INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES IN ROMANIA.
PRECURSOR STAGE OF COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Andreea Claudia MARDACHE[1]

Abstract: *Intentional communities have been present worldwide for many years now, and in Romania they are currently in the formation stage. The present study showcases five such community projects in Romania. By using qualitative research, I have studied the aspects that motivated the members of these communities to be a part of this type of community. The study revealed that the members of intentional communities had different life experiences and internal transformations that made them want to join these communities: health problems, accessing a loan, interests in spirituality, permaculture etc.*

Key words: *community, intentional community, integration.*

1. Introduction

In Romania, in the past few years, there have been a number of projects that aim to form intentional communities, as they exist worldwide and in a quite significant number. A part of these communities can be identified online as well, by accessing web resources such as: *Fellowship for Intentional Community* (www.ic.org), *The Cohousing Network* (www.cohousing.org), *Ecovillage Network of the Americas* (www.ena.ecovillage.org), *The Northwest Intentional Communities Association* (www.ic.org/NICA) or *Global Ecovillage Network* (http://gen.ecovillage.org/).

I was interested in studying these community projects because I believe that „this social phenomenon is closely tied to current issues humanity is facing, such as economic, social and environmental distress etc. and it offers the alternative of a lifestyle that, on a short-term basis decreases a part of these universal problems people all over the world face or even fixes them in the long term" (Mardache, 2015, p. 17).

Regarding these relatively new types of communities, I find the following affirmations made by Zamfir (1989, p.53) to be very relevant: "It is interesting to note that in the past 2-3 decades, there have been searches for alternative lifestyles, even in capitalist countries, as a reaction to the „dominant lifestyle", a term coined by Galtung. (...) These alternative ways of life differ from the dominant lifestyle because individuals refuse to live abiding by capitalist rules and in the structures dictated by the capitalistic social organization, instead attempting to build human communities that follow new life principles. These communities

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[1] Transilvania University of Braşov, andreea.mardache@unitbv.ro

are very similar to the utopic socialist attempts a few centuries back. (...) Alternative lifestyle searches also begin in third world countries, as an essential part of the process of identifying new ways to create social development that aren't capitalistic in nature."

2. Community – Theoretical Aspects

Communities are defined using numerous perspectives, and we can identify a bunch of definitions for the term community in most dictionaries: *Micul Dicţionar Enciclopedic* [Little Encyclopaedic Dictionary], different editions, *Marele Dicţionar de Neologisme* [The Great Dictionary of Neologisms] (2006), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *Enciclopedia Dezvoltării Sociale* [Encyclopedia of Social Development] (2007), *Encyclopedia Universalis*, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1972) etc. Communities are defined either in restrictive contexts or in general, and the importance of the concept of community is outlined frequently.

Enciclopedia Dezvoltării Sociale [Encyclopedia of Social Development] (2007) defines a community as „a social formation that lasts in time and contains a relatively small number of individuals with a similar cultural background and similar social status that occupy a small territory. These individuals form persistent and long-lasting relations of cooperation through which they achieve an efficient social control within that specific social group".

Moser (2009, p.101) states that the definitions of the term community may vary: (1) there can be a purely administrative and geographical definition; (2) the term can relate to a place we assign to a group of people or what we call local communities or vicinity; (3) community may also have a symbolic and psychological meaning when it relates to characteristics such as the common interests of a group of individuals. When we use this meaning of the term, we can also say that individuals share similar values, they identify with the group and support each other".

According to Goodman, (1992, p. 73-74), a community is „a social group that shares not only a common identity and organized model of interaction, but also a common geographic territory. This common geographic territory increases the frequency and often the consequences of their interactions."

 Amerio (2003, p. 25) defines a community as a global social entity „in which the connections between the members are very strong and the ingroup sentiment is very present and rooted in profound traditions"; also „a community is the bearer of common good that not only transcends the individual good, but also becomes the guarantee and measure of the latter".

Besides the attempts that have been made to define communities, there have been a number of classifications made, resulting in many types of communities: ethic and aesthetic communities (Bauman, 2001; Pitulac, 2009), anarchic and intentional communities (Pitulac, 2009) etc.

Longres (1995, p. 72) mentions three types of communities: locational, identificational and interest communities.

In classic sociology, Nisbet (1967), quoted by Bădescu (2005, p. 97), identifies five theoretical regimes of the concept of community throughout the history of sociology:

a) the moral community (in Auguste Comte's sociological system).

b) the empirical community (Frederic Le Play's School).

c) community as typology (Tönnies and Weber).

d) community as methodology (Durkheim).

e) molecular communities (Simmel).

Regarding the concept of „intentional community", the definitions available are not quite as numerous. One of them belongs to Leafe Christian (2003, xvi), who defines residential intentional communities as „a group of people who have chosen to live with or near enough to each other to carry out their shared lifestyle or common purpose together". The author emphasizes the importance of common living, as well as the existence of a common purpose, work and effort in order to have a lifestyle that reflects the same values, as mentioned in the web source: *Fellowship for Intentional Community*.

3. Intentional Communities in Romania – Qualitative Research

One of the objectives of the present research was to identify what prompted the members of intentional communities to desire to be a part of such a community, what were their interests and life experiences.

In order to achieve the objectives, I set for this research, I used a qualitative research that involves two methods: observation (field observation, general, uncontrolled observation, un-structured observation, participative and intensive observation) along with interview (unstructured, narrative, thematic story interview). I conducted 30 unstructured, in-depth interviews and in order to analyze and process data I used the NVIVO 10 software. The starter question was „Tell me the story of your presence in the community."[2].

Mardache and Atudorei (2013, p. 170) list a few intentional communities currently forming in Romania: Armonia Brassovia, Braşov County, Rainbow Valey, Hunedoara County, Green Apuseni Mountains, Alba County, Kogaion Community, Buzau County.

The communities analyzed in the present study are: Armonia Brassovia community in Brasov County (http://armoniabrassovia.ro/), Aurora Community in Hunedoara County (http://www.aurora-circle.org/), Rainbow Valey in Hunedoara County (http://www.valeacurcubeului.org/ and http://valeacurcubeului.com/), SatCitAnanda community (Geoagiu Băi in Hunedoara County) and Stanciova community in Timiş County (http://stanciova.wordpress.com/).

In order to analyze qualitative data, I used the software NVIVO 10 and I did open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In order to do open coding, I used a paragraph by paragraph coding technique, I built in-vivo codes based on which I built categories and subcategories, such as: „types of prior transformations", „life experiences", „stages of transformation", etc. In order to do axial coding, I made connections between categories and subcategories and discovered main axial categories relevant to the objectives of my research, structured in temporal sequences and by the type of each life experience.

4. Interpretation of Qualitative Data

4.1. Projects Prior to Community Integration

Before finding out about the existence of communities and wanting to live in such a community, a lot of members had projects, most of which failed, that involved moving from the city and buying land located more or less closer to the city (some of them even did buy land) or even build communities.

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[2] Parts of this research, regarding other research objectives, were published in Mardache (2015) and Mardache (2016).

„*We were thinking, something, we wanted to move in the countryside, anywhere, we were tired of living in a block of flats.*" (A.Z., Armonia Brassovia).

„*... my idea was to buy land close to Braşov, have a garden, more space, not be chained to the city and its living conditions...*" (I.D., Armonia Brassovia).

„*We bought land with the intention of running from the city and started to build*" (A.B., Armonia Brassovia).

„*... before I started with the community, I also had an intention to move, I bought land near the city, 10 km away, and I tried but I saw that nothing worked. (...) At that moment I realized, hold on, it's not the individual way that I'm looking for and we can do the same thing collectively and a lot more efficiently*" (B.S., Armonia Brassovia).

B.K. (Armonia Brassovia), in his attempts to find „a bigger family", was involved in the foundation of an association meant to „uphold old traditions", built an urban garden and an orchard, when he could benefit from both individual and collective work.

G.B. and O.T. from Armonia Brassovia community wanted to form such a community:

„*I had been thinking about it long before, about the idea of a community, of building something, I was one of the people who really wanted that.*"

„*A few years back I thought of a project just like this one that I wanted to develop. I have a plot of land in Bod that I kept precisely for this type of project.*"

V.N. (Armonia Brassovia) designed a project for which he wanted to obtain financing from the organizers of „Lion's Arena" show, in which 10 families were to be involved. Through this project, he wanted to build houses, kindergartens etc, but he gave up on it, dissatisfied with the conditions imposed by the financers.

4.2. Transformations and Interests Prior to Community Integration

A part of the members of the community describe certain interests or transformations prior to community integrations that formed the foundation for their desire to later integrate in the community. These transformations or interests are very diverse:

- health problems that determined a radical change in nutrition (A. şi R. from Rainbow Valley community went from an omnivorous diet to a completely vegan one but no product of animal origin, just fruits and vegetables and unprocessed seeds).

- less interest in professional development and social contacts

„*Meanwhile I stopped talking to people, I'm not as involved in society or in a social group, I also really don't care about professional evolution or professional achievements anymore*" (C.C., Armonia Brassovia).

- layoffs and constant change of jobs

„*And at some point I was fired because of gender motives, a lot of details and irrelevant things and then something broke inside of me, in the sense that I realized something wasn't working anymore, something I didn't exactly know, what was happening, afterwards I found out something was no longer sustainable, something related to stress, money, resistance in general*" (C.R., Armonia Brassovia).

- a change of conception regarding the workplace

„*Now I say: I'd like to be left alone, which means not in a company that stresses me out, along with other people...Now I'm dedicated to doing what I like to do, doing exactly what I know...*" (M.T., Armonia Brassovia).

- accessing a loan

„*... the experience I had with the loan was our wake up call, it made us think... Well, wait*

a minute, we worked, gave all of our energy to earn some money we used to pay interest, bills and eat and then, what is left? Life passes by and you remain a slave on a plantation and don't do anything and I said, ok, wait a minute, what do we really want from life?" (Ș.B., Armonia Brassovia).

- interest in permaculture <u>and the desire to apply principles of permaculture by setting up a garden.</u> Holzer (2012, xiv) stated that „the term permaculture was invented by Australian ecologist Bill Mollison and his student, David Holmgren, and it comes from the term «permanent agriculture». A permacultural system is a system that imitates nature, it's based on natural cycles and ecosystems".

- certain transformations and interests in spirituality<u>:</u>

Finding out that „*Indians have a tradition and a faith that whoever comes out every morning to see the sunset for a year will be cured of all diseases"*, B.K. started doing this ritual and saw some personal changes.

„*...my soul started to wake up... I made a decision, I sold my land and I decided to take a vacation for a year, at least, or an year and a half, to live good, read and live for my soul and in the meantime, I will find, I will meditate on what to do, what to start"*.

- transformations brought by reading Anastasia's books (*Ringing Cedars of Russia,* the collection of volumes written by Vladimir Megre) and the birth of her children:

„*I was so obsessed with building a career, earning money, and when I got pregnant and while reading Anastasia and all the information there, I started developing other interests. I started being preoccupied with healthy eating, a good education for my children. Naturally, that was my first thought, what I was going to leave my children"* (G.G., Armonia Brassovia).

A part of the members of the communities speak of an experience similar to a personal awakening: „*…this process of internal awakening, so to speak...so yeah, I could say that before we started taking meditation courses, I was already on the path towards quitting smoking, naturally, after we gave up on eating meat, whatever, and these things, when you wake up, you start to wonder what you do, why you do what you do and how you do it…"* (C.D., Aurora).

5. Conclusions

The members of the intentional communities studied speak of different life experiences or internal transformations which determined them to reach the conclusion that, living in such a community is what they want because it offered solutions to the problems they were facing. They consider living in the city unsatisfactory (either because of living in a block of flats or because of the workplace etc.), some of them even bought or intended to buy land outside the city but they realized an isolated way of life, far from other people wasn't satisfying either.

Other members of the communities discover permaculture, they become fascinated with this new way of doing agriculture and they want to set up their own garden, but also learn and experience permaculture along with other people. A part of the members of intentional communities declare that they've changed their way of thinking, their interests, favorite books, diet etc, experiencing a process of „awakening", starting to ask themselves questions and doubt everything they had lived up until that point. Under these circumstances, discovering that they were not alone, that there were other people who had come to same conclusions, the members of intentional communities believe that life in such a community,

alongside people who share the same ideals and interests is what they desire for themselves.
For more information, you may also contact this address: andreea.mardache@unitbv.ro

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