

Religious Behavior of Romanian Migrants Living in the State of Baden-Württemberg, Germany

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to present the religious behavior of the ethnic Romanian migrants in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg located in the South-Western Germany. The land is one of the most important destinations for migrants settling and working in Germany with its high living standards (even for the German context), high population density, and large job offers on a wide-range scale. In the case of the Romanians, the relative geographical proximity to Romania is also a factor that explains a large number of Romanians in the area. Several studies throughout the last decades have repeatedly shown that the Romanians are one of the European ethnicities with the highest level of religiosity. My aim was to conduct a research, based on qualitative methods, which reveals whether this high level of religiosity (and its reflection in the behavior of the individuals) is present in the case of the Romanian diaspora in Baden-Württemberg. Even if there are several Romanian priests and churches across the state, I could identify some major differences. First, there seems to be a strong link between the religious attitudes and the general social life of the Romanians and their area of origin within Romania. This also determines the typical recruiting patterns and the micro-social structure in which the migrants start their lives in Germany. Other factors that influence the religious behavior are the length of the time spent in Germany, and whether their command of German is good or not.

Keywords: *Religiosity; secularization; Romanian diaspora; migration; intergenerational religiosity; church attendance.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *Religiozitate; secularizare; diaspora românească; migrație; religiozitate intergenerațională; frecventarea bisericii.*

Introduction

The mainstream of sociological studies on religious transformation, in the case of post-communist countries, relied traditionally on empirical research, and focused on the religiosity level of the population. Other researches investigated the social attitudes towards the religious institutions, other trust of the population towards the Church and the

public opinion about the reintegration of the religion into the public sphere.

Various conferences have been organized with the purpose to discuss these issues in the post-soviet region. The first one entitled *Religion and politics. Problems of Central-Eastern Europe after the Collapse of Communism*, was organized by Polish sociologists. Other researches and conferences focused mainly on the new religious movements, on the religious transformation, on the issues related to the secularization and

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on the relation between Church and the State. Most of the presentations were published in volumes that appeared in English, Polish and Russian. A prominent role in organizing conferences and publishing these studies was held by the Association of Sociology of Religions in Central and Eastern Europe (ISORCEA). A product of these collections was the volume *Religion and Social Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Borowik and Tomka, 2011). Another major research topic during 1994–2008 was the re-emergence of the ecclesiastical institutions, their functionality, as well as the attitude of the population towards the ecclesiastical institutions in the spheres of social work and education¹.

By enlarging the regional aspects, the volume *Transformations of Religiosity*, edited by Pickel and Sammet (2012) from the University of Leipzig, appeared in this period. This volume also includes a series of empirical studies, which, according to the author's opinions, expressed in the preface of the volume, were meant to provide the basis for new theories in the field of sociology of religions. Other studies included in this volume focused mainly on the role of religion in the shaping of political values (Rosta, 2012).

In the preface to the volume, the editors emphasize the main idea behind most of the studies: with all the reprisals of the communist regime, the dictatorship failed to destroy or weaken the religious values of the population. Beside this, religious transformations throughout history have maintained the traditional forms of religious life that resisted change and modernity. Studies conducted in Romania on religion and religiosity in the post-communist period highlighted unanimously a high degree of religiosity of the population. This religiosity is represented by the attachment to the Church as a sustainable institution that presents stability in uncertain times (Romocea, 2011). Other studies present and explain the high religiosity of the Romanian population by the strong connection between the national and the religious identity (Romocea, 2011). This idea is coherent with David Martin's (1978) theory of the

secularization process in which he expresses that one of the possible ways in which religious values were preserved is their identification with national values and symbols.

After Romania joined the European Union in 2007, a new epoch began that partially restructured the fundamental values among the population. As Romocea (2011) asserts following the opening of the borders massive migration ensued that, in the case of the Romanians, disturbed the patterns of stability and the preservation of traditions. Sociological studies of religions have begun to address the theme from this perspective as well. On the issue of the religiosity of migrants, the study of Ciobanu and Fokkema (2016) presented the functional aspects of the religiosity of the Romanian migrants in Switzerland. The issue of the impact of religiosity on the economic performance of migrants was presented by Goschin and Roman at the 51st Congress of the European Regional Science Association (Goschin and Roman, 2011).

Our present research focuses on the religious behavior of Romanian migrants settled in Baden-Wurtenberg, Germany.

The purpose of the research

The research aims to study the religiosity and religious behavior of the 25–40 years - old population, men and women who settled in Germany for the past 5 years. In the present paper, we only present a part of the research results, which focus on the religiosity of the migrants, while other aspects of their lives in Germany such as social networks, financial activities, housing conditions are beyond the scope, and hence not part of the present paper.

Methodological aspects

The research was realized by qualitative methods: the data were collected with semi-

structured interviews. We used content analyses on the texts of the interviews. Another research method was the participatory observation. We were several times present at the religious and non-religious activities at the Hungarian Evangelical Church in Stuttgart. In the formation of the target group, we took into account two criteria: the age of the persons, as they had to be between 25 and 40 years old, and the date when they settled in Germany, but we selected only those who have been living in Germany for less than 5 years.

Alltogether we conducted 53 interviews, of which 3 were conducted with priests belonging to the Orthodox, Reformed (Calvinist) and Roman Catholic confessions. During the planning of the sample, we did not have access to relevant statistical data. Therefore, the sample cannot be considered as representative.

The phases of the research

People were contacted at various stages. At first, this was realized through online social networks. In the second stage, based on prior scheduling, people were contacted by phone. We used the snowball sampling method, asking people to connect us with other acquaintances, relatives to conduct further the study. We have attempted as far as possible to include in the sample people of different ethnic groups (redundant) who emigrated from Romania (besides Romanian-Hungarians, Roma, Saxons), belonging to different denominations, so that the sample would be as heterogeneous as possible from the point of view of the studies, the age, and the duration of their establishment in Germany. In the third stage, some people agreed to schedule meetings so that we can lead interviews. The interviews were taken either by phone (average call duration was 23 minutes) or face-to-face. In the latter cases, the average duration of an interview was 35 minutes.

We noticed during the activity of contacting people great openness towards the research, a keen desire to communicate their own experiences, impressions, and the desire for their opinions to be transmitted to fellow Romanian citizens.

Even if in some cases at the beginning of the discussion mistrust, suspicion, and mildly aggressive attitudes were expressed, when they learned the specific topic of the research, they presented a highly cooperative behavior.

However, some initial aggressive attitudes have been presented through expressions such as: “*Do you want to know how much I earn?*”, “*Do you want to send my data to the ANAF?* (Romanian Tax Agency)”. (B.S., 28 years old, secondary studies). It was surprising that, later on, without exception, these people agreed to take part in the interview and insisted that their views should be forwarded by us to other Romanians at home.

The next reaction of some of these persons, when they were told that it was a study of religiosity, was that they considered themselves atheists, saying they did not attend the Church, either at home or in Germany. These people, however, unanimously stated that they actually have their own faith, which is to some extent independent of the teachings of the various churches.

Our sample has the following characteristics: we had 18 males and 32 females among the interviewees. 19 of them were aged between 25–30, 18 had ages between 31–35 and 13 between 36–40 years. In terms of the accomplished studies, 11 of them finished elementary school, 26 high school, 9 had secondary (postliceal) studies and 4 of them had university diplomas. As for the ethnic belonging, 26 were Romanians, 21 Hungarians and 3 persons have reported to be of another ethnicity. In terms of their confession, 21 belonged to the Orthodox Church, 14 were Calvinist, 6 were Romano Catholics, and 9 belonged to neo-Protestant confessions. In terms of the time since they have been living in Germany, 9 reported to have

been settled for less than 6 months, 11 between 6 months and one year, 19 between 1–2 years, 8 between 2–3 years and there were 3 interviewees who have settled in Germany for longer than 3 years.

Methodology of religious phenomena research

The reviewed literature emphasizes that the diversity of manifestation/forms of specific conditions for religious phenomena occurrence, require complex and nuanced approaching strategies. In defining the concept of religiosity, we chose the framework set by Hamilton (1998) which defines religiosity in a broad sense, emphasizing the importance of religion in the life of individuals and the community. In the theological perspective, this concept expresses the relationship between the individual and transcendence, which is a dimension beyond the possibility of empirical investigation.

For operationalization purposes, we applied the operational research model of Glock and Stark (1982), which includes five applicable dimensions to the study of religiosity. From these dimensions, the present research uses only three: 1. Practical ritual dimension. 2. The ideological dimension of the faith itself. 3. The consequential dimension of faith, the way in which people live their everyday lives according to their faith.

We used the following indicators for the first dimension: a. Participation to religious services, by Church attendance in Germany, and Romania; b. Participation to various ceremonies related to personal or family life in Germany (marriage, baptism, first communion of children, etc.); c. participation to various rituals related to religious holidays (in Germany); d. participation to community events, organizations, programs related to religious institutions. In the case of the second dimension, the field of faith, we were interested in how people relate to faith, how they

live their faith individually. The applied indicators were the way of self-definition in terms of religiosity – whether or not they consider themselves religious and whether they believe that in their personal lives religion plays a role.

Regarding the consequential dimension of faith, we chose as indicators: the attitude towards religious education (in Germany or in Romania), and the attitude towards abortion and the use of modern methods of family planning. Another research method we applied was the attendance to the religious and non-religious activities, on a regular basis, at the Hungarian Evangelical Church in Stuttgart. However, the results of these investigations are not presented in this article.

The data collection took place between March 15 and May 15, 2018, and our stay was financed through a research grant offered by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Results and discussion

Regarding the first dimension of study, respectively the indicator about attendance to religious services, and events we mention that no persons were identified within the sample that failed to participate at least once to the religious service, or event of their own Church.

A preliminary trend emerges from the analysis of the results. It seems that the frequency of participation depends on three factors: 1. the length of time he/she has already spent in Germany, 2. the confession/cult to which he/she belongs, 3. the characteristics of the group with which he/she lives in Germany. Regarding the first factor, it seems that Church attendance is primarily a way of searching social support to help the migrant to integrate to the new condition. The faith related motivation plays a secondary role. This was confirmed by the majority of the interviewees, except for those who belonged to non-protestant confessions.

Interviews show that attending religious services also helps facing the feeling of loneliness, especially for those who have just arrived in Germany. A typical answer is offered by a man B.G., mechanic, 33 years old, married, Orthodox religion, arrived 4 months ago in Stuttgart. *“Do not think that I go too often to the Church. Here (in Germany) I feel alone, even if I am with my family so, with a few people, we come together ... we speak Romanian ... it is good if someone is interested about us, if we can ask for help, or for advice in case of need.”*

As for the participation rate of the various confessional groups, according to our data, the most frequent participation appears in the case of persons belonging to neo-Protestant confessions. In their case, the participation is almost weekly, both at the service and at the various activities organized by the Church. It seems that this does not depend on any other of the analyzed factors. Lesser participation appears to be in the case of persons belonging to the following confessions: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Calvinist.

The reasons given were lack of time, tiredness, or other factors that show a passive attitude towards the Church. A good example in this sense is the answer of our interviewee (I.O., 31 years old, commercial employee, not married, higher education, arrived one year and four months ago). *“I have come here to work ... I have only one day off a week, I prefer to rest, or to have fun with my friends”*. It seems that even in the case of these people the issue of identity is highly important, because they prefer to spend time with friends from Romania, or meeting with other families, they have the opportunity to speak Romanian and to discuss the problems in Romania. *“I do not necessarily have to go to the Church to meet”* (I.O.). Yet another person speaks about the habits in Romania: (M.O., 36 years old, Calvinist): *“I go to Church when I’m at home, on holidays, but not necessarily. ... there we all gather”*.

Another reason for non-participating in the case of the people belonging to the Roman Catholic confession is the lacking

knowledge of German language. (B.A., 31-year-old, high school, not married, Roman Catholic, established for more than 7 months): *“I would sometimes go to the Church, but I do not know the language.... It’s a nearby Church, but I do not attend the services. I prefer to pray for myself”*. When he was asked about the habits he had in Romania, the answer was that: *“...at home we usually went on weekends, but not every week ... just when I had time”*.

The lack of interest appears especially in the case of those established for longer than 3 years, regardless of gender, studies, sphere of activity. Typical is the answer of (M.S. 37 years old, Orthodox religion): *“I consider myself an atheist. I came here to work, not to go to churches. In fact, I have my personal faith, it is my belief which helps me when I feel alone”*. When they were asked whether the functioning of the Orthodox Church as an institution present in Germany is important, the answer is definitely positive, even if they do not attend the services, or if they declare themselves atheists but with personal faith.

From interviews with Orthodox priests, we learned that there is a high level of attendance of religious services on feast-days. According to an Orthodox priest in a locality with 150, 000 inhabitants, at Easter services more than 800 persons participated this year. That is the day when the highest level of participation appears. The explanation of the priest is simple: *“The precise date of the Easter differs between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox calendar, although sometimes they coincide. In Germany, the official feast is the Roman Catholic Easter with free days for the employees. This is why they cannot go home for the Orthodox Easter in Romania. When the dates coincide, the Church is almost empty”*. Regarding various family events, baptism of children is of primary importance. The phenomenon is explained by the fact that, according to the priest, 80% of those attending the Church belong to the age group of 25–40 years. According to priests, the marriages in Church are very rare, as

young people usually celebrate their marriage in Romania.

When they are asked about Church attendance in Romania it is clear that cultural and community traditions are the most important. Most people say they go to Church on feast days, Christmas and New Year's Eve. They go with their parents, relatives, because *"that is the tradition"*. In the case of persons belonging to the Roman Catholic and Calvinist confession it appears that, although they respect tradition, they are less interested in Church attendance. (P.R., 29 years old, woodworker, Roman Catholic): *"We celebrate Christmas and Easter at home ... I do not go to the Church, but the feast is a sacred thing for me. I prefer to spend it with the ones at home; at least I have a few days when I can meet my relatives"*.

In cases where they do not go to Romania but to relatives, parents who are also settled in Germany, they say that they try to keep the traditional symbols and practices. In these cases, traditional dishes are prepared; they sing Christmas songs, paint/buy red eggs, practice the ethnic Hungarian habit of splashing. For example (R.S., 38 years old, educated, married, with one daughter, established for more than 4 years in Stuttgart): *"If we do not go home, I buy cakes from the Christmas Fair – there are some Romanians. I know, they sell at the fair and I always know where to find them"*. It is worth to emphasize, that such persons, who do not regularly go back to Romania, did not mention going to church. It seems that the symbols are more important and respected.

As for the dimension of faith in the case of migrants belonging to traditional confessions, our conclusions are not clear. Taking into account the complexity of the issue, we need to be very careful in assessment for the following reasons: In the case of all claims, we make based on our research, we have to keep in mind that we do not have a control sample to allow us to compare our group with a similar age group in Romania.

In our case, we are talking about adult, young people, mostly with an education level

below the average, in a situation where they have to cope with various practical, new problems and challenges.

The relatively low level of participation to religious services means a natural, age-specific process. In relation to this issue, in the literature we find references (Hamilton, 1998; Tomka, 2011) which suggest that at different stages of age, the degree of religiosity of people fluctuates. More intense religiosity occurs in the case of children, adolescents and the elderly. Religion and the power of faith usually decrease at the age at which people are concerned with existential issues.

On the same topic, Sandu (2011) claims that the young persons who decide to go abroad are regularly those who are less connected to the Church, to their original communities and to the traditions. Taking into account both claims, we cannot clearly judge which narrative covers better the truth in our target group. This would require deeper further analysis.

In many cases, predominantly among men, regardless of their nationality, we observed the refusal of faith. A typical answer sounded like this: *"I am an atheist ... I have come here to work, not to attend at churches. I have to do useful and lucrative things here"* (M.B. aged 33, Orthodox religion).

It seemed to us relevant for the analysis that in the case of the members of the traditional churches we have not found persons who claimed that in accomplishing the goals and overcoming the difficulties they would rely on transcendental forces. Asking where they hope to find help in difficult cases, the answer is that firstly, among friends, relatives, colleagues. They always emphasized how helpful the already established Romanians are toward the newcomers. They help each other, so the ethnic Romanian community seems to be strong and inclusive in Baden-Wurttemberg. The topic of transcendental help appears predominantly in the case of the respondents belonging to neo-Protestant denominations. A typical answer is: *"God from above will help us. For this we pray and*

no matter how difficult our life is, we know that we have to rely on His power". (S.E., 38 years old).

When we asked them whether they are believers, in the case of persons belonging to traditional confessions, there was often a strict denying answer, but usually followed by some clarification, which showed that their concept of faith referred to the traditional, ecclesiastical sense of religiosity. Many claimed, however, they have a certain faith, primarily in themselves and their strength and determination.

Regarding the consequential dimension, we have tried to find some reflections of faith on issues related to everyday life. As we mentioned above, we have used two indicators: 1) attitude towards religious education of children, and 2) towards family planning, abortion and modern means of contraception.

Regarding the first indicator, the most concerned persons were the people established together with the families in Germany. In their case, both men and women categorically agreed about the importance of the religious education of children, but in 12 out of the 18 families, parents did not consider it achievable in institutional form. From interviews with priests of various denominations, it appears that churches try to meet this demand. Within the limits of possibilities, they organize religious classes for children of various ages. An often-invoked problem is the lack of space in the case of Orthodox and Reformed Confessions. That is why during the summer holidays, camps and excursions that are highly appreciated by the parents are organized for children. At family level, parents, especially mothers, even those who have declared themselves in a negative way regarding religious practices, try to solve this issue personally, including stories about religious myths. Although they don't regard themselves as believers, these parents appreciate religious education, saying "*this does not do them any harm, it will be for their benefit*". (R.A., 34 years old, orthodox religion).

In most cases, the parents claim that these educational obligations tend to become the task of the older generations, their parents at home. This fact suggests that the religious values are preserved in their families and in their original communities. As for the attitudes towards family planning, we did not notice differences between members of various confessions. What we have found is an almost unanimous refusal about abortion. This, as it turns out, is associated with very conscious and strict family planning, regardless of the level of education, nationality, confession or family situation of the interviewed women. At the same time, it is associated with the broad acceptance of the use of modern contraceptive means, even in the case of people belonging to the neo-Protestant confessions.

Although the sample of our research is not representative due to its exploratory character, we suggest that we can identify some major tendencies in the terms of religiosity. After all, the research focused on a certain age group that from the point of view of the religious behavior manifests a series of peculiarities presented in the literature as well. These particularities, such as lower level of religiosity, a tendency among the respondents to distance themselves from ecclesiastical religion, confidence in their own beliefs and opportunities, have been confirmed in our research.

The reviewed literature mainly focuses on modern theories of secularization, which emphasize religious changes in the sense of weakening community values and collective beliefs as result of modernization, individualization and social differentiation. Some key authors (Bruce, 2000; Dobbelare, 1981, 2002; Luckmann, 1976; Wilson, 1998) consider that the tendency of secularization begins with transformations such as privatization and individualization of religion – a process that leads to the weakening of the institutional forms that support it and provide sustainment for the faith.

In our research we have found elements, and signs of these privatization tendencies

able to lead to secularization processes in the case of the investigated population. This population is a group of persons who suddenly found themselves in a situation where they had to get used to work and lifestyles different from their traditional environment, which offered them their original socialization frameworks.

In order to predict the consequences of this phenomenon, or the possible directions that they might follow, a much broader, longitudinal research is required. What seems obvious, besides a weakening of ecclesiastical religiosity, is the persistence of the symbols and traditions of community-identity. The change of attitude of the interviewees after the first contacts suggests a lot for us. First, they were rather suspicious, and did not seem to take us very seriously. When it turned out that, the topic of our research is their religiosity, their attitudes changed rapidly, and they were serious, respectful and cooperative. This suggests that, regardless of their actual situation in terms of believing or going to church, the topic itself is culturally defined as an important universal aspect.

Another aspect highlighting the importance of religiosity for the interviewees is that even if they missed the change, or did not want to get religious education, they

were eager to provide it for their children. Hence, they see religion as cultural framework providing for safety and identity strengthening aspects for them and their children, in the future.

We assume that in the framework created by the circumstances of the heavily industrialized regions of Germany, we can identify universally valid patterns in terms of religious behavior. The differentiation seems to be mainly based on the recruitment models (whether they are individual migrants or members of organized groups of workers), the housing conditions, their social network and status within the Romanian community. These are some of the factors which are referred to as “social worlds” with a strong identity mark (Sandu, 2010).

Last but not least, a decisive role in the shaping of these processes depends heavily on the way of functioning of the ecclesiastical institutions of the diaspora, which, as an Orthodox priest claimed, “*must carry out a totally different activity from what our task is at home. Here we have to make incomparable efforts, trying to help those who ask for support, we need to know them and how to deal with each other’s problems in order to attract them to the faith*”.

Note

¹ In the case of Hungary and Romania, the main outputs of the researches have been the articles published by Szilagyi and Flora (1997) and Pusztai (2008).

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