditionally organized in those years, were no longer suited to the demands of the new urban communities (Gannon, 1978, p. 229). Overall, the mutations in the religious institutions' life of the 70s and the 80s changed the religious geography of America and produced a disparity between the East and the West, due to different levels of urban mobility (Welch, 1983, p. 167).

In studying the religious institutions' geography of the London metropolitan area, Dwyer, Gilbert and Shah (2013) also remarked a close connection between the churches refocus on the suburbs and their implications in an inclusive associative culture in these new territories (p. 416). Since the suburban social landscape was often multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-cultural, the religious institutions' strategies also had to be adapted in terms of identity: "Ethnicity therefore needs to be tested, critically examined, and evaluated in terms of its authenticity in mediating fundamental human values and in opening persons to loyalty to God" (Williams, 1976, p. 607). From racial and ethnic perspective one can also remark an observation made by Dochuk (2003, pp. 184-185) in regard to churches' moving decision in the suburbs in some black protestant communities. The religious diversity intertwines tightly with the racial and ethnic one, increasing the diversity of the churches (Farnsley, 2000, p. 96).

Some general trends in churches' implication in the community life should be observed: 1) the formation and consolidation of an inclusive community identity (Williams, 1976); 2) the unification of several churches' efforts to resolve some major community problems like unemployment (Gannon, 1978), or like the scarcity of information and coordination abilities (Alex-Assensoh, 2004); 3) the supply of social services as a result of the decentralisation of social policing (Lichterman, 2008); Lichterman (2008, p. 100) also considers that religious [organisation]-based social services tend to be more effective and cheaper than those provided by the state agencies, and that they elicit a more charitable spirit from the people, who in addition, assume more responsible partnership roles in a new social contract.

Another dimension of the rapport between the church and community worth analysing is community attachment. Martinson and associates claimed that the adoption of traditional Christian values enhanced community attachment without necessarily making members more satisfied with their residential community (Martinson, Wilkening, & Buttel, 1982, p. 55).

On a more general note, D'Souza (2012, p. 160) mentioned the role of education in mediating the relationship between religion and the democratic community, between faith and citizenship, which translates into more involvement into community.

4. A Case Study in the Romanian Urban Space

In this section, we will be reviewing some of our findings from a questionnaire-based survey undertaken in the city of Alba Iulia, in Romania's Alba County.

The religious denominations of our sample respondents were as follows: 1.2% non-religious, 81.5% Greek Orthodox, 11.2% Pentecostals, 1.5% Eastern (Greco-) Catholics, 1.4% Western (Romano-) Catholics, 1.1% Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.6% Baptists, 0.5% Protestants, and also 0.5% Adventists. There were also 0.8% claiming to be of other religion.

Starting from this structure of our sample, as we mentioned in our introduction, we will be examining some associations between religious affiliation and other variables describing the relationships in the community, the attachment, and the participation.

4.1. Relationships with neighbours

The relationships in a territorial community can also be described by looking at the frequency of conflicts. The question posed on our questionnaire was: "During the last years, did you fight with your neighbours?" Out of the non-religious, 50% declared having no fights with their neighbours and 50% as having one or two fights in the last years. Out of the Orthodox, 87.3% had no fights, 10.4% had one or two fights and 2.4% had more than two fights. Out of the Greco-Catholics, 88.4% had no fights and 11.6% had one or two fights. All of the Roman-Catholics, Protestants, Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses declared they had no fights at all with neighbours in the last years. Out of the Baptists, 74.4% declared they had no fights and 25.6% had one or two fights. The Pentecostals had no fights in proportion of 70.1%, one or two fights in proportion of 24.2% and more than two fights in proportion of 5.7%. The majority of those of other religion also had no fights (79.2%), the remaining 20.8% having just one or two fights.

As to the general quality of their relationships with neighbours, the non-religious declared in proportion of 62.4% that they were fairly good, 24.7% that they were rather bad and 12.9% that they had no relationship at all. Out of the Orthodox, 47.7% appreciated their relationships with neighbours as being very good, 45.3% being fairly good and 2.3% rather bad, the remaining 4% having no relationship at all. Greco-Catholics, Roman-Catholics, Protestants and Baptists appreciated that overall, their relationships with neighbours were good and fairly good, most of the "very-good" being expressed by the Greco-Catholics. The majority of Pentecostals claimed fairly good (55.6%) and very good (35.8%) relationships, and 2.8% rather- and 1.4% very- poor. 4.3%

of Pentecostals had no relationships at all. Adventists appreciated relationships as being very good overall. Most of Jehovah's Witnesses also expressed fairly- (71.6%) and very- (28.4%) good relationships, and so did those of a different religion at 79.2% and 20.8% respectively.

Another issue on the questionnaire was that of the involvement in common projects. The question was: "During the last years, did you or someone else in your household worked together with your neighbours to accomplishing repairs or improvements to the building and/or surroundings?" With the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses, the majority of respondents answered "Yes", regardless of their religion. The interval ranged from 56.8% of the non-religious to 100% of the Adventists and included the Baptists at 70%, the Pentecostals at 58% and the Greek-Catholics at 69%. Aside from Jehovah's Witnesses, the non-religious and the Pentecostals displayed higher rates of lack of involvement at 43.2% and 41.3% respectively. Out of the Orthodox, 35.8% declared they had not been involved in common repairs or maintenance.

4.2. Attachment to the city and surrounding area

Out of the non-religious, 74.1% stated being much attached, 12.9% very much attached and 12.9% little attached to the City of Alba Iulia. The Orthodox, being the only group having a small proportion of respondents declaring no attachment at all (0.8%), stated themselves very much attached (46.4%), much attached (45.5%) and little attached (7.3%). Greek- and Roman-Catholics showed similar structures, 59.9% and 66.3% respectively being very much attached, 30.2% and 22% respectively being much attached, and 10.4% and 11.6% respectively being little attached. On the same lines, Protestants were divided into three equal groups at 33.3% each. Baptists were either very much attached (at 74.4%) or little attached (25.6%). Most Pentecostals were very much attached (58.9%), much attached (37.8%) and few (3.3%) little attached. All Adventists declared themselves being much attached. 43.2% of Jehovah's Witnesses were very much attached and 28.4% equally much- and little attached. Those of a different religion were equally much- and very- much attached.

As to the area in general, 49.4% of the non-religious felt little attached, 24.7% un-attached, 12.9% much attached and 12.9% very much attached. Most Orthodox (41.1%) felt very much attached, 38.8% much attached, 13.3% little attached, and 6.7% un-attached. Greek-Catholics also felt very much attached to the area at 69.85%, much attached - 10.4%, and little attached – 19.8%; none felt un-attached. Roman-Catholics felt 55.2% very much attached, 11.5% equally much and little attached and 21.9% not attached at all. Protestants felt 33.3% equally very-, much-, and little attached and none felt un-attached at all. None of the Baptists also felt un-attached, all being split equally between the very and the little attached. Pentecostals were 56% very much attached, 29.4% much attached, 8.7% little attached and 5.9% not attached at all to the area. All Adventists felt very attached to the area and Jehovah's Witnesses were 42.7% equally very much and much attached, and 14.7% little attached.

4.3. Participation in community activities

Respondents were also asked to evaluate the likeliness of contributing to community activities through (a) monetary contributions and (b) through labour contributions.

As to monetary contributions, more than half of the non-religious (56.8%) estimated such participation as likely, the rest of 43.2% appreciating it as not likely. Orthodox appreciated 44.5% as likely, 33.8% as certain, 12.5% as unlikely and 9.3% as totally unlikely. The majority of the Greek-Catholics (66.3%) appreciated their contribution as likely, 22.1% as certain and 11.6% as certainly not. The majority of Roman-Catholics (77.1%) also appreciated their contribution as likely, followed by equal proportions of them, at 11.5%, estimating it as unlikely and respectively, certain. Protestants were equally split at 33.3% between those appreciating the probability as likely, unlikely and certain. Most Baptists (48.8%) appreciated it as certain, 25.6% each of the rest estimating it as unlikely and totally unlikely, respectively; taken together, these two choices made most Baptists side with the "rather no" side of disposition. Most Pentecostals (41.9%) appreciated as certainly not, followed by those considering unlikely (31%), likely (16%) and certain at 10.6%. All Adventists appreciated as certain their contribution if need be. The majority of Jehovah's Witnesses (60.4%) appreciated their monetary contribution as unlikely, the rest (39.6%) considering it likely. Finally, the majority (74.4%) of those of a different religion were certain they would contribute, with the rest (25.6%) being certain they would not.

Referring to labour contributions, most of the non-religious (85.1%) appreciated as likely such contribution, with the rest (14.9%) being certain of such contributions. Out of the Orthodox, a bit less than half (48.8%) estimated contribution in labour as likely, 30.7% as certain and 12.8% as unlikely. The Greek-Catholics were one third (33.3%) inclined (likely) to participate, one third unlikely, with the remaining third being split between those certainly not likely (21.9%) and those certainly likely (11.5%). Out of the Roman-Catholics, a considerable proportion (65.6%) appreciated a labour contribution as likely, with the remaining 34.4% being equally divided between the three other choices. 65.6% of the Protestants estimated it as certain, the remaining 34.4% appreciating it as unlikely. Baptists were strictly polarised between certain (74.4%) and the certainly not (25.6%). Most Pentecostals (66.9%) appreciated such contribution as likely, 15.5% as certain and 14.8% as unlikely; only 2.8% considered it as totally unlikely. All Adventists were certain they would participate. Most Jehovah's Witnesses (71.6%) considered it likely and 28.4% unlikely. Finally, the majority of those of a different religion (74.4%) estimated they would certainly participate, with the rest seeing it as likely.

5. Conclusions and Future Openings

One may start by first observing the relatively large proportion of conflicts with neighbours among the non-religious, when compared with other religions. The non-religious are followed by the Pentecostals, the Baptists, the Greco-Catholics and the Orthodox. The non-religious also appreciate in larger proportions that the relationships with their neighbours are rather bad. The absence of collaboration with neighbours is

ubiquitous to all Jehovah's Witnesses and present in smaller percentages at the non-religious, Pentecostals and the Orthodox. Based on these findings, community relationships in the case of an intervention should be of interest to both secular institutions in the case of the non-religious and to Pentecostal, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses', Greek-Catholic and Orthodox churches in the case of followers.

Protestants, Baptists and Jehova's Witnesses appeared to have attachment to Alba Iulia city problems. A lack of attachment was noticeable in the non-religious and Roman-Catholics. Attachment problems would invite interventions from both the municipal representatives and the religious institutions.

The dialogue about some practical urban development strategies between secular and religious institutions may represent a good opportunity for raising the optimism and the feeling of stability in the area.

Given the community climate described above, it is worth examining the members' intentions of participation in community activities. Those displaying lower propensity for monetary contributions were mostly Pentecostals, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, non-religious and Protestants. Those less inclined to labour contributions were mostly Protestants, Greco-Catholics, Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

As a potential intervention strategy to stimulate higher participation we would suggest transcending the borders of religious communities and reaching further into the wider territorial community (living area), especially in the case of Pentecostals, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Greek-Catholics, notwithstanding of course, a proper analysis of the financial and physical resources of different confessions. Participation through monetary contributions requires obvious financial resources and the participation with labour requires a minimal work capacity and a certain age and health profile.

Referring to the trails opened by our research, but also to those arising from the present paper, we feel obligated to take notice of a relatively important methodological aspect. We would like to mention Kornblum's (1994, p. 42) suggestion that many sociological research projects require a direct observation of individuals under study and that community studies rely on long-term monitoring periods of particular groups. This is the context in which, in order to describe the quality of life of the individuals involved, the sociologist has to be both *a direct observer of events* and *a real participant* in the social space under scrutiny. As such, following the inquiry in which we collected and analysed the above-mentioned data, a qualitative research stage would be more than instrumental.

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