Vocabularies of community involvement in urban Romania[1]

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Abstract : *Many researchers consider that involvement in collective action, as defined by rational choice theorists, can be hardly explained without some appeal to cultural or psychological factors. This article discusses the results of a qualitative inquiry into the narratives of three types of actors of small urban community, including leaders of community organizations, active participants in collective actions, and the by-standers. It finds systematic differences in the stories provided by representatives of the three groups whose members have significantly different perspectives in terms of self-description and motivation for action. Therefore, we argue that explanations of individuals' availability for collective action based on social psychology and culturalist narratives should be taken into consideration.*

Introduction

Participation, in its' various forms-political, associative, or in the community is a core topic for scholars of urban governance because public involvement gives democratic legitimacy to institutions of any type. The Western literature on urban poverty highlights the importance of community involvement in designing and implementing sustainable development policies (Small 2002). Citizens' involvement in community level policy is regarded as taking various forms from active membership in formal action groups, to contributions, to less structured and institutionalized neighborhood level initiatives. In all of their variants they sustain the important role of civic involvement in urban policy though what is called often as „informal governance" (Crenson, 1983). Numerous articles relating structural conditions to community involvement, most often socio-economic status of

individuals or the network structure of the neighborhood, play evidence for the actuality of the topic (Conway and Hachen, 2005 ; Dekker, 2007 ; Lelievedt, 2004 ; see also Orban, 2006, for a study of neighborhood collective action in the cities of Hungary).

Yet, involvement is a challenging topic also for theoretical reasons as it is at the border of the deterministic *vs* cultural views of social processes. Deterministic explanations of neighborhood participation focus on the effect of factors like individual resources (Conway and Hachen, 2005) and network features of individuals as well as of collectivities (Dekker, 2007 ; Kang and Kwak, 2003 ; Lelieveldt, 2004) while interpretations of participation in cultural terms are often regarded as contradictory to deterministic ones.

This paper bridges the aforementioned explanations of involvement nin collective action with two focal issues that are often overlooked, and are rarely associated in the

explanation of social participation : the roles people play in their community and the cultural background of the community that influence their decision to get involved or to stay aside. Such an approach will not only highlight the relevance of ethnographic research for theory building in this area of inquiry but can improve the knowledge of community processes through articulating in one theoretical view the interaction of structural positions in the collectivity, the roles in collective actions and the discourses of actors.

The avatar of participation that provides data for this inquiry is the informal community activism of members of the urban neighborhoods naturally delimited as *scara de bloc* whom I define as contribution to formal or informal local collective action initiatives. ***The specific aim*** of the paper is to describe, compare, and theorize the discourses of participants in community initiatives. The „community" is defined by the place of residence, specifically by the segment of the building in which individuals have their flats or condominiums. A summary of significant social scientific conceptions linking participation to cultural factors and the discussion that follows related to the structural positions in community collective actions provide the conceptual and the theoretical background to support the research design and the interpretation of the results.

The cultural perspective on participation : a contested tradition

In the 1950s and early 1960s there was a widespread view that action is determined by the individual's reference to norms and values. Attempts to conceptualize the systems of beliefs, norms or values and attitudes that explain participation, especially in the political or civil society field were made. Such is Almond and Verba's well known „Civic Culture" (1989) which distinguishes between participatory, dependent, and parochial-civic culture. Bellah (1980) refers to claims for civic

engagement as „secondary languages of social responsibility" of practices of commitment for the public good. Others, like Inglehard (1990) consider civic culture as an autonomous field that explains, among other things, the readiness to contribute to the public good. In the normative perspective of this current of thought, involvement is the expression of solidarity that is derived from a set of collective obligations (Hechter, 1987).

Individual decision to act can originate either from general norms or from normative attributes of identity (as in the case of the argument in the superb essay by Craig Calhoun on the Chinese students' participation in the riot in the Tiananmen Square (1991). Social identity, conceptualized by the psycho-sociological literature (Tejfel and Turner, 1979) as the result of processes of categorization, identification, comparison and psychological distinctiveness is associated with normative rights, obligations and sanctions' (Giddens, 1979, 282) which can mobilize people for action.

An assessment on the grounds of consistency and empirical evidence provide a rather negative result. On the level of basic assumptions, culturalist perspective was criticized as being too „idealistic" or „metaphysical" (see Kornhauser (1978) or the overview of critiques by Alexander and Smith, 1993). Research, on the other hand, shows that the „role of individual attitudes in shaping activism must be regarded as fairly limited" (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1985, 706). Moreover, cases of match between attitudes and conduct are suspect of the endogeneity problem when one tries to explain behavior through attitudes. In the recent decades, following the various critiques to culturalist analyses of social participation, works trying to delineate the cultural peculiarities that are conducive or opposed to a socially participatory life-style were developed. Elster (1989), for example, believes that the first individual to get involved in collective action does so driven by accepted norms and that only the individuals following the first to act, are making instrumental calculations.

Another important, and relatively recent, contribution to the cultural analysis of collective action has been brought in by the social movement research on movement frames. Mobilization for collective action is a reaction to an unjust and undesirable situation, along with a change in the frame of mind from self-blaming to blaming the system (McAdam, 1982). Such a shift requires certain worldviews and ways of assessing life situations against criteria of fairness and of attributing causes. The sets of „beliefs and meanings orientated towards action which inspire and justify the actions and the campaigns of social movement organizations" (Snow and Benford, 2000, 614) have been called „collective action frames". Recruitment of participants and sustainable involvement often requires the alignment of collective action frames to the more general or master frames. These are defined as systems of beliefs and interpretation, and are accepted by large number of people. Frames can be the product of frequent interactions and attachments, sustaining group solidarity through homogenous ways of viewing group interests and regarding the groups' position relative to others'. Small (2002) adapted the concept in a distinct manner, introducing the idea of *neighborhood frames* to explain community involvement via „cognitive [and] ...normative perceptions of and attitudes toward the neighborhood" (*idem*, 30).

It is evident however, that moving from description of discourses to explanation of action is a long way. This methodological discussion bears on the relationship between discourse, action, and the actor. The discourse is instrumental in making accountable actions and providing consistency to identities and culturally configured roles. Such a view conforms to the more recent attempts to pair the cultural world with social structural processes. Thus, it is justifiable that we look for how people describe and explain their actions while finding themselves in situations of social dilemmas, as their accounts are possibly discourses of engagement or disengagement.

Social psychology and the motivations of involvement

Social psychology and the study of social movements provided important contributions to the understanding of the cultural foundations of participation.

Adopting a rather „realistic" stance, one can say that discourse is reflective of the speaker's personality. Psycho-sociological factors are relevant in many models of social participation as mediators between socio--cultural factors and their involvement. Some of these factors are : self-efficacy, a concept approached by Bandura (1995), which is in reciprocal relationship with actual and successful engagement and self-esteem (Itzhaky, York, 2003) and which has a direct and positive effect on community participation (Perkins, Brown and Taylor, 1996 ; see Conway and Hachen, 2005, for contrary results). Both self-esteem, understood as a general sense of self-worth and self-efficacy, operationalized as one's feeling of autonomy with regard to the environment's challenges are regarded as direct or indirect motors of social engagement or/and disengagement.

Classifications of motivations, with their presupposition of consistency across time, belong to the same psycho-sociological tradition of explaining involvement with reference to actors' personality. In the literature one can find several attempts at ordering the various motives invoked to sustain involvement in collective action. According to Clark and Wilson (1961), these motivations are of three broad sorts : 1) material motivations, most close to the idea of extrinsic reward of action ; 2) solidarity motivations, which refers to involvement constrained by judgments of solidarity, reciprocity, norm following and face saving and 3) functional motivations, which reflect the satisfaction induced through the contribution to the realization of socially positively valued objective. Reasoning along the stages of moral development theorized by Kohlberg, Gross, (1994) proposes a similar typology of motivations for involvement in

highly costly collective action : 1) motivations linked to pecuniary rewards or fear of punishment, featuring a preconventional moral outlook ; 2) following various social norms, be them religious, or community in order to obtain social approbation that correspond to the conventional phase of moral development and 3) submission to universal moral principles, that are above the community norms and are based on a conception of human autonomy, objectivity and moral responsibility (Gross, 1994, 467). Among the more recent classification of motives for involvement in community level collective action is Batson's (1994) which distinguishes among ***egoism, altruism, collectivism,*** and ***principle-ism***. Similar coding of motivations for accounts of active citizenship has been used by Dodescu and Hatos in Romania (2004).

Community roles

Collective action is often a heterogeneous process with regards to the individual input and the form in which the contribution is made. Collectivities are segmented by structural features which are underlying its dynamics, including collective action. Moreover, the forms and level of participation can be used to differentiate among members of community.

Social movement and collective action analysts have usually recognized the importance of leaders as organizers (McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, 1988 ; Gamson, 1990 ; Ostrom 1990 ; and Ostrom and Ahn, 2001) and distinguished among three types of movement participants : leaders (or elite), members, and adherents. When considering instances of collective action, it is commonsensical to make the distinction between leadership and membership. Another useful distinction to be made considers the active versus the passive members, the latter being defined as those that involve in collective action the latest.

According to social movement theorists, leaders are those who have important contribution to processes of collective attribution and organizing the collective action (McAdam,

McCarthy, Zald, 1989). Moreover, leaders not only modify their followers' function of utility for involvement, but they have additional benefits from participating compared to the rest of the community. The most important benefit is the prestige, the honor one gets from leading a collective initiative, and a better or strengthened position in the collective network. From start, the motivations of the leaders appear to be different from those of their followers.

Popkin (1977), for example, acknowledges the weight of leadership for the organization's success. He refers to the person that organizes a collective action as the „political entrepreneur", a term borrowed from Frohlich, Oppenheimer and Young (1971). Furthermore, he defines the role of the person who leads the collective action as the one who is „available to invest time and resources in order to coordinate others' inputs for the production of collective goods" (Popkin 1997, 190).

Knowledge on the sources of leadership in community organizations is not well established. Popkin (1977) has noticed during his fieldwork in Vietnam that in order to develop leadership in a community, leaders have to be chosen from its most trusted and capable members. This goes hand in hand with a central position in the community network structure, evoked by high levels of prestige and competencies (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988).

Besides leaders and activists, most of community members are not significantly more than simple by-standers, or passive members, for whim involvement is rarely a serious option. In a former paper (Hatos, 2006) I have highlighted several ways in which a community member becomes a spectator of collective initiatives. Majority of people lack the resources required for involvement : physical time, health issues (especially for the aging groups), and motivation for those who are not well integrated in community networks and lack symbolic capital. The latter group can be called *will* in vernacular, and they are the socially excluded.

Research questions

A study of discourse of members of collectivities where collective action occurs will expect, according to the literature, to find associations between levels of involvement and evidences of self-efficacy, self-worth and various classes of motivations. Such expectations guide, naturally, my research.

However, as I have already stressed that the research on neighborhood collective action has rarely connected hypotheses specific to the deterministic-structural models with the discourse of actors and their roles in community level action. This study analyzes the relationship between the community members' reports related to their involvement or non-involvement in community collective action, and their structural position in society and in the community; it articulates the discourse they provide concerning specific instances of community initiatives.

Research design

This study uses a qualitative inquiry in which theoretical sampling of unit of analysis on the basis of several intervening variables was used. The unit of analysis is the individual, who can be a member of one of three types of involvement groups, and who can reside in any of the conveniently chosen building sections.

During the spring of 2005, 28 biographical interviews were conducted. The subjects were equally distributed in three main groups defined by the type of locally certified involvement: leaders, activists, and passive members. They were selected from the same mobilization contexts, the *scara (*already defined as *building section of neighboring condominiums)*. Subjects were chosen from 10 *scări*. Each *scara* included from 20 to 50 condominiums. The *scari* were selected based on the ease of access into the communitites of these building sections.

First, nine individuals were formally identified as elected *scara* leaders – and one was a former leader that acted as a replacement in a situation in which the collectivity has blocked the appointment of an official representative. Further, nine active members were selected at random by the researcher from lists of residents of each *scara* who consistently participate in the collective actions carried out by the community. Finally, the same selection procedure was used for the identification of the passive members, which were described as neighbors that contribute the least to the achievements of the *scara*.

Due to the sampling method, interviewee consent was easily achieved while the validity of the information provided checked by the interviewer which was usually an inhabitant of the condominium. The narratives, obtained through semi-structured interviews, focused on the organizational biographies of the respondents, on their history in the collectivity and detailed accounts of instances of collective action. The transcripts of the interviews were coded using *atlas.ti* though an initially open coding procedure. The transcripts were coded at least twice to ensure reliability. In the article, individuals were assigned pseudonyms and the identifying information was removed from the analyses.

Results

The socio-economic position of the participants is indicative of their social structural positions. Once the structural context of the narratives are established, I will reveal the results of the analysis focusing on the self-descriptions of the three categories of actors, on the indicators of identities and feelings of self-efficacy, on accounts of action within the collectivity mainly in terms of motivations and I will finish with an attempt to articulate the interpretation of participatory discourse with the structural conditions of its production.

The subjects' socio-economic position

Residents in the samples of leaders and active members of the community displayed

remarkable similarities concerning sociological descriptors. Virtually, all the *scara* leaders and their collaborators are born in the fifteen years that span from 1945 to 1960, i.e. aging from 45 to 60. In other words, the bulk of *scară* activists and leaders consists of people situated around retirement age. The inactive members' sub-sample is less homogenous from this point of view, including two persons that are rather young – born around 1980 and a less adult person, born in 1964.

For three out of 28 interviewees there was no information on the parents' socio-economic status, 13 had a working class family background, 9 had peasant background and only 3 had parents with higher social status, such as teachers or lawyers. This structure is consistent with the occupational structure of the interval in which the subjects were born – mainly the period from 1945 to 1965. In addition, the distribution of social background in the three main categories of analysis is similar.

At the time of the interview most of the subjects were either employed (21) or retired (7). Four of the retired subjects were leaders of *scara* suggesting that there is a connection among being retired and running for the leadership of *scara*.

The activists' discourse

Meanings of action within the context of the community were reflected through the narratives produced in interviews. Three important topics reflective of the cultural dimension of community engagement emerged: self-descriptions of the three categories of actors as indicators of identities and feelings of self-efficacy, representations of family socialization practices, and accounts of action within the collectivity mainly in terms of motivations.

General evaluations of oneself

Image of self and action are in a mutual sustaining relationship. This relationship is well reflected in our interviews which were

good opportunities to manifest specific degrees of self-esteem in at least two ways: explicit statements of positive worth and relative weight of positive and negative qualities. Thus, leaders seems to have higher self-esteem than their followers. Only among the leaders group were any persons that plainly state their positive self-perception:

„I was never ashamed and I will never be" (leader, 56)
„Q. What are the qualities you miss as a scara leader ?
I cannot figure out any" (leader, 50).

In discourse, positive or negative perceptions of self are less visible through the admittance of some defects rather than through the readiness to attach to him/herself positive traits. While people seem to be reluctant to categorize themselves in negative terms, there are meaningful differences regarding the weight and, as will be further discussed, content of positive attributes. Actually, the number of positive traits auto-attached decreases from leaders to active members of *scara* and is lowest for the inactive members. Although this might be partly a simple effect of the discursive scarcity of the inactive members it may reflect also a lower self-perception of those classified as inactive by their neighbors.

Descriptors

Although the characterizations that can be reconstructed on the basis of out narratives are far from homogenous, some meaningful patterns can be found comparing the three basic classes used in our analysis. The most clearly structured self-image is that of the leaders whose descriptions are centered on leadership. They consider themselves characterized by ***involvement*** (activism, participation), ***good leadership*** (management and organizational skills too) and ***perseverance*** (determination and ambition included). Their defects, if mentioned, refer to their performance as

leaders, members of this category accusing lack of communication skills, bad health or being too soft with people :

„*Q. Which are the qualities that you lack ?*
A. I don't quite know how to talk to people... That is I am not able to become closer to people. This is the way I am.
...
A. Besides the fact that they say that sometimes I speak too loud, that I quarrel to quickly..." (leader, 48)

„*Maybe I should be tougher on people, but I cannot do that, I am too understanding*" (leader, 50)

Involvement, good leadership and perseverance of leaders are completed sometimes with normative traits like honesty and a sense of duty.

Sharply defined as they are, the contours of the leaders' self-image provide evidence of an identity in which taking the lead is an important marker.

As compared to the leaders, the active members of *scara* have a more blurred self--image. They consider themselves involved persons as well but the rest of their self-image is undefined. One important finding of this study was the weaker emphasis the active group puts on leadership and determination. This feature is conveyed by all of the negative traits mentioned by the members of the active group, traits that are linked to lack of determination, ambition and courage. Active members seem to be socially engaged but they lack the necessary traits to advance to a leadership status. The emphasis on the lack of personality traits required for leadership suggests that activism is on a continuum between passivity and leadership.

„*Q. Tell me about the fact that you did not like to be a leader. Why is that so ?*
A. It very much depends on the person's temper. I am a timid person and I didn't like to become involved very much" (active, 55).

„*I rather give up than striking back... and I am sorry of this because they think I am fool*" (active, 51).

With regards to the way inactive persons describe themselves says a lot about the way they became excluded from instances of collective action. Briefly, they display a positive orientation to the past (paseism) and a negative orientation to the present. The positive traits they mention, rare as they are, refer to the past, suggesting a kind of nostalgia and break with the least glorious present. In contrast with the past, the present is the ground of manifestation of defects and shortcomings like feelings of powerlessness, defeat, inactivity or lack of ambition shortly, feelings of low self-efficacy and low self-esteem.

A group of inactive actors which we may call *the defeated* show clearly the syndrome of depressive realism (Alloy and Abramson, 1979) and external locus of control while exuberantly describing the achievements of past and accounting for the misery of today.

„*Unfortunately yes, at 32, with a 3-year old kid my husband and I moved to Oradea because he moved with his job, and my fate changed totally. I got cut off from my friends, from my native town, from my friends and I started from nothing...I have learned, I had will, but I was a stranger, alone and I manage by myself... not really because here I was no more leader...I felt cut from reality, not being in the right place, like a flower that you move from a place to other and...dries out...*" (inactive, 62)

To recapitulate, self-images supplied in the interviews give evidence of the feelings of self-efficacy of leaders especially and, on a lesser scale, of active members. In contrast with them, passive actors find little positive things about themselves but praise highly the past or show signs of depressive realism.

Social categorization (in terms of age, religion, ethnicity, occupation a.s.o) or identification influences little narrative explanations

of involvement or abstention from collective action. This suggests that, contrary to the instances of social movement quoted in the literature, identity contributes little to one's decision to contribute to the collective good in the context of our neighborhoods.

Moreover, past experience have endowed leaders with a special identity whose characteristics explain their actions, and is reflected in the self-attribution of some peculiar personality traits like ambition and determination. Thus, participation builds identity – that of activist – rather than the other way around. In this regard, the situation of active members is at least curious. Instead of activists' identities we have insinuations of fallen leaders : when talking of themselves, active members of the community seem to regret the lack of traits that leaders can boast of.

Why get involved ? Why stay aside ?

Involvement is evidently the central concept in our research. How do people justify their involvement in solving collective good provision problems, or vice versa, their refrain from action, are thus important questions for this paper and were approached as the key issues by the interviewers and their subjects as well. One important observation due here is that involvement *(implicare)* concerns both contribution to the collective action and engagement in leading the action. Conceptually, at this level the two domains are regarded quite similarly.

Our analysis will approach first the structure of discourses on involvement then will endeavor making in-depth interrogation of the interpretation of participative acts *for several important groups of subjects*.

The analyses of the reasons behind the individuals' motivation to act or to restrain themselves from involvement yielded a picture that is quite suggestive of the Weberian distinction between instrumental and axiological rationality. While people who participate in social activities use normative frames of references to express their reasons for involvement, those who are not participating in social activities justified their choice primarily using „rational" references. Specifically, people who choose to engage in collectively beneficial actions are driven by values or norms, and those who keep to themselves are assessing the cost and benefits of involvement, by putting in balance the resources they have, possible unintended outcomes, or the conditions in which action would take place.

The above table gives credit to conventional theories of collective action (Olson, 1965 ; Elster, 1989). It suggests that abstaining from action is instrumentally rational while participation can be justified only with reference to norms and values. To use the moral development language, conventional and mainly post-conventional morality is accountable for participation, while a pre-conventional low level of moral sophistication explains the reluctance some have to contribute to the provision of the public good.

A practical consequence of these findings is that participation could be fostered through ideological socialization or the practice of moral reasoning whereas primarily rational points of view can hinder the realization of collective action. Moreover, extrinsic motivations – i.e. selective incentives, positive or negative, can influence largely the outcome of collective action along with the more recently discussed factor of group structure (McAdam 1986, Kim and Bearman 1997).

The study results show that engagement is explained through moral complexity, cultural motivations, or extrinsic motivations, while passivity is due or related to lack of resources, and made meaningful because of the „side effects" of activism or non-activism. Thus, are individuals who are more involved morally, more developed or more socially responsible also more sensible to the issue of social acceptability ? As with any post-hoc accounts of action, the results listed in the table may be reflective of mere justifications. To the culturally or morally substantivist interpretation described above we can pose at least two alternative explanations.

Table 1. *Justification for action and inaction*

Involvement	*Non-involvement*
Intrinsic motivations: action related gratifications	
– entertainment	– bad memories of involvement
– pleasure	– pleasure
Culturally driven: value related gratifications	
– love for cleanness	– family first, then the *scara*
– to do good things for fellow citizens	
– social responsibility	
– responsibility for the collective good	
– to educate the others	
Culturally driven: norm related gratifications	
– shame	– promotions based on connections (perceived unfairness)
– duty, norm	
– something has to be done	
Secondary benefits (extrinsic motivations)	
– financial	– no pay
– social approval, appraisal	– lack of appreciation
– independence	– authenticity
– coercion	
– benefits of leadership	– being the leader means problems (costs of leadership)
Resources	
– has time	– no time
	– bad health
	– lack of cultural resources (being from country-side)
Group problems	
	– lack of solidarity/ cohesion
	– difficulties in organizing the group

When considering the structural conditions in which engagement and disengagement occurs, the normative force behind the involvement of active members and leaders is less interesting. Norms are social because lack of compliance with them is socially sanctioned. In other words, in some instances, reference to norms can be an indicator of social integration. Knowing that the active and leading members of the *scari* are caught in dense networks or „cores" (Hatos, 2006) we begin to understand why normative justifications for involvement are more important for some and less important for others. Much of the normative phrases, are reflective of what we believe to be our „social responsibility", or in other words, post-conventional morality and principle-ism : „to do good for fellow citizens", „responsibility for the collective good" or simply, „social responsibility". On the other hand, concepts reflective of the coercive nature of a norm are no less reflective of socially binding interaction : duty, shame, something has to be done. The reasons behind individual action or inaction conform with the framing theory of mobilization for collective action, which highlights the importance of framing situations

as unbearable and morally outrageous (Snow and Benford, 2000) in order for action to take place.

The peculiarity of the active members' discourse can further be explained in a more cynical way, entailing fewer but stronger presumptions about personality, cultural construction, and moral development. Better communication skills, including greater capacity to elaborate socially desirable or legitimate accounts, are a necessary characteristic of people who mobilize themselves and others for action. Furthermore, it is quite possible that the focus on norms, i.e. on non-egoist motivation for involvement, was just another well versed display of their social communication (or social accountability) skills during the interview.

Many of the attributions of action or inaction detected in the narratives support the hypothesis of rational involvement, according to which the actors take into account the costs and the benefits of the engagement. Non-active members explain their lack of engagement through the lack of resources, such as time or good health. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, leaders and active members complain the most about the costs that involvement, especially in the case of leaders, entails.

„Q. Did you like being better than the others, to lead ?
A. No, I have always wanted to stay on secondary positions as I thought that being in charge means trouble" (active, 57).

„I have never put pressure on anyone but I said it is OK if they choose me as well as if they didn't...Because there no real gain as there [at the labor union] if you get involved in problems you have to argue with the bosses, to discuss with everybody the issues because there are people who do not understand some problems... You explain them once, twice, three times but they still do not understand. But there are also people who know and understand

the problems... and I have to quarrel with the management and with other people, so I do not have much to earn" (active, 49).

„All agree that since we don't have a formal scara *leader nobody argues, there are no more shouts like : you are 3 wage earners and wait from me, who I am a retired ? And I give you 4.000 [lei] so you can earn 300.000 ? It was really offensive to tell this for 4.000 lei. Therefore, not only they have changed him but he [the former leader] said : no more, I don't stay any more, I am no one's rag"* (leader replacement, 59).

The quotes above suggest that engagement in leadership of community actions is challenging not only because it elicits additional investments of time and other resources, but also because of so-called „transactional costs" – mentioned in the institutional literature – that can be translated into the costs produced by low community social capital. Members of the community do not trust each other or their leaders, and thus they are hardly willing to contribute. Others are simple free riders, who can be also judged in terms of civic attitudes, who do not contribute or, worse, destroy the goods produced through collective effort and work of the leadership. As predicted by the theory of collective action, this type of situation deters engagement.

However, leaders derive many gratifications from their engagement, besides the civic gratification, labeled as such after Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995), of doing one's duty. The rewards are either financial or social (example, social prestige) and they can be effective in increasing commitment to the common interest. The last explanation cannot be overestimated : given the costs of involvement and leadership, the outcomes of following collectivist or principlist motivations could be assessed on the relational level using the symbolic capital, the prestige and recognition one receives from doing his/ her public duty.

Conclusions. The discourse of community initiatives actors

The analysis of 28 interviews of urban neighborhood inhabitants from Oradea confirmed our expectations that discourse of engagement in civic life, community roles and structural positions are strongly correlated. While previous studies (Hatos, 2006, 2009) in Oradea, based on both ethnographic and survey data gathered in the same urban contexts, confirmed that there is an association between the resources relevant to participation and the integration into the neighborhood's network structure, this study puts the emphasis on the articulation of discourse and the role in the community level collective action. In this regard, systematic differences between leaders, activists and passive members of the neighborhoods were found.

Analysis of discourses of *scara* leaders, active members and socially inactive inhabitants of *scări* displayed patterned accounts of involvement and non-involvement. One can speak of discourses of activists and non-activists as clearly discernable. However, the demarcations in the narratives of the three categories are not always well defined. They were rather variable, and thus can be placed on a continuum of discursive dimensions whose combinations make the specificities of the interviews form the three groups. Thus, leaders are placed at the one edge of the continuum and inactive members at the other while active members are somewhere in the middle displaying characteristics of leaders and inactive members in the same time.

First, the discourses are reflective of different feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem which correlate positively with availability for involvement. The passive members of the *scări* are the less likely to communicate in general, which is evident in their shorter and rather poor interviews ; they live in the past and are not able to find positive attributes of self in the present. Engagement patterns correlate with resilience, especially noted in the leaders' accounts, who defined themselves mainly using features of a resilient personality like determination, ambition and courage.

Resilience is the factor that adds light to the negative reference of leaders when discussion their social background. Their social success is expressed in terms of self-efficacy not in factual indicators of social status ; they felt it was achieved at odds with the cultural and material barriers associated with their social background. However, the importance of resilience for involvement shed light on the possible mechanisms that make self-efficacy productive at individual and collective levels : holders of positive efficacy beliefs tend to invest much more for the accomplishment of desired results that the others. This of course has an influence inclusive on the social attainment of individuals and on the fate of collectivities (see for example, Bandura, 1998)

Normative justification of action or non--action was different for the three groups. Involvement is justified primarily through compliance to norms and universal principles like social responsibility while abstention from contribution to the collective good, through rational computation. This might point to the Romanian correspondent of the „secondary languages of social responsibility" mentioned by Bellah and Hammond (1980), or the discourse of civic engagement, to paraphrase the theories of Alexander and Smith (1993) or a local instantiation of mobilization through neighborhood frames of action as suggested by Small (2002). The narratives of leaders and of the active members were more focused on the social norms, principles and duties they felt they had, while these values did not emerge in the interviews with the passive group. Contrary to the alleged egoism of free-riding and abstention. For both types of active roles, though, secondary gratifications play a great importance.

A simplistic culturalist or psychological conclusion regarding the factors of engagement in collective action is rejected as it is found inappropriate due to... It is evident that the culturally articulated accounts of activism and non-activism have emerged and

are clearly discernable. In a culturally or pedagogically optimist vein, this research suggests that a network of structural factors, moral sophistication, self-efficacy and attitudinal complexity can bring leadership and involvement in communities. The alternative understanding of the recorded and presented discursive patterns, proposes a structural determination of justification that would epitomize various degrees of community integration, the social pressure, and the individual accountability skills as critical and worthy of further inquiry. Thus, further research should include a focus on what triggers motivation for collective action, on identity or self-efficacy influence in the process of neighborhood collective action, while controlling for other factors such as the community network structure or the distribution of resources and constrains.

Note :

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