

TYPES OF CAPITAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Cătălin-George Fedor

Scientific research III PhD, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch, Department of Anthropological Research,
Str. Codrescu, nr. 2, 700481, phone: + 40 745646339, email: cgfedor@yahoo.com

Introduction

The paper presents the results of a sociological study conducted in four communities situated in the central area of Moldova. Its main aim was to establish the ethnic identity of Catholic population in the villages of central area of Moldova and to discover the way in which these communities build their ethnic and cultural identity. It was a mixed, quantitative and qualitative study. From a qualitative perspective, we used individual and group comprehensive interview. In the quantitative research, we used the social distance scale, ethnic attributes inventory and social representations inventory of different forms of capital. The results are focused on ethnic aspects and local features of studied communities and the conclusions reveal the methods of ethnic self-defining for each community and their tendency to conserve local identity by refusing external influences that have an ideological stake.

Research methods

Thus, we propose to carry out an evaluation of the ethnic and cultural identity of the populations from the Csango communities in Moldova. We conducted our research in the field in two communities of Catholics from Bacău County (Făraoani and Prăjești) and in two communities of Catholics from Neamț County (Săbăoani and Gherăești). The research undertaken has a mixed character, being both qualitative and quantitative.

Quantitative research

We opted for ethnic attributes inventory (Chelcea, 1998), which is the most widely used modern method of measuring ethnic stereotypes and it provides most information on their structure, stability and change. Starting from various forms of capital suggested by Bourdieu (1986), we used a simplified tool for capturing social representations of various forms of capital (economic, political, symbolic, cultural and social) of studied ethnic groups. We calculated the following indices: Index of social distance (SDI - describes the number of potential social contacts rejected by the respondent); Index of social contacts (SCI - comes from the number of opportunities for social contacts accepted by respondents); Qualitative index of social contacts (QISC - reflects the attitude of the respondents to the others).

Sample calculation

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics for 2015, there are 11863 inhabitants in Săbăoani and 6742 in Gherăești located in Neamț County and 2333 inhabitants in Prăjești and 5561 in Făraoani in Bacău County (<http://statistici.insse.ro>). So, the size of collectivity (N) for this study is made up of total population of the 4 settlements (26499 inhabitants). Taking into account the margin of error of 4.5% and using the formula for calculating the sample size, results: $n = 466$ people distributed proportionally per each community.

Qualitative research

From a qualitative perspective, we resorted to individual (12 in total, 3 in each community) and group (1 focus group) comprehensive interviews. We placed a special focus on the life story with the final aim to shape the individual and collective memory (Atkinson, 2006). The field research was conducted during May-June 2015. The target group of the study included the elderly aged between 75 and 92 years, depositors of collective memory specific to each community. The questions were adapted to the level of understanding of the subjects; their language was adequate to their degree of knowledge. The interviewed individuals, three from each village, agreed to take part in the interview. We informed the subjects about the confidentiality of information supplied during the interview. The interviews took place in a familiar environment and were accepted by the respondents, namely, in the office of the parish house that belongs to the church of each community. The body of data collected during interviews was coded based on the hierarchy of data importance and their recurrence to build categories and topics. We aimed to develop an understanding of latent meanings of the analyzed messages based on the model of Grounded Theory (Corbin, Strauss, 1990), a methodological approach focusing on the way in which data and their analysis are the product of a symbolic interaction. Then, the concepts and the topics were organized in a narrative scheme summarizing the outcomes of research. The research topics were: The memory of inhabitants on the history of village and community; Ethnic self-definition; Controversies linked to ethnic origin of communities/ External interference; Inter-ethnic relations among Romanians, Csangos, Gypsy and others; Traditions, local specificity; The Role of Church and Other Institutions for Community; Preservation of Local Identity; Outlook into the Future.

Results and discussions

Social distance

As regards the social contact indicator (SCI), the highest score indicates a better position. Therefore, the order is Romanian-Hungarian-Csangos-Gypsies. The situation is reversed in the case of the social distance indicator (SDI), in the sense that the lower score shows a higher tolerance for other ethnicities. The qualitative indicator of social contacts (QISC) reflects a strongly positive attitude of the respondents to Romanians, and a low-positive one to the Gypsies. In the case of a comparative analysis per counties, the results show that the situation of the indicators is similar in the two counties.

References

- Atkinson, R. (2006). *Povestea vieții. Interviu*. Iași: Polirom.
Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.
Chelcea, S. (coord.). (1998). *Memorie socială și identitate națională*. București: INI.
Corbin, J., Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Cannons, and Evaluative Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13 (1), 3-21.

Webography

(<http://statistici.insse.ro>)

Types of capital

The ethnic group that stands out in the category of economic capital is represented by the Gypsies. Most of the respondents regarded the Gypsies as the wealthiest. Apart from economic capital, the Gypsies also predominated in the category of share capital, being considered as most helpful to one another. When it comes to the ethnic category represented by Romanians, the latter were perceived as the poorest, but also the ones who best preserve their traditions. The Romanians are also the ones who have monopoly of the political capital, of the symbolic capital, respectively. The Hungarians do maintain political capital, but at a lower level in comparison with that of the Romanians.

Inter-ethnic relations: Romanians / Hungarians / Csangos / Gypsies / others

In population in the communities studied has the following ethnicity: Romanian, Hungarian, Csango, and Romani. The relationships established between the people who belong to the first three ethnicities, i.e. Romanian, Hungarian and Csango, can be included in two categories. On the one hand, positive, cordial, conflict-free relations have been established between the inhabitants. The reduced distance between the three ethnicities is also proven by the marriage between people belonging to different ethnic groups. On the other hand, tense relationships exist in cases in which inhabitants who identify themselves as Hungarian conduct actions among the inhabitants aimed at assuming the Hungarian identity. Such an attitude is justified by the interviewees by the political and territorial implications of considering these areas as being predominantly occupied by the Hungarian population. The hypothesis of a conflict between individuals within the community, without extending the conflict to the various ethnicities in the community arises from analysing the interviews we have conducted. Thus, we cannot speak about an inter-ethnic conflict within the communities studied.

The forms of sanction usually consist in verbal sanction, exercised by the other inhabitants of the commune. Moreover, the refusal of the personalities of the commune to collaborate with them can also intervene. None of the interviewees mentioned aggressive sanctions of the inhabitants who disseminate elements of Hungarian culture and the relationship between the inhabitants of different ethnicities does not take the form of inter-ethnic rejection.

The relationships between Romanians, Hungarians, Csangos and Gypsies are also lacking inter-ethnic conflict, yet the social distance between the three ethnicities and the Gypsies determines the informal norm of the interdiction of marrying local Gypsies.

The interviewees who declared to belong to the Hungarian ethnicity showed two types of attitudes. On the one hand, they feel that they are undervalued by the majority ethnic population. This attitude leads, in some cases, to them formally assuming the Romanian ethnicity, as we have shown above. On the other hand, they also feel proud to see elements of Hungarian culture, such as the Hungarian language and the traditional dance, being revived.

Conclusions

The study carried out on the four communities previously mentioned has revealed the fact that, with the exception of a low percentage of the population which identifies itself differently, the population is undoubtedly Romanian. The inhabitants define themselves as members of their Romanian community and share a common ethnic identity. Thus, the consented and affirmed ethnical belonging of the population from the areas studied is, to an overwhelming extent, Romanian.

Differentiating between localities, the inhabitants from Gherăești, Neamț identified themselves as Romanian and considered their language to be the Romanian language, leaving behind the heritage of the Csango dialect. The inhabitants from Săbăoani, Neamț, identified themselves as Romanian, the Csango dialect being, in their opinion, similar to a distorted Romanian tongue. In the case of the inhabitants from Prăjești, Bacău, two methods of ethnic self-definition have been noticed, even though the entire population proclaimed itself to be Romanian. On the one hand, there are those who recognize the Csango dialect as a cultural heritage from their ancestors, without, however, recognizing a connection with the Hungarian cultural and genetic background. On the other hand, there are representatives of the local population who neither recognize nor accept the Csango dialect as an element inherited from their forerunners. Only some of the subjects from the communities from Făraoani, Bacău define themselves, from an ethnic viewpoint, as Csango. However, they do not assess themselves as Hungarian; they claim to belong to the Csangos, who are unique and different from the Hungarians. The dialect spoken is the Csango dialect is a hybrid between Hungarian and Romanian. They call it "our language", proving their attachment to the spiritual heritage inherited from their forerunners.

The indices calculated reflect a strong positive attitude of the respondents towards the Romanians, followed by the Hungarians and the Csangos, and a weak positive attitude towards the Gypsies. Even though they perceive themselves as poor, the Romanians show the greatest respect for their traditions and have "monopoly" over the political capital and over the symbolic capital, respectively.

The tendency to preserve local identity is shown by members of all communities and must be supported.