

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES IN ROMANIA - THE MOTIVATION TO LIVE IN THE COMMUNITY

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Abstract: *What is the motivation that drives some members of society to leave the city and seek to live in the rural area in an intentional community? In order to answer this question, I conducted a qualitative research using two methods: observation and interview. Along with the desire to live closer to nature, the presence of similar others constitutes one of the main reasons. The members of intentional communities want to live and work in more humanly dimensioned environments, in simplicity, to develop themselves and live the feeling of freedom and the joys of life more intensely.*

Key words: *community, intentional community, motivation, voluntary simplicity.*

1. Introduction

Leafé Christian (2003, xvi) defines the residential or land-based intentional community as “a group of people who have chosen to live with or near enough to each other to carry out their shared lifestyle or common purpose together. (...) What most communities have in common is idealism: they’re founded on a vision of living a better way, whether community members literally live together in shared group houses, or live near each other as neighbours. A community’s ideals usually arise from something its members see as lacking or missing in the wider culture”. Gotea (2010) states that society or, to a lesser extent, the community can be seen as a network of social networks that are always constructed, reconstructed, and accessed by social actors. In this context, the social network encompasses all the social relations between persons connected by one’s kinship, common interests, spatial proximity, friendship, occupation, offering / receiving services or various combinations of them.

Leafé Christian (2003, xvii) states that there is a “growing interest in intentional communities, whether ecovillages, cohousing, or other kinds of communities” and “by 2002 the yearning for community, and individual communities, has been favorably — and sometimes repeatedly — covered by the New York Times, USA Today, The Boston Globe, NBC’s “Dateline,” ABC’s “Good Morning America,” CNN.

There have been several initiatives to build intentional communities in Romania as well. The present article outlines the motivation to live in such a community as evoked

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by 5 members of developing intentional communities in Romania. The research of these intentional communities had several objectives and a part of the results obtained were published in Mardache (2015), Mardache (2016) and Mardache (2017).

2. Motivation – Theoretical Aspects

Buzea (2010) identifies the best-known theories of motivation: the hierarchy of needs theory (A.H. Maslow), the ERG theory (C.P. Alderfer), the need for achievement theory (D. McClelland), the hygiene-motivation theory (F. Herzberg) and the equity theory (J. S. Adams, 1963).

Out of all the above-mentioned theoretical frames, I chose to analyze the motivations that drove intentional communities' members to partake in such a community using A.H. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory.

According to Buzea (2010), the hierarchy of needs theory (A.H. Maslow) was one of the most influential theories on motivation from the second half of the 20th century. The theory postulates the existence of a hierarchy of human needs, split into five categories: physiological needs, security needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. The first four are deficiency needs (D-needs) and the self-actualization need is a growth need (G-need).

Although Maslow (*apud* Buzea, 2010) states that there is a principle to the hierarchy of dominance that involves the occurrence of a superior need only when the inferior needs have been satisfied, he also claims that there are exceptions to hierarchical satisfaction: for example, people who seek self-actualization without having their basic needs fulfilled etc.

I noticed the same exception when I observed a part of the intentional communities members with a certain personal profile - they had the characteristics of voluntary simplifiers (Mardache, 2015). Although a part of them do not have their basic needs fulfilled, they act towards self-actualization. The lifestyle of voluntary simplifiers revolves around five core values identified by Elgin and Mitchell (1977, p. 4): material simplicity, human scaling (preference for a human dimensioning of life and work environments), self-determination, ecological awareness and personal development.

In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory relevance in explaining the lifestyle of voluntary simplifiers, Craig-Lees and Hill (2002, p. 193) state the following: "Although Maslow's hierarchy seems relevant in explaining lifestyle, it is a universal theory of human development and, therefore, it is not good enough to explain specific lifestyles. (...) The need for self-actualization can be universal, but the values and behaviors involved in satisfying that need are personal, situational and culturally determined".

Ballantine and Creery (2009, p. 2) present Zavestoski (2002)'s approach in terms of the link between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and voluntary simplicity. They note that Zavestoski modified Maslow's hierarchy of needs by splitting the self-actualization need into two: efficiency (can be satisfied through consumption) and authenticity (cannot be satisfied through consumption).

Huneke (2005, p. 530) mentions that Zavestoski interviewed individuals preoccupied with the aspect of voluntary simplicity and "uncovered proof that the people who

admitted that their need for authenticity was not satisfied through consumption will always seek other means (such as voluntary simplicity) to satisfy these needs.”

Huneke (2005) questions the assumption that voluntary simplicity is an option solely for those with large incomes and believes that we must analyze the way in which Maslow’s theory was applied in the study of voluntary simplicity. Huneke (2005, p. 545) states that the results of his study (that also confirm Zavestoski (2002)’s conclusions) testify that: “the point in Maslow’s hierarchy in which an individual changes his focus from deficiency needs to development needs varies greatly from one individual to another: it can be the result of innate differences, cultural and environmental differences or a combination of these factors.” Moreover, Huneke (2005, p. 545) observes that “the literature in the field of voluntary simplicity suggests that the level of material prosperity that is considered sufficient is chosen consciously.” Therefore, it is possible that prosperous people do not seek to satisfy their self-actualization need (although, at a high level of prosperity, some individuals do admit that they have needs they cannot fulfill via consumption only) or that there are individuals who, even without having reached more than an average household income, still realize they have needs that cannot be satisfied through consumption (and, therefore, become voluntary simplifiers).

Etzioni (2002, p.89) believes that it is very important for individuals to have the possibility to prove that simplification is a voluntary choice and not an imposed one, that they “did not fail in the eyes of the capitalist society.” Therefore, voluntary simplicity manages to satisfy people’s need to be appreciated without using a high level of consumption.

3. Intentional Communities in Romania – Qualitative Research

One of the objectives of the present research was to identify the motivations behind the intentional communities members’ desire to live in such a community.

In order to achieve the objective I set for this research, I used a qualitative research that involves two methods: observation along with interview (unstructured, narrative, thematic story interview). I conducted 30 unstructured, in-depth interviews and, in order to analyze and process data, I used the NVIVO 10 software. The question asked was: “Why do you want to be a part of and live in this community?”

Mardache and Atudorei (2013, p. 170) list a few intentional communities currently forming in Romania: Armonia Brassovia, Braşov County, Rainbow Valey, Hunedoara County, Green Apuseni Mountains, Alba County, Kogaion Community, Buzau County. The communities analyzed in the present study are: Armonia Brassovia community in Braşov County, Aurora Community in Hunedoara County, Rainbow Valey in Hunedoara County, SatCitAnanda community (Geoagiu Băi in Hunedoara County) and Stanciova community in Timiş County.

In order to analyze qualitative data, I used the software NVIVO 10 and I did open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In order to do open coding, I used a paragraph by paragraph coding technique and in-vivo codes based on which I built categories and subcategories.

4. Interpretation of Qualitative Data

The motivation to live in the community adds to the need to live closer to nature (all community members come from the countryside), alongside people with similar interests, blended with the bigger or smaller need for personal and spiritual development and the desire for self-sufficiency, alimentary and energy autonomy.

► the need to live alongside people with similar interests:

B.K. (Armonia Brassovia) states that: *“I want to live in a community where we can all relate to each other’s souls, so where, where we work, so, for me the dreams you have and the dreams others have are very important, for me it’s very important that dreams do come true.”*

C.R. (Armonia Brassovia): *“the motivation for daily activities there...the motivation would be, I don’t know exactly, there are many, to be close to warm people, for example at my place to be closer to warm people, not to have conflicts of any kind around me.”*

“And we do share a common goal. All of these people have a dream they want to turn into reality, to move somewhere in the middle of nature and so it’s normal to seek to be part of a community, not alone...to help each other, right, isn’t that what the human species has always sought?” (S.S., Armonia).

“...for me it was the idea of finding beings who were at least on the same wavelength as me and together bring something more to the world.” (M.A., SatCitAnanda).

Moreover, the need for growth, development (self-actualization) is also very important, as seen in the need to live in harmony with oneself, with nature, with peers and get involved in activities that have meaning:

► the search for harmony with peers and nature:

“I’m looking for...I think, in essence, harmony. For everything to be, like, smooth, beautiful, to create a better world, a different world, you know?!” (C.R., Armonia Brassovia).

“Umm..and firstly, I’ve always wanted for us, as individuals, each member, to live clean, in harmony with nature. So that, each of us, through this harmony with nature..you bring that harmony to society differently.” (M.B., SatCitAnanda).

► the desire to do something for people in general:

“I feel very well here too, in my small home in Braşov, to raise my children at Tărlungeni, to have peace and lead a comfortable life..This escape I did just because, that’s what I felt, the idea of doing something for the community.” (F.D., Armonia Brassovia).

► the need to live closer to nature:

“...I love nature and I have always loved nature and animals, even if I grew up in a block of flats in the city but my holidays were in the countryside...The common life principles of those in the community would be: first, love of nature and...so this ecological lifestyle first and foremost.” (S.S., Armonia Brassovia).

“But, at least, one after the other, you can grow everything yourself and fulfill your basic needs, so to speak. If you move somewhere and you produced all of these and, at the same time, you have this permanent contact with the land that recharges you, because, actually, that’s what it does, with the light, the sun, the water.” (Ş.B., Armonia Brassovia).

► the desire to raise children in a natural environment:

G.G. from Armonia Brassovia community believes that living close to nature changes our values, offers us authentic benchmarks in life:

"...getting close to nature too, my feeling is that we change our values a little and not precisely my values, since I already know this, but children...At least in the first years, I think it's vital to give your children authentic benchmarks such as life in nature."

"... people lived in blocks of flats, got their paychecks, had somewhere to work, had everything but realized that something was still missing, meaning they separated from nature, separated from its rhythm....." (I.S., Armonia Brassovia).

Living in nature enables you to live in harmony with yourself:

"...I don't see it as running. I see it as returning to nature for many of us. Now, in the flats there, if you live in a block of flats, you can't live in harmony with yourself, you can only be in harmony when you're in nature." (G.B., Armonia Brassovia).

"Um...and first and foremost, I've always wanted for us, as individuals, each member, to live clean, in harmony with nature." (M.B., SatCitAnanda).

C.C. (Armonia Brassovia) mentions how difficult it is to feel close to nature in the city: *"...I loved plants more, I feel sorry that here, in Bucharest, I only see blossomed trees, but I can't witness the whole cycle, how the flower grows, the fruit..."*.

A.B. from Armonia Brassovia community states that he needs the quiet, which can't be found in the city. : *"And that's how the need to buy the land appeared, to be as far away from the city as possible, not hear manele music anymore, not hear power drills, I wanted to hear the silence, to hear the wind, hear the animals."*

► the desire to engage in activities that have meaning:

"...It is more of a desire to do something, actually, at least, from my point of view, to do something that means something to me...When I saw that I was spending so many hours a day in a place where I felt I wasn't doing anything that meant something." (E.M., Armonia Brassovia).

"And then all life lost its meaning and I've been looking for a meaning I couldn't find there so I started looking into communities." (A.I., SatCitAnanda).

► the need to leave the city:

"The need to leave the city came from the fact that we couldn't find our place here, I don't know, energetically, spiritually...At that point when we wanted to leave I was bugged by the fact that I couldn't find my place here. Everything was bugging me." (A.B., Armonia Brassovia).

"I had, yes, first of all I think there was some form of saturation in regards to the city.." (F., Stanciova).

► the desire to enjoy life:

"I said that now we're young, now we can build something, have the energy, enjoy life...invest in the future now, invest in the community." (I.T., Stanciova).

"I was looking for happiness, plain and simple. The joy of being with the others, somehow a joy, I can't name it now the way I was thinking of it then, a joy, plain and simple, of being with the others and living in an environment, enjoying life probably." (A.I., SatCitAnanda).

► ensuring self-sufficiency, alimentary and energy autonomy:

“Basically we are wasting so much time earning some money that we can use to buy what we eat, but the food should be something...so we should not work for food, it should be something you can find in abundance.” (G.G., Armonia Brassovia).

“But you can live in a sustainable way, provide your own food, provide your day to day living and even in the future through what you produce you can give back to society as well.” (M.B., SatCitAnanda).

“Well I started um...with the desire to live closer to nature, but not by myself...to be with others who wanted the same thing and truly take this step of leaving the city and the system of total dependence to the system and trying to become as sustainable as possible.” (M.C., Valea Curcubeului).

“Well there are people who share the same goals, who admitted to the madness of the system, who want to live in nature on their own two feet. This is important, when you live, when you manage to provide your own food and water...no one can control you anymore. That’s what matters. Well that’s what they have over you.” (A.S., Armonia Brassovia).

► the fulfillment of the need to socialize in both children and adults:

“...social needs and children’s need to socialize are hard to satisfy on your own somewhere. Children need friends, need to play...” (A.B., Armonia Brassovia).

► the support of the group in setting up projects:

“...If I go somewhere and I isolate myself and have no form of support, you are, as they say, easy to...I can’t find the word. You’re a sitting duck, I’m missing the word. You’re exposed. So you go on your own and..nothing, when a group has formed, it’s different. It imposes authority.” (V.N., Armonia Brassovia).

► living in an environment that fosters development:

“A community, to me, creates that environment that helps you develop as a person, beyond everything else.” (I.S., Armonia Brassovia).

“I know, I think and I’m convinced that humans can only be in harmony and balance with themselves in a natural environment.” (Ş.B., Armonia Brassovia).

From the perspective of Abraham Maslow’s theory of motivation, the most important needs identified in intentional communities members are:

Belongingness and love needs. These express the desire to belong, the need to give and receive affection, the need for human contact and privacy (Maslow apud Buzea, 2010).

The members of intentional communities seek the company of similar others, who want to have the same lifestyle, closer to nature, who share the same ideals, who they can communicate with. For these reasons, the members of intentional communities believe that one of the most important perks of living in such a community is the people themselves who are a part of it.

In this sense, Bauman (2001, p. 4) stated: *“In a community, we can count on the good will of others. (...). Our duty is simply to help one another and, therefore, it is our right to expect that the help we need comes immediately. (...). Who wouldn’t want to live among friendly people, whose words and actions they can count on?”*

Self-actualization needs (Maslow apud Buzea, 2010) express the need to feel self-fulfilled, for every individual to reach his full potential. The members of intentional communities seek to have a harmonious way of living, to feel a state of harmony with themselves, with nature and with their peers. Moreover, they are preoccupied with personal development (practice meditation, prayer) and seek to help their peers, give something back to their peers, to society.

Safety needs (Maslow apud Buzea, 2010) refer to security, stability, dependence, order, predictability and lack of fear. Moreover, they show the human preference that is oriented, more likely, to familiar and known aspects as opposed to the unfamiliar and unknown, the tendency to have a certain religion and life philosophy that organizes the surrounding world in a coherent structure. By living in the community, the members of intentional communities interact on a daily basis with almost the same people, they get to know each other, they learn to accept their differences, which provides them with added stability, safety and predictability. The safety needs of intentional communities members are also found in their desire to reduce their level of dependence on society, to be autonomous in point of food and energy etc., by managing to satisfy all of their needs through living in the community.

In terms of safety experienced in the community, Bauman (2001, p.3) stated:

The community is a “warm”, pleasant and comfortable place. It is a roof below which we take shelter from the rain, like a fire we use to keep our hands warm in a cold day. Outside, on the street, there are a lot of dangers – when we leave the house, we must be careful, we must be cautious who we speak to and who speaks back to us – to be on full alert all the time. Inside, in the community, we get to relax – we are safe, we are not threatened by all types of dangers lurking in dark corners (more precisely, almost no “corner” is dark). In a community, we get along well with each other, we trust what we hear, we are safe for the most part of our time, we are rarely disoriented or surprised. We are never strangers to one another.”

Esteem needs (Maslow apud Buzea, 2010) refer to self-respect, the need to evaluate our own self in a positive manner, as well as the positive evaluation and recognition we get from others. Satisfying esteem needs leads to feelings of confidence in our own capabilities, self-value, capacity and adequation, to the feeling of being useful and necessary. Living in the community offers the possibility of developing each individual's unique potential, the feeling of usefulness through mutually beneficial activities in the group and increases self-esteem.

Physiological needs (Maslow apud Buzea, 2010) are, for the most part, the needs that assure the homeostasis of the organism: food, water, oxygen and sexual activity. The members of intentional communities believe that life in the community can satisfy their basic needs (for food, water and shelter) by ensuring sources of food and water in the community, both individually and through lucrative group activities, through mutual help. The members of intentional communities' desire to live in houses built using natural, ecologic materials, to support themselves in building those houses, to ensure the sources of power and food that they need in the community.

5. Conclusions

The members of intentional communities no longer desire to live in a city that cannot provide a way of living in harmony with their peers and with nature, that cannot offer them silence, peace and the feeling of freedom that they seek. At the same time, they realize that living in the community, alongside similar people, brings many benefits: exchanging information and sharing different experiences, the socialization of children, mutual help in building houses, ensuring sources of power, cultivating the land and providing self-sufficiency in terms of food and energy.

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