

The Spiritual “Freelancers”: Young People, Religiosity and Community Problem Solving

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ABSTRACT: Earlier research showed that religion is related to participation among adolescents. It emphasized the effects of belonging (affiliation to groups and traditions) on community service among Western populations. This article takes one step further and focuses on religiosity as a potential motivation for community problem solving during adolescence and young adulthood, in the Eastern European Orthodox cultural setting. Data comes from several semi-structured interviews with participants in a civic project conducted in the city of Timisoara (Romania). Findings indicated a low impact of the social religious component on engagement. The cognitive dimension of belief and the emotional bonding (prayer, ritual connection to the higher reality) function as indirect motivators, through the moral element of behavior. Results also showed a privatization of spiritual life at young adults (the invisible religion): estrangement from doctrines and the development of an individualistic type of morality, meant to drive volunteer activities further.

KEYWORDS: Community, Motivation, Orthodox, Participation, Religion, Romania, Volunteering, Youth

Introduction

Early engagement in the community is considered by scholars of significant importance “in developing responsible and civically active adults” (Fendrich 1993, Youniss and Yates 1997, Oesterle, Kirkpatrick Johnson and Mortimer

2004, 1124) and in “maintaining a democratic society” (Sandu, Stoica and Umbres 2014, 131). Among stimulating factors for teenagers to become active, religion has gained increasing attention. Its four main dimensions - belief, belonging, behavior and bonding - have unequally been approached. The focus has been set on belonging (affiliation, socialization and communal rituals) influencing participation. On the other hand, studies concentrate on religion as a generating factor for participation and less research looks at inner incentives potentially sustaining engagement over time - from adolescence to young adulthood. For non-Western and especially the Orthodox environment, there is marginal evidence on this subject.

The study addresses this gap in the literature and aims to explain how inner religious stimuli can determine youth to take part in community problem solving and in volunteering over time. Results reveal the privatization of spiritual life, an “invisible” type of religion with potential stimulating effects for civic engagement.

The article builds on existing argumentation and uses surveys performed at national and European level. The empirical part of the study refers to a public participation initiative in the Romanian city of Timisoara, called “Young people decide!” (2010-2014). We chose this project as it provided the proper empirical setting: several institutions from an Orthodox country, gathered for a local initiative involving adolescents in community problem solving: Groups of students, between 15 and 18 years old, coordinated by teachers, identified and attempted to solve different social, cultural or environmental issues in their neighborhoods, initiating and implementing certain public policies. Their ideas competed in annual contests and were evaluated by partners (local administration, NGO-s), with the best solutions being put into practice. The project borrowed its fundamentals from a partner institution in Northern Italy - the Regional Council of Piedmont.

We have used qualitative research methods in this article - 13 semi-structured interviews and direct observations; the last, possible due to the involvement of the author in the project, being at the time a practitioner in the field (employee of the collaborating local authority).

The first section reviews the literature, with the focus on connections between religion and participation in the community, as well as on characteristics and functionalities of the four main religious dimensions:

We look at arguments especially with respect to youth between 15 and 24. The presentation of the research background is followed by methods and findings. Conclusions focus on scientific relevance and discuss avenues for further research.

Religion and civic engagement

In his classical work "Democracy in America" from 1835, de Tocqueville describes volunteer work as a necessary activity, due to man's vulnerable social character: "Among democratic peoples, all the citizens are independent and weak. They can do hardly anything for themselves, and none of them is in a position to force his fellows to help him. They would all, therefore, find themselves helpless if they did not learn to help each other voluntarily" (de Tocqueville 1969, 514). Recent literature defines volunteering as "the process whereby individuals connect and engage with other persons, groups, or organizations in order to address specific community needs on an unpaid basis" (McAllum 2017).

Regarding the manner in which it takes place, there is a difference to be made between community service, "typically delivered at sites such as shelters, clinics, homes for the elderly, soup kitchens and day care centers" (Youniss, McLellan and Yates 1999, 244), and community problem solving, where we deal less with social assistance and more with improving the quality of life at a collective level. With respect to teenagers, religion generally appears "to be linked with commitment to and involvement in *community service*" (Youniss, McLellan and Yates 1999, Smith 2003). Let us try to establish the relation between religiosity and *community problem solving*, too: Am I more likely to voluntarily approach community issues if I am a religious person - aware that "something larger and more important than me and the community of all humans (should) exist(s)" (Saroglou 2011, 4)?

The four B's

Religion is as a „multifaceted reality and (...) religiosity can also be conceived as a multidimensional construct" (Saroglou 2011, Hill 2005). In the socio-psychological realm, there are four main (inter-related) dimensions of religion identified and discussed (shortly mentioned before): 1) belonging

- the social element of religion, affiliation to religious groups and traditions; 2) belief - the cognitive element of conviction that there is or has to be a transcendent form of existence; 3) bonding - the emotional connection to a higher reality, to others and/or to the inner-self, by means of private or collective rituals; and 4) behavior - acting in conformity with religious moral principles (Saroglou 2011).

Teenagers and collective religion

Studies show that, in Romania, youth are less inclined towards regularly attending religious services - 25% of a representative sample (Sandu, Stoica and Umbres 2014, 118). In the frame of a close relationship between the Orthodox Church and believers, this is a sign of detachment of youth from institutionalized religion. On the other hand, church attendance and communal practice, at least in the Christian environment, strongly produce social capital (e.g., Groenlund et al. 2011). Besides school, churches are considered the most important ones in recruiting young people to get involved (Hill and den Dulk 2013, 181). The “morally freighted” interactions within religious organizations produce visible effects in terms of pro-social behavior, including civic engagement (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 477; Hill and den Dulk 2013, 183). Religious communities are found to potentially “inculcate in youth abilities that can increase their confidence and functional capacities”, political activism and neighborhood organizing among these capacities (Smith 2003, 23). “Attending a house of worship or another religious group are both significant and increase the odds of volunteering” (Hill and den Dulk 2013, 182-192).

Starting from these assertions, we will try to find out from our respondents to what extent are they attracted to the social religious dimension and if belonging plays a part in their decision to volunteer. But next, let us focus on the theory with respect to individual religious motivations for getting engaged in the community.

The cognitive religious dimension

According to the categorization we have proposed for this study, belief, or certainty about an external transcendence, is the next religious form of manifestation to be taken into consideration: Personal faith does not

always manifest in an absolute manner; we rather deal with complex, relative and individually formed conceptions and perceptions of the divinity. Differentiating between two main categories, Saroglou (2011, 13) speaks about "holding religious ideas, beliefs, norms, and symbols in a (a) literal, dogmatic, and/or orthodox way versus (b) an interpretative/symbolic, flexible/questioning, and/or autonomous way". Speaking of autonomy, Luckmann (1967) is the first to mention the so-called invisible religion - an individual, privatized, but present spiritual life (due to the fundamental religious nature of the human being), to be noticed even in societies with a predominant secular social component. Detachment from traditional religious models is sometimes associated to the search for a "competing" image of the supernatural force.

This particular vision has been identified in the earlier mentioned study recently performed in Romania. Sandu, Stoica and Umbres (2014, 112-114) observed that, compared to other countries, the level of secularism is higher among youth, with a possible explanation in the conflict between generations; because, on the general scale, religiousness is highly visible in public life. Questioned about the belief in God, young people declare that they strongly hold such a conviction in a total proportion of almost 80 %. At the other extreme, of those not believing in the divinity, there is a relevant difference: One out of ten Catholics and Protestants are non-believers, while the rate doubles in the case of Orthodox Christians. When Romanian youth come out of adolescence and move towards adulthood, they seem to have abandoned religious beliefs and views (possibly, borrowed from their parents in the time they had been living together) and develop much more secular opinions: Around the age of 19, "a passage from I strongly believe to I am not sure" is to be observed, with convictions not necessarily related to "a complete negation of the belief in God, but transferred to uncertainty" (Sandu, Stoica and Umbres, 2014, 112, 115).

With respect to the relation between belief and volunteering - the cognitive form of religiosity is placed at the end of the motivational scale for getting engaged: "The importance of religious beliefs plays little role in church attendees' decisions to volunteer" (Ruiter and de Graaf 2006, 193; Becker and Dhingra 2001, 329-30). Most arguments converge towards the idea that "religious inclinations make very little difference unless one becomes

involved in some kind of organized religious community” (Wuthnow 1991, 156); to the same extent, “privatized religion may be morally compelling and psychically fulfilling, but it embodies less social capital” (Putnam 2000, 74).

As we will see later, the spiritual privatization and personalized agnostic views find enough supporters among respondents in our study. These attitudes are not only related to belief, but to the emotional religious dimension, of bonding, too: Belief and bonding “invisibly” join to express spirituality, “outside religious traditions and institutions” (Dy-Liacco et al. 2009, Saroglou 2011).

Prayer and devotionism

Private rituals / praying (56%), along with participating in religious holidays (60 percent), are more popular activities, compared to going to church, among Romanian youth. This shows “a high level of spirituality”, rather than the inclination towards social rituals; as well as a privatization of spiritual life, but accompanied by a constant loyalty towards Christian faith and values (Sandu, Stoica and Umbres 2014, 118-119).

The potential impact of private rituals, of the emotional side of religion, on deciding to volunteer, has been assessed differently in previous literature. Research suggests, on one side, an irrelevant effect of bonding on civic engagement (e.g., Hill and den Dulk 2013). On the other hand, positive correlations have been found specifically in regard to involvement in the community: “Frequency of prayer significantly increases the likelihood of being a member in (...) community-based associations”, such as neighborhood groups (Loveland et al. 2005, 10). Fact is that the complex character of prayer includes a significant element - concern for others (Ladd and Spilka 2002, 479; Loveland et al. 2005, 3). This concern, or the altruistic belief and behavior, is worth to be looked at in the following.

The moral behavior

The survey in 2014 that we referred to in the previous sub-sections shows that around 64% of young people in Romania strongly believe that God is *a source of moral rules and duties* (Sandu, Stoica and Umbres 2014, 115). This indicates a widely spread conception with religious fundamentals, placed by young people at the origin of moral behavioral rules.

Altruism means an inner impulse to care about the other and to act subsequently: it is about "the tendency to think about the welfare and rights of other people, to feel concern and empathy for them, and to act in a way that benefits them" (Penner and Finkelstein 1998, 526). Although one is inclined to automatically transform this tendency into a significant potential for unpaid action, there are studies denying the influence of altruistic beliefs on volunteering; at least in the case of church members (Ruiter and de Graaf 2006, 193; Bekkers 2003). These are supposed to take their incentives rather from socializing in the religious community, than from personal values. Generally, however, research places the attitude of concern for the other in direct relation to civic engagement, both when it comes to church, and to secular types of environments: Independent of factors related to structural and social backgrounds, altruism provides "an important psychological motivation for participation in volunteer work and other forms of civic engagement" (Wilson and Musick 1997a, 1997b; Oesterle, Kirkpatrick Johnson and Mortimer 2004, 1128).

Research mainly indicates a combination of collective practices and individual spirituality as a predictor for participation among youth. Pointing to Smidt et al. (2008) and Loveland et al. (2005), Hill and den Dulk mention "private devotional activity" as interacting with religious participation in public, for adding value to civic engagement; neither category alone is supposed to increase volunteer activities, as would both taken together do (Hill and den Dulk 2013, 183).

Research background

Countries in Eastern Europe - Romania, our focus, among them - have a limited tradition of civic engagement (e.g., Ekman, Gherghina and Podolian 2016, Kostelka 2014, Hooghe and Quintelier 2013), as well as of religious public life, virtually absent during communist times (e.g., Voicu and Tufis 2013). After the regime change, public participation rates are increasing in Eastern Europe - compared to the West, which goes in the opposite direction (Groenlund et al. 2011, Musick and Wilson 2008). The European Values Study has placed Romania among the last nations in the EU with respect to the incidence of taking part in associations. Approximately 18% of the total active population is involved in volunteering activities (Sandu, Stoica

and Umbres 2014, 91). Perceptions such as “volunteers would not be needed if the state was doing a better job” (EAC-EA 2010, 235) go back to the communist period, where mandatory activities (such as “patriotic work” in the agriculture) were imposed by the state (Voicu and Voicu 2003). Young people under 30 prevail among the ones formally engaging in civil society - between 5 and 15 percent of the adult population, although with an upward tendency (Country Report Romania 2010, 3-4). Fulfilling their expectations towards a high economic improvement and developing the educational system are supposed to stimulate them towards participating in the civic sector (Apateanu and Tatar 2017).

Almost 23% of Romanian youth take part in formal unpaid work, corresponding to the European average (Sandu, Stoica and Umbres 2014, 91). With respect to the fields where they prefer to become active, the first place is occupied by helping people in need, followed by engagement in community matters (EAC-EA 2010, 141-143; Sandu, Stoica and Umbres 2014, 92). In other words, community service in the earlier described sense of social assistance is the predominant form of participation, whereas community problem solving is the second type of volunteer activity preferred by the youngest Romanians.

Knowing that Eastern European young people belonging to the Christian Orthodox denomination are attracted to public participation in the form of attempting to solve community and neighborhood matters, the question we ask now is to what extent they are motivated by religiosity when starting to get engaged.

“Young people decide!”

To analyze this issue, we look at the city of Timisoara, of about 300,000 inhabitants, situated in the Southwestern part of Romania, bordering Serbia and Hungary. It was part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and builds its particular civilization and civic spirit (culminating with the initiation of the anti-communist revolution in 1989) on a peaceful multicultural and multiethnic character. Several initiatives coming from local authorities and civil society, towards stimulating citizens to participate in community problem solving, were put into practice in this city, at the beginning of the 2000s: Citizens' advisory councils were created following the model of the

French twinned city of Mulhouse; a practical decisional transparency system - involving a permanent communication with inhabitants on local policies, in the form of periodical public debates - also showed its effects.

Cooperation between different institutions and high school students, in a project regarding active citizenship, was yet another form of extending public participation. The idea was developed by means of a partnership between schools, the local administration and civil society organizations, within the project called "Young people decide!". Youth-adult partnerships are seen as the most effective type of participation when it comes to this age category, as they can collaborate with adults "in all aspects of group decision making - from visioning, to program planning, to evaluation and continuous improvement" (Zeldin et al. 2014, 338). Lack of skills and less willingness to share decision-making with youth had the effect that these forms of partnerships are yet to become a normative practice (Augsberger et al. 2018, 190).

Inspired by the Italian region of Piedmont, the project in Timisoara attracted dozens of students from several public schools starting with 2010. Coordinated by teachers, they were supposed to make proposals for improving the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Their ideas competed each year for a prize consisting in the implementation of the winning project, with the practical contribution of the group of students who had initiated it. Pupils were also involved in training courses on civic engagement. Our participatory observations revealed a high degree of ambition and openness towards active citizenship among most of them.

In 2014, "Young people decide!" came to an end. Looking back at the project five years after its completion, we now follow the purpose of examining the potential impact of religiosity on the decision of participants to get involved and further engage in voluntary activities.

Methods and data

The information in this study has mainly been obtained by means of 13 semi-structured interviews, with persons who were actively engaged in that particular social practice. The author took part in the project as a civil servant of the Town Hall at that time and worked on its implementation with representatives of citizens' associations, schools and non-governmental

organizations: Participation in the environment allows for a closer understanding of how actors move, interpret and live the social phenomenon they are part of (Keller 2012, 14); the researcher has to “come home”, take a distance from the field and analyze the information in an objective manner. There is a certain balance to be pursued here: The risk is a too strong connection to the field, a subjective incorporation into the case; then again, lack of participation can lead to an “ivory tower” type of perspective - an impersonal documentation, depriving the author from details on people’s mentalities, attitudes, feelings and motivations.

In 2015 (one year after the initiative ended), two experts were interviewed - representatives of institutions involved in the project. In 2018 and 2019, eleven discussions were carried out with former participants, either over the phone or e-mail (Table 1). The fact that we spoke to most interviewees four years after the project’s implementation could generate memory biases with regard to their experiences as adolescents; the intervening period is a possible source for altered perceptions. We therefore asked detailed questions and insisted on accurate responses, following the achievement of an objective image upon the situation.

Table 1. Overview of the Interviewees

Initials	Gender	Age	Denomi- nation	Role	Interview date	Interview mode
M.O.	Male	61	Orthodox	Expert	6 March 2015	On site (working place)
M.D.	Female	38	Orthodox	Expert	10 March 2015	On site (working place)
A.D.	Female	22	Orthodox	Participant	10 October 2018	E-mail
A.S.	Female	25	Orthodox	Participant	13 October 2018	Phone
M.P.	Male	22	Neoprotestant	Participant	23 October 2018	E-mail
C.F.	Male	24	No denomi- na-tion	Participant	13 November 2018	E-mail
M.N.	Female	25	Orthodox	Participant	14 November 2018	E-mail

C.A.	Male	24	Greek Catholic	Participant	22 November 2018	Phone
A.C.	Female	24	Orthodox	Participant	23 November 2018	E-mail
A.J.	Male	24	Orthodox	Participant	26 November 2018	Phone
O.L.	Male	25	Orthodox	Participant	26 November 2018	Phone
P.N.	Female	21	Orthodox	Participant	28 November 2018	Phone
R.U.	Female	22	Orthodox	Participant	15 January 2019	E-mail

In selecting respondents, the study used the heterogeneous purposive sampling. Also described as a selective or subjective research method, purposive sampling mainly applies to qualitative studies and relies “on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units” (Sharma 2017, 751): She approaches the persons whom she will speak to depending on the subject she pursues to explore. We were interested in persons who were involved in the particular community problem solving project. Choosing interlocutors had to do, on one hand, with the quality of an expert - he or she had to possess the necessary knowledge, experience in that particular field and capacity to look into decisional processes (Struebing 2013); these “key-persons” may unlock “an otherwise unclear, inaccessible and unmanageable field” (Breidenstein et al. 2013, 78). We had these features in mind when asking the head of a local NGO, as well as a psychologist and teacher to be our interview partners (the two experts). Apart from that, prior knowledge about the subject and the element of access to the field were important: A foregone “solid personal connection” helps building up trust and facilitates the approach (Breidenstein et al. 2013, 78). Having had the chance to previously work with the experts made room for such personal contacts.

The research primarily focuses on the actors (young people) who took part in the project. Most of them belong to the Orthodox denomination. They come from various backgrounds - 9th to 12th graders, from several participating high-schools. More extensiveness and heterogeneity for the study was pursued by not focusing on a single research field or environment,

such as one particular school. On a narrative basis, respondents were invited to describe the process including “own structural orders and orientations towards the world” (Struebing 2013, 100). An interview guide was used as a scheme of questions (Appendix 1), needed to be developed along the way - according to certain answers, to the (sometimes, surprising) unfolding of the topic, as well as for stimulating discussions.

Appendix 1. Interview guide

- What were your main reasons for getting involved in the project “Young people decide!”?
- How do you appreciate your connections to religion during the time you were engaged in the project?
- To what extent did you consider yourself a believer in that period?
- After finishing high-school, in what way did you take part in volunteering activities?
- If you engaged in volunteering after finishing high-school, what were your motivations?
- To what extent do you consider yourself a religious believer today?
- How would you assess your current connections to religion and spirituality?

Analysis and interpretation

Interviews were recorded, but we wrote down ideas expressed by our interlocutors during the dialogue - for establishing a certain scale of relevance for the affirmations. For instance, different assertions leading to the fact that religious services were not attractive for young people: identifying frequent statements in a certain direction “prefabricates” the theory and their subsequent ordering gives birth to a theoretical conceptualization. We found it necessary to transcribe the interviews: “Written text provides the ease of finding keywords or themes. Methods such as grounded theory rely on this strategy to pull information from qualitative data” (Parameswaran, Ozawa-Kirk and Latendresse 2019, 3). Besides writing down memos and analytical notes, we used the coding procedure and situation maps.

Coding the text is almost indispensable in qualitative research. Encrypting the document (extracting certain ideas and concepts) is part of a selection procedure by means of which the meanings of particular statements (in the case of interviews) are actually being decrypted (Struebing 2013, 118). This way, “the sites of silence in our data” are being articulated (Clarke 2005, 85). Using either the open procedure - cutting the text to pieces in the phase of the first reading, the axial coding (concentration on a particular situation),

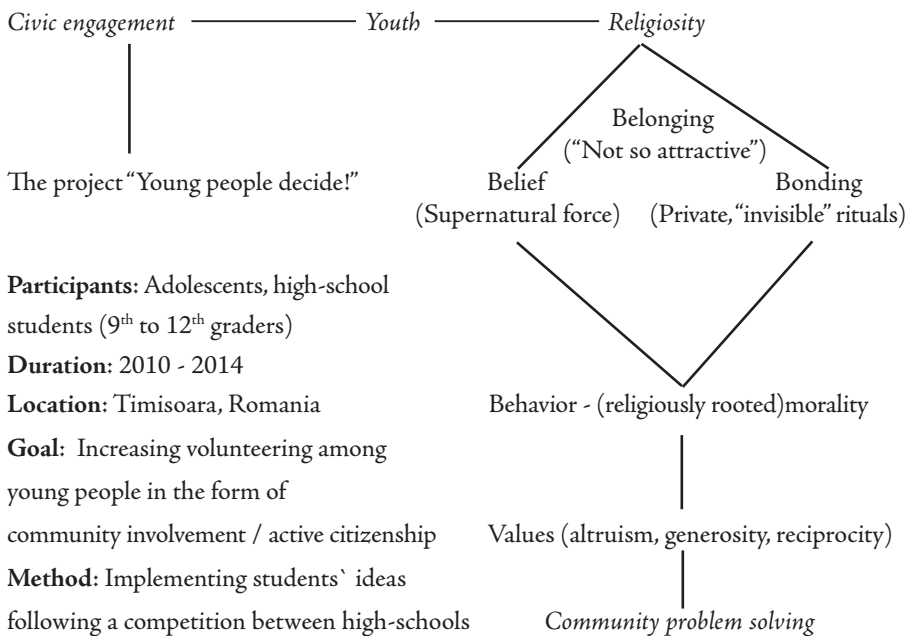
or re-deciphering / the final selection (Strauss and Corbin 1990, Struebing 2013), the researcher arranges her notions so these finally make a sense. Take the religious cognitive element of belief, for our situation (Appendix 2): it cannot be looked at by itself and in a "traditional" manner, as a motivational factor for engaging in the community; young people connect it to religious moral teachings. They further "privatize" faith and frame it in own, rather agnostic visions upon the divinity, conceived as a real, but indescribable supernatural force.

Appendix 2. Coding scheme

Belonging	Virtually no connection to volunteering An "interesting" activity Observation of rituals Singing in the choir Family component
Belief	Rebellion Agnosticism Supernatural force Moral teachings Uncertainty
Bonding	"Invisible" spirituality Private prayer Peace Guidance Finding God everywhere
Behavior	Moral character Karma Reciprocity Principles Metaphysical interests

Drawing a situation map can, further, create connections between elements. It is not a procedure to be used at a certain moment in time; the researcher establishes her own rhythm and succession, nevertheless inside an organized intellectual working process. We chose to draw such a scheme for connecting our findings (Appendix 3). For example, belief and bonding are placed on the same level by our respondents; they are closely related to each other and indirectly generate an influence on the decision to volunteer, through the moral dimension of behavior.

Appendix 3. Situation map



Writing memos and analytical notes, coding the information and sketching situation maps are part of a "multitasking" procedure, involving a "very provocative" process of analytical and creative thinking" (Clarke 2005, 84, 89). Attempting to confer a meaning, a reason to what had been heard or observed, allows the researcher to expand her own understanding of the process, to learn about the practice and the way people have perceived their experiences: Writing is learning. Analyzing is explaining. And explaining leads to understanding.

Findings: The "own way" of helping the community

With respect to the first religious dimension described in the theoretical section: During the interviews, respondents made virtually no connection between belonging and the decision to get engaged in the community. Opinions converge towards a synthesized affirmation: "I try to be a good person, but not necessary through my connections to church" (A.S.). Some

took part at services with their families, others sang in the choir, or they merely found the community interesting: "I am an Orthodox, but I do not practice; I am simply interested in studying rituals" (O.L.); "I went to the Neo-Protestants (Pentecostals) and I felt the community one hundred times stronger than with us, the Orthodox believers. I felt attracted to it, but it had nothing to do with an impulse for volunteering" (P.N.). The same opinion is to be found with one young man who sang in the church's choir as an adolescent, this having barely to do with taking part in the project.

Church as a "recruiting agent" for participation does thus not apply in our case. At the most, "I took my religious morality from attending services as an Orthodox, but to a lesser extent. I felt the community there, but it was not so attractive to me" (P.N.).

Belief and bonding - the private spiritual vision

Adolescents want to be free, not only in choosing religious or spiritual convictions, but in deciding what to do in life: "They are rebels, tend to contradict teachings" (P.N.). Some prefer to attend church by themselves: "I go there alone, say a prayer and find my peace. I don't need the institution" (A.S.). In the same line, one of the respondents speaks about being able to find God anywhere (C.A.). The way of seeing the divinity varies from the religious framing, to the image of a supernatural, rather indescribable entity (M.N., A.C.). "I consider myself an agnostic. I cannot define this force or include it in a religious category, as I cannot prove its existence under a certain form" (A.J.).

A female former participant in the project speaks about the notion of God "not resonating" with her anymore, after she had passed through high-school and the following years of personal formation have re-shaped and developed her thinking into a self-reliant one: "I have a different notion of God now. It is about belief, but not about religious belief anymore" (P.N.). She makes the difference to the years of school, when she had perceived religion as a source of certainty, trust and guidance - the awareness "that someone takes care of you". Her rituals are now part of a privately built spiritual vision.

Some respondents place the element of belief in an indirect connection to participation, through moral behavior: "I can be motivated to volunteer by

my belief in God, or by the belief that a good deed is of help for others. If I had not believed, perhaps I would have been more individualistic: «Why get involved, if there's nothing in it for me?» (A.S.); „Motivation came indirectly on a religious basis: The fact that I was a religious person made me more moral than if I had not been one, and this morality determined me to take part in the project and want to help people” (P.N.); “I am a believer to the extent of acting according to the Bible's teachings, of not hurting others and helping the one next to you” (A.S.). Still others state that belief and prayer are not to be put in connection with the inner tendency to be good to others, which is “determined solely by one's own features of character” (C.A.).

Behavior - the “minimum moral standard”

Respondents refer to morality - the behavioral component of religion, as not being shaped in church and place it in connection to their experiences, character and convictions (C.F., R.U.). “My generosity was surely influenced by the education I had received when I was a child” (C.A.); “The principles I am guided by today come from my personal life” (P.N.); “I am guided by my conscience and principles, without connections to religion. Not a dissonance between the two moral views: At the origins, morality has religious roots. It is about a minimum standard not to hurt the one next to you” (O.L.). Another interview partner goes further: “In Northern countries, atheism is over 80%... And all their actions imply civic spirit. Not religion must be central, but principles...”; he invites us to look at Neo-Protestants, who “have their seeds sowed, to see if they are involved in volunteering” (A.J.).

Interviewees mention the notion of karma several times, referring to reciprocity as a guiding principle for their actions: “Things you do return to you” (A.J.) and “Everything you give to the world, you will also receive” (P.N.). A young man, adhering to Buddhist teachings, also speaks about reciprocity: “Through generosity, you help yourself” (A.J.). The psychologist we have mentioned earlier refers to altruism in the same line, as one of the highest needs in Maslow's hierarchy, connected to the “tendency of activating your potential. At this level, the ego is less present: Altruism, dedication to the other, forgetting about yourself offer a positive state of mind” (M.D.). To the same extent: “Once you have performed an act of generosity and experienced the uplifting feeling of helping the other, it becomes an addiction, you won't be able to stop” (M.N.).

Acting in conformity to moral standards, as a precursor for community problem solving, is, consequently, mainly seen as a non-religious and, sometimes, religiously-rooted attitude. A female respondent refers to the support she is offering us for the research project: "Look at the fact that I am helping you with this interview - it's only an example for my own way of helping the community, by means of such small gestures" (P.N.). Like most of the ones we have talked to, she does not connect religion with the motivation of acting in an altruistic manner. Her "thirst of knowledge" during young adulthood was the source of "getting away from religion" and act according to a privately shaped morality.

Some still leave room for a potential religious tie (A.D., M.P.): "Religion classes, through the things they promoted - such as being a good person, have influenced me. One can say she is not motivated by religious principles for volunteering; but I know things I have learned are with me, they have not gone anywhere" (A.S.).

Conclusions

In the Eastern European Orthodox realm, privatization of belief and bonding among young people (an individual, asocial, sometimes heterodox spirituality) is able to act as an incentive for getting involved in community problem solving, through the most important moral element of behavior. Spiritual life, even agnostic and "invisible", contributes to getting attached to a positive scale of values - generosity, altruism, truth, justice and reciprocity - sometimes with the feeling that God is the "source of moral rules and duties". On the practical level, these values are converted in acts of volunteer engagement in their community.

Theoretical arguments in this study - structured around the four main religious dimensions - of belonging, belief, bonding and behavior - suggested a combination between external (social) and internal (private) religiosity as a potential motivational factor for volunteering. For the Western setting, literature emphasizes collective rituals (the "recruiting" role of churches) as potentially creating the environment for involving in community matters. In Eastern Europe and especially in Romania, although ties between the Orthodox Church and its believers are traditionally strong, most young adults were found to express their spirituality privately, far from collective rituals.

Results confirm this theoretical estrangement of young people from church and exclude religious belonging as a potential incentive for participation. The possible explanation is the gap between the Orthodox Church and its followers - due to its perceived control by the state during communist times and the remaining prejudices in this direction in the years after.

Unpaid work rates are increasing in Romania and volunteers are preponderantly attracted to local politics, respectively solving community problems. Young people show spiritual motivations in this context, based on a privately shaped morality, sometimes with religiously rooted fundamentals: "Adolescents are rebels", argues one of our interlocutors; and we would add - young people are self-learned "freelancers" in the spiritual realm. Experiences shape their ideologies and attitudes, including the decision to get involved or not in community problem solving at a certain moment in time.

Limitations of this study are mainly related to particularization, to the subjective, convenience sampling. On the other hand, relevance derives from the theoretical argumentation and the in depth information obtained by means of the interviews, difficult to come to on a statistical basis: The personal, first-hand approach allows the researcher to reach a "diversity of views and experiences" (Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam 2003), providing the data with a consistent and rational substrate.

Research can go further and attempt a comparative look (different denominations) at the subject: identify proportions and follow some causal relationships. Initiatives of religious institutions tackling the estrangement of youth from Church are also worth an in depth future examination. And from a more practical perspective - representatives of NGO-s, schools, public administrations and social workers dealing with civic engagement could benefit from the findings, in the stage of exploring young people`s motivations to become and remain active in their communities.

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