

THE ROMA COMMUNITY OF MURGENI, COUNTY OF VASLUI, ROMANIA. THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF A RELIGIOUS CONVERSION TO PENTECOSTAL CULT

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Abstract

The present presentation includes the findings of a field sociological research in 2015 in Murgeni – a small provincial town in Romania located at the eastern border of Europe, with a Roma community of over 2,000 inhabitants. The study presents for the beginning a brief description of the locality. The central theme of the research was the role that the conversion of Pentecostal worship had in the life of the Roma community. Within this framework, research has attempted to answer a set of questions as follows: To what extent have some traditions of the Roma population changed? How has the local Pentecostal Church developed to this day? How did the authorities get all these changes? How does the Romanian population report to the mass conversion of the Roma community? In order to answer these questions, sociological research was based on various techniques: a survey of a sample of 300 subjects, participatory field observation, focus groups with ethnic Roma, interviews with local decision-makers, interviews with religious leaders. Field research has proven to be a good opportunity to identify new directions of action for local government or non-governmental actors who can intervene to better socio-cultural integration of the Roma or to understand the social costs of their migratory flows to Europe.

Keywords: economic underdevelopment, migration, religious conversion, religious community, pentecostals

Resumé

La présente présentation reprend les conclusions d'une étude sociologique de terrain menée en 2015 à Murgeni, petite ville de province située à la frontière orientale de l'Europe et comptant une communauté rom de plus de 2 000 habitants. L'étude présente pour le début une brève description de la localité. Le thème central de la recherche était le rôle que la conversion du culte pentecôtiste avait dans la vie de la communauté rom. Dans ce cadre, les chercheurs ont tenté de répondre à une série de questions: Dans quelle mesure certaines traditions de la population rom ont-elles changé? Comment l'église pentecôtiste locale s'est-elle développée à ce jour? Comment les autorités ont-elles obtenu tous ces changements? Comment la population roumaine rend-elle compte de la conversion massive de la communauté rom? Afin de répondre à ces questions, la recherche sociologique s'appuyait sur diverses techniques: enquête sur un échantillon de 300 sujets, observation participative sur le

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terrain, groupes de discussion avec des Roms, entretiens avec des décideurs locaux, entretiens avec des chefs religieux. Les recherches sur le terrain se sont révélées être une bonne opportunité pour identifier de nouvelles pistes d'action pour les gouvernements locaux ou les acteurs non gouvernementaux pouvant intervenir pour une meilleure intégration socio-culturelle des Roms ou pour comprendre les coûts sociaux de leurs flux migratoires vers l'Europe.

Mots-clés: sous-développement économique, migration, conversion religieuse, communauté religieuse, pentecôtistes

Rezumat

Prezentarea de față cuprinde concluziile unei cercetări sociologice de teren efectuată în anul 2015 în Murgeni – un mic oraș de provincie din Romania situat la granița de est a Europei, cu o comunitate roma de peste 2000 de locuitori. Studiul prezintă pentru început o succintă descriere a localității. Tema centrală a cercetării s-a referit la rolul pe care l-a avut în viața comunității de romi convertirea la cultul penticostal. În acest cadru cercetarea a încercat să răspundă la un set de întrebări după cum urmează: în ce măsură anumite tradiții ale populației roma s-au schimbat? Cum s-a dezvoltat până astăzi biserica penticostală locală? Cum au receptat autoritățile toate aceste schimbări? Cum se raportează populația română la convertirea în masă a comunității Roma? Pentru a răspunde la aceste întrebări cercetarea sociologică s-a bazat pe tehnici diverse: un sondaj de opinie pe un eșantion de 300 de subiecți, observație de teren participativă, focus grupuri cu etnici romi, interviuri cu decidenții locali, interviuri cu liderii religioși. Cercetarea de teren s-a dovedit un bun prilej pentru a identifica noi direcții de acțiune pentru factorii din administrația locală sau din domeniul non guvernamental care pot interveni pentru o mai bună integrare socio-culturală a romilor sau pentru înțelegerea costurilor sociale ale fluxurilor migratoare ale acestora spre Europa.

Cuvintecheie: sub-dezvoltare economică, migration, convertire religioasă, comunitate religioasă, penticostali

Motto:

“... at some point, each of us considered the possibility of leaving the town...”
(Roma male, focus group)

1. Introduction

1.1. Murgeni-location and population

The town of Murgeni¹ is located in the south-east of the county of Vaslui, 35 km from the municipality of Bârlad and 94 km from the municipality of Galați. It is considered “the smallest town” of the county Vaslui. In the central area there is the neighbourhood Satul-Nou, which spreads along the

¹ For a more historical detailed description, see Coman (1973).

road and includes most of the Roma population. In 2004, the township of Murgeni, or the burg of Murgeni, became a town (with the composing villages: Cârja, Floreni, Lățești, Raiu, Sărățeni, Schineni). The population of the township Murgeni should be regarded from the point of view of establishing the township as an urban area. If at the 1992 census, the township of Murgeni and the composing villages gathered around 8008 inhabitants, in the 2002 census – 7674 inhabitants, a figure close to the population upon the establishment of the township as a town. In the last census – in 2011 – the following figures were recorded: Murgeni – 3612, Carja – 1003, Floreni – 668, Latesti – 329, Raiu – 659, Sărățeni – 304 and Schineni – 544 inhabitants. In whole, the town of Murgeni had, at the date of the census, a number of 7119 people. From the data provided by the local administration it was inferred that over 2000 people were Roma. As known, the figures given by the town hall may not coincide with the data available from the last census, as in the latter case, ethnicity was self-declared. A town hall attendant estimated that the population of the township Murgeni was composed mostly of Roma – 2127 people and 1600 Romanians, to which we should add the population in the rural areas.

1.2. Economic development

The township of Murgeni was characterised, up to 1989, by good economic development. ICIL-milk-processing unit, Filatura – cotton factory, Livestock complex – pig farm, IAS-state-run agricultural unit, MAT-wine factor unit, Cooperativă Agricolă de Producție – CAP (Agricultural Production Cooperative) etc. To these was added a series of state establishments (e.g. the Court) likely to absorb the local workforce. Unfortunately, all these productive or administrative units were closed one after the other. One respondent from the focus groups noticed: “In Ceaușescu's time it was better... there were jobs... people worked... unfortunately everything is now ruined.... There was a Slaughter-house, a milk processing unit. After the cotton factory was closed, people just started to stay-at-home”.

Then the Court (a branch of the Court in Bârlad) was closed. The Agricultural Production Cooperative and the state-run agricultural unit are nowadays private property, and most available agricultural lands are leased. The area is also known for wine production. Local economic initiatives are today extremely reduced. On the specialised website www.listafirme.ro we identified a number of ten companies headquartered in Murgeni, while in

the villages nearby the figures are even lower²: Carja-5, Floreni-1, Latesti-0, Raiu-0, Sărăteni-2 and Schineni-1 companies. On the same site we find similar figures for the neighbouring township. This data is difficult to verify, but it can provide an image of the scarce economic activity in the area. Let us though mention a private initiative as it is recalled by a participant in the focus-group: “before being a mediator I worked in a tailoring... there were 70-80 employees.... we would make 2 meter long diver suits... we had to carry them as well, and they were really heavy... we did not do the cutting because they came already cut, we had to carry them and they were heavy... we would glue them together... there was high pollution in that room...” Another participant in the focus group seemed very happy to have obtained a job with the recently opened supermarket Profi. Unfortunately, the supermarket has no anti-theft protection, and, as such, any negative cash balance is covered by the salary – already very small, of the employees.

Within this context, the employment of the Roma is indeed problematic. The Roma local councillor actually pointed out that “from an economic point of view it is really... I have no idea what we could do... the only chance to get some jobs would be an investor who would hire Roma... the few business owners in the area have a negative perception about the Roma”.

It is important to note the way in which the local and county administration relate to the future developments of the town in order to see to what extent coherent socio-economic policies are designed for a sustainable development on medium and long term. A first reference of this kind is to be found in the *Strategy for the economic and social development of the county of Vaslui for the period 2013-2020*, which can be identified on the websites of the county administration. From the very beginning, this document warns us that Murgeni is the smallest urban settlement with the weakest economic development. The explanation is in its turn unequivocal: “territorial isolation from the other urban centres in the area, as well as the lack of a historical economic tradition”. The same public document provides the percentages referring to the economic activity which combines the turnover with the number of employees (see **Figure 1**).

From the **Figure 1** it can be noticed that the town of Murgeni occupies the last place compared to the other urban areas.

² These data and the following are at the level of 2015-2016 when the present sociological research took place!

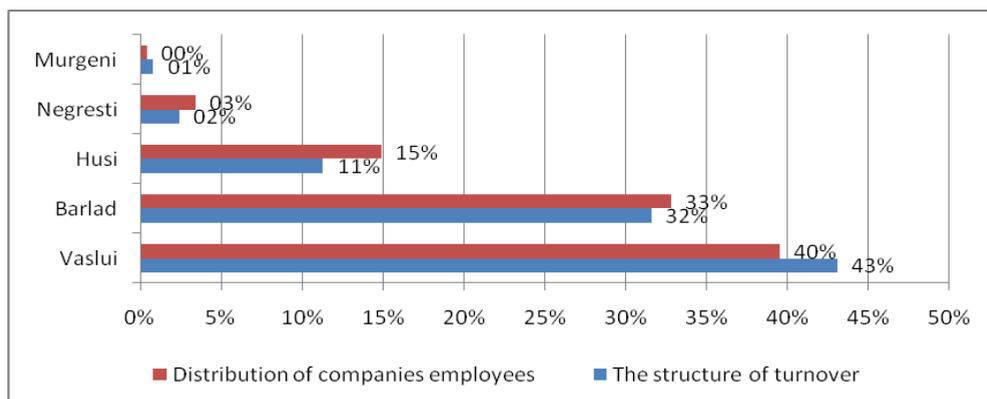


Fig. 1. Companies employees and the structure of turnover in urban of Vaslui County

1.3. Workforce

The lack of economic activities has led to increased level of either on long term migration (over one year) or the circulatory migration. Besides the jobs in the state-owned institutions (hospital, schools, police, etc.) the highest proportion of the population works in agriculture (few Roma are involved in agricultural activities). In fact, the workforce could be included in the categories: unemployment or personnel in search for a job (also known as unpaid unemployed – a number of 15.236 at the level of the county Vaslui³). In Murgeni, the unemployed have had a long history following the wave of lay-offs in the 1990s. Predominant in this respect are the families benefiting from social subsidies. The lack of jobs, correlated with the unexpected freedom of movement across borders has led to a spectacular exodus especially of the Roma population. A respondent from the focus groups appreciated in particular the fact that over 200 families of Roma were living in Nancy. “The whole town of Murgeni is there” he stated. As type of work carried out, the Roma are usually involved in scrap iron recovery. The same respondent declared that “working with iron is very difficult... I am always dirty... sometimes we buy iron, some other times they call us when demolitions are carried out.” In London, the Roma from Murgeni are doing the same thing. “I have been there, the Roma local counsellor declares... I figured I could make some money while I was there... I joined them at work...

³ According to AJOFM Vaslui.

working with iron is really difficult... when we were discharging I thought I was losing my breath... sometimes the Roma do not even eat at home and they go to work...there were times when they handled up to 500/ 600 kg of iron daily...” In fact, the activities of the Roma are in agreement with the demands of the local administration in the western countries. Here is how a Roma of Nancy describes the way in which they live: “I have been there for 7 years... my family is there right now... my kids are in school... we have a company there in the business of iron collection... we take the list from the town hall... they give us the list with the day when they throw washing machines, refrigerators, iron... we have a truck and we collect the iron... then we take it to specialised centres... we take the kids to school, then back home... the French state gives 115 EUR/ child... from the town hall we receive 690 EUR as a minimum income/ person... it should have been for 5 years, but they continue to pay it... the money we receive for the kids are spent fast with the school and everything... the kids have managed to integrate well... they speak French... some others are signed up for sports clubs... there are some who steal... among those who are not seventh-Day Adventists... but this does not happen in our community... we are all Christians in our community... we get along well with the authorities... we pay our taxes, and if we pay the taxes, they continue to pay us the benefits... there the state helps us with the rent ... it is much better compared to Romania”.

From the statements of a town hall employee, it appears there are Roma who work in the field of constructions, they took courses in Romania but moved to Germany where they worked with a contract. Another Roma is already running a bee-keeping project. “It is possible to start a business with objects made of woven wicker, as it is the case in a nearby locality” added the same clerk. There are also vocational training projects for the Romanian or Roma people, which are more or less successful. Some experiences can nevertheless be conclusive, as it results from the statements of a participant in the focus group: “I attended vocational courses... all good, it was nice, but it turned out to be just a fraud... we did not receive diplomas or money... we concluded a contract, we were told that at the end we will receive 1800 lei, but the money never came... we opened accounts, but then we had to pay for managing them, we did not receive any money... the selection was done based on the people who wanted to sign up for the courses... we were around 300 people... people even came from the countryside, and they were promised the reimbursement of their travel expenses...” Specialisations were

also less frequent: florist, disinfection and pest extermination, bakery, etc. It is however rather unlikely to find jobs in these fields. Surprising, the participants in one focus group declared that they did not intend to participate in further vocational training programmes since they considered these programmes useless. We do not know in detail what happened, but the projects were implemented in the area by a foundation from Vaslui called Ecovas, whose activity was acknowledged at county level. The beneficiaries' expectations might have been however overestimated.

1.4. Habitation

In the town of Murgeni there are 20 blocks. The town is not connected to the gas distribution network; thus, the flats from these blocks are heated using fire wood. As regards the Roma population, they either build new houses or they buy existing houses or flats. When building new houses, legal requirements are not usually observed. There are numerous old houses made out of clay bricks; nevertheless, in case of new houses, building materials are modern; in spite of this situation, the lack of money has caused many of these houses to remain practically unfinished. The windows are covered in metal sheets, which indicates the fact that the owners are absent and that they will probably come back, in order to finish their houses.

The yards of these houses are, generally, full of dirt; in few cases I saw domestic animals, raised in the household. In general, households are connected to the electric power and water networks, unlike the sewage network. The dwellings of the Roma have also been connected to the water network, but these people have been compelled to pay their historical debts. As regards the sewage network, we must say that there are issues related to the connection to this network in several areas. Thus, the sewage pipes level is higher than the level at which houses are built; in other cases, the connection cannot be performed because of the location of the house or of the toilet. Here is the statement of a Roma during a focus group: "for instance, my toilet is located at the back of the yard...I cannot connect my toilet to the sewage network because the slope is an obstacle: the sewage pipes are located at the centre of the road, at the highest point... if I change the location, the situation remains impossible, as on the other side there are other houses... I should place the pipeline at the level of the living room... the engineer said that I need to use a pump, then the connection will be possible, etc." In other areas, the ground water constitutes an obstacle, as it is located at a high level; as sewage pipes do not exist, one cannot build

drainable concreted pits. All these are embarrassing situations for the 21st century. During a focus group, one Roma stated that a child from a Western country, who spent there the holiday, started to cry when he discovered that he had to use the WC located at the back of the yard, which was totally inappropriate. Other children refused to take a bath in the basin. Certain Roma have modern bathrooms, but, as there is no connection to the sewage network, the situation gets complicated. Moreover, if there is no water during certain days and then the water is pumped under pressure, the pipes crack. The mayor of the town declared that the connection to the sewage network had not been carried out based on an accurate study: “I discussed the issue with the former mayor and with the former deputy mayor, who suggested to everyone: build your bathroom on the road’s side... then, the sewage network was built on the main road, but few owners have succeeded in connecting their houses to the network, because of the level differences... now, they are not trying to fix the situation, but they are performing new investments; nevertheless, the first investment has been useless!”

As regards the situation of properties, a town hall clerk stated that “the vast majority of the Roma population do not have papers for their land... all properties bought... are bought based on papers drafted by hand... in such a case, they cannot obtain building permits... they usually start a construction, then they come to request a building permit... but, as they do not have papers from the very beginning, things get complicated... unfortunately, people working abroad apply the same method... you would expect from them to change their behaviour... in fact, they did not change at all”. Another official from the town hall emphasized that a registration procedure with the Land Registry Office of properties belonging to 40 families who do not have papers is being carried out presently; after the measurements, these families will become legal owners of the respective land.

On the same issue, there is a project initiated by the *Association for the Integration and Assistance of Vulnerable Groups*, entitled “Miro Char-Casa mea” [Miro Char-My house]; due to this project, 62 people will benefit from assistance in order to become legal owners of the houses in which they live; special attention will be paid to the houses which have been nationalized by the Romanian State; the status of these houses is still uncertain, as their owners are not known.

Despite these inadequacies, the Roma dominate the inhabited area in the central area of Murgeni with an aggressive real estate policy. The Romanian neighbors are still complaining about these issues.

1.5. *Issues in education. Programs for Roma communities*

If we were to refer to the population of the town (stable population of 10 years and over), the education level is given in the **Table 1**.

Table 1. Levels of education in Murgeni town

	Frequency	%
No education	561	9.7%
Primary education	1460	25.1%
Secondary education	1965	33.8%
Vocational Education	640	11%
High-school	839	14.4%
Post-secondary education	112	1.9%
Higher education	234	4%
Total	5811	100%

Source: INSSE, Romanian census (2011)

As it can be noticed, the dominant percentage comprises the population with an inferior level of education, with almost 80% people with higher-secondary studies. The census indicates among the uneducated people a compact group of 360 people considered illiterate. In the absence of an ethnic distribution we notice the general low schooling level, which accounts for the potential difficulties of a possible economic re-boost of the township. One problem remains the educational integration of all roma people regardless of age what it calls for the intervention of educational programs.

Let's recall the project "Copiii romi se întorc la școală – prevenirea abandonului școlar se face de la grădiniță" [Roma children go back to school – drop-out prevention begins in kindergarten] focused on the training of parental educators, a project implemented by the Association Catalactica, Teleorman branch in partnership with Holt Romania – FCSSCF, Iași and Echosoc Bârnova. The project was co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Sectoral Programme Development of Human Resources 2007-2013. A number of 13 specialists were formed with a view to provide parental education to 10 parents from the kindergartens they were working in. In the county of Vaslui, the Full-time Kindergarten from the village Băcești was involved.

This project mentioned above where related with the projects started in the UNICEF campaign⁴ entitled “Hai la școală” [Let's go to school] (initially the project was entitled “Viitorul copiilor începe la școală” [The children's future starts at school]) launched at the middle of 2010 in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport and the Institute of Education Sciences. Other partners were the County School Inspectorates, NGOs: Holt, CRIPS, The Centre Education 2000+, the Agency “Împreună” and the Roma Civic Alliance. The project started from the fact that over 300000 youth in Romania do not go to school on a regular basis. As far as the Roma children are concerned, it was noticed that 44% of the children aged between 7 and 11 years old did not go to school, while for the age category 12-16 years old, the figure is as high as 65%. Many other analyses were made public in that project, but one of the conclusions remains open even today: to what extent are there coherent and efficient strategies for preventing school drop-out? At this point, there is an issue which arises, namely that various specialists should contribute to these strategies: teachers, social workers, medical staff, local authorities, school mediators. The project included 38 communities (for the period 2010-2011), another 103 communities for the period 2011-2013 and an additional 100 communities were proposed for the interval 2012-2013. It was estimated that the involvement of local role-players would provide more sustainability. For the county of Vaslui, the communities included in the project were Satu Nou-Murgeni, Băcești, Radeni-Vl.Grecului, Doagele (2011-2012); Cârja-Murgeni, Fâstâci-Cozmești, Pușcași, Vetrișoiaia (2012-2013); Cârja-Murgeni, Fâstâci-Cozmești, Rădeni-Dragomirești (2013-2014). The extremely good results of the projects are indicative of the fact that those projects should continue.

In conclusion, it can be noticed that in most projects, the Roma community in the town of Murgeni has been, over the last years, the centre of attention as far as the school reinsertion and reduction of school drop-out are concerned.

The program “A doua șansă!” [Second chance!] has played a special part at community level; it was a PHARE program implemented starting with 2005 at national level. The program has allowed the people who had not completed the compulsory school levels to continue and graduate. The target population was made of people who have not completed the primary and secondary education, with no age limit for the participants. The medium

⁴ See details on the website: <http://www.unicef.ro/ce-facem/initiative/hai-la-scoala/>

length of schooling was 2 years for the first category and 4 years for the second category.

The Agency *Salvați copiii* [Save the Children] conducted in 2014 a study⁵ on this program and its results. For the year 2012-2013, according to the data of the National Statistics Institute (reporting the school population enrolled in all forms of education to the general population corresponding to the each age category), there were, at the level of 2012, approximately 176000 children with ages between 11 and 17 years old who were reinserted in the education system. Meanwhile, within the system *A doua șansă* there were, at the level of the school year 2012/2013, 2384 children (of a total 10166 people).

There were, at national level (school year 2012/2013) 254 schools conducting the program *A doua șansă* [A second chance], of which 168 ADS primary and 176 ADS lower secondary (a school is allowed to conduct both programs). From the interviews conducted we learned that the school Filadelfia from Suceava was also involved in the project “A doua șansă” to support the Roma from Murgeni.

2. Previous research; methods, participants, instruments

After the Revolution there are many sociological research carried out in Romania on the Roma ethnic group and for this reason we will just give some examples. One of the first researches, coordinated by E. Zamfir and C. Zamfir (1993) had as object of study the social conditions of interethnic conflict between Romanians and Roma people in the commune of Kogalniceanu, Constanta county. From a religious perspective, the authors draw attention that the Roma did not have their own religion and since they have joined a religious cult, the masses are kept in Romanian, not Romani language. These characteristics, concludes the authors, along with the relative poor traditions have led to a weakening of the sense of ethnic identity. Finally what distinguishes Roma is rather the way of life in many aspects significantly different from the majority. After ten years another team research returned to the locality for a new diagnosis on the former interethnic conflict but also on the current situation of the Roma (see Netedu and Dragus 2005). Another research named *Barometrul Incluziunii Romilor* [Barometer of Roma Inclusion] (2007) which she proposed to find out

⁵ See the report on the website <http://salvaticopiii.ro>

“what are the perceptions of the Roma population and to provide the Roma with the opportunity to comment on the main issues problems faced”. One of the research themes looked at intolerance towards those different as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, its score being down from the years after the Revolution. M. Voicu (2007, 61) observed that the Roma people who attend the church feel less discriminated having a sense of social integration. A description of research conducted on Roma ethnicity in Romania can be found in C. Rughinis (2012, 66-126). This writer draws attention to the difficulty of measuring Roma religiosity, starting from the mere statement of church attendance. In this case, qualitative research is useful and an exemple may be D. Kiss's research (2009) in the *Herculian* village from northwest of Covasna county. Regarding the conversion of the Roma to the Pentecostal cult, the author proposed to verify a number of four explanatory theses: the thesis of individual conversions, the thesis of cultural affinity, the thesis of Protestant ethics and the thesis of higher birthrate. The author finds that despite massive conversions he has failed to identify those 'conversion narratives' that can explain the process itself by those involved: explanations do not involved the religious issue itself. The thesis of cultural affinity is mentioned by the author as the possibility of some ethnic groups, communities to accept the Pentecostal cult more easily than other types of religiosity. With regard to Protestant ethics one can analyze to what extent religious conversion has also brought economic prosperity or reciprocal: the association of these two variables is contextual and can not be generalized. Finally, the thesis of higher birthrate remain important. After these conclusions D. Kiss added another two possible explications of the conversions: the role of 'protestant ethic discours' and the decentralized nature of the Pentecostal church organization.

Some of the sugestions of D. Kiss we discovered them in our research who took place between 15 and 21 November 2015. The team consisted of 10 field operators (who were studying sociology or social work) and a coordinator. The techniques used in the field were the following: documentary, direct observation, interviews, questionnaire survey, two focus groups with Roma poeple and another with Romanians. The interviewees were: Roma citizens, religious leaders (from the Pentecostal and Orthodox cult), the mayor of the town, employees from the local administration, leaders of various local institutions. The entire research team lived during the research in Birlad (at 40km) because of lack of hotel or tourist units in Murgeni.

3. Results

Dimensions of the religious life. General framework

Without entering the details of the Pentecostal history in Romania, in the table below we will illustrate the spreading area of this population particularly in the region of Moldova (for further information see Andreiescu 2012).

Table 2. The number of pentecostals in all the counties from Moldova region

COUNTIES	INHABITANTS	Pentecostals	% of the total population
ROMANIA	20121641	362314	1.8%
BACAU	616168	5492	0.9%
BOTOSANI	412626	11202	2.7%
BRAILA	321212	886	0.3%
BUZAU	451069	2019	0.4%
GALATI	536167	7654	1.4%
IASI	772348	4585	0.6%
NEAMT	470766	1586	0.3%
SUCEAVA	634810	47773	7.5%
VASLUI	395499	4193	1.1%

Source: INSSE, Romanian census (2011)

It can be noticed the prevalence of those from the county of Suceava, followed by those from the county of Botoşani. In the neighbouring counties, the Pentecostal cult was spread with the direct support of the churches from Bucovina. The Pentecostal cult (the people referred to as repentant) started to manifest in the area as early as the 1920s. Before 1920, the Baptists were present in the area. The conversion was mediated by the Romanians who returned from the United States, converted there and returned in the country. It should be equally mentioned the high number of Pentecostals in the county of Galaţi⁶. If we were to detail the situation in the county of Vaslui, according to the statements of a minister from the Church Filadelfia, efforts

⁶ Group called “Centrul de la Galaţi” (in Andriescu 2012, vol. I, 149).

have been made, at the level of the confession, in order to strengthen the churches in the county. Similarly, the population in the county Vaslui is mostly Orthodox. Other detailed information in N. Geantă (2018, 532-572). For the town of Murgeni, we notice the following distribution: 5125 Orthodox, 1167 Pentecostals, 15 Seventh-Day Adventists, 22 Christians Old Calendarist church, and no information is available for another 786 inhabitants. We notice that the main confessions are the Orthodox and the Pentecostal ones. Among the Pentecostal only the Roma are mentioned, while some of them have remained Orthodox.

***The history of a massive conversion:
the Pentecostal Roma community of Murgeni***

The Roma have massively adhered to the Pentecostal rite starting with 1990. This massive shift was neither estimated, nor deterred by the Orthodox Church. In fact, a priest from the town argued that as early as 1992/ 1993, the Roma started to adopt the Pentecostal religion, although they had been Orthodox before: “many had come back from prison where they entered into contact with other religious cults... they probably came with promises... *if you give up your criminal life we will grant you aid, we will support you...* they do not have to ask for the permission of the Orthodox Church in order to adhere to the Pentecostal church... we cannot stop them...”. At the same time, while there were no returns from Pentecostal rite to Orthodoxy, the same priest noticed that usually only the Orthodox are drawn to this rite and not other neoprotestants. The reconversion of the Roma did not cause additional problems at psychological or ideological level. A Roma presbyter even asked us: “were the Roma orthodox?... orthodox because they were classified as such?... but one cannot say they are Christians if they lie, steal, commit murder or rape”. In other words, in any cult, belief needs to be illustrated by facts, which seems to have been brought with the adhesion to the Pentecostal religion.

The conversion to the Pentecostal rite in the area of Murgeni is necessarily connected with the influence of the Pentecostal church of Suceava. From discussions with Mr. N. Cotleț, minister of the church Filocalia, Suceava and founder of the Pentecostal Church of Bârlad we understood that he personally went to Murgeni in 1993 where he found 5-6 Pentecostal families. Here is what the minister reported. “The Roma Ion Chiriac adhered to the Pentecostal church in Bârlad, as well as a man from Suceava, Ilie Miron, who used to work in the ball bearing factory. I got to Murgeni with

them. There we rented the community centre and we organised an open-air gathering. In the event also took part a farm chief from Vicov (county of Suceava), who confirmed that those who converted to the Pentecostal religion have radically changed". The minister from Suceava was travelling in the territory without suspecting certain dangers he was exposing himself to since the area of Murgeni was well known for high criminality and antisocial behaviour. Here is how the minister recalls the contact with the social authorities: "after the protest... the constable came to me... I got a fine and then I sued him and I won... Then the cops admitted they asked for all my data in order to protect me so towards the end I have always turned to the Police as well... practically, the Police was there to help us". Thus, the Roma conversion activity was far from easy. Mr. Cotlet explained he had bought a house where he held meetings and the number of believers increased dramatically. "We reached a number of 50 conversions each year..." the minister argued. The question was what the reasons why the Roma converted were. The minister from Suceava considers there were two reasons:

- 1) The Roma was touched by the word of the Bible.
- 2) The Roma was overwhelmed by their wants.

The minister from Suceava admits that religious work was accompanied by the help given to the Roma community. At the beginning this help was provided by Romanians, and later help was given by the US and smaller churches from Europe (through the personal contacts established by ministers). More recently, the Church has even brought trucks with cabbage, potatoes, furniture, etc. The religious life continued linearly until the emergence of divergences between the Roma families. The community Sandu (in the central area) gave rise to two other groups which remained Pentecostal but built other two places of worship. All three churches were authorised in order to avoid controversies. Despite these conflicts, the evidence of the religious involvement of the Roma is significant through its symbolism. Mr. Cotleț still considers that an unfortunate event occurring in his family (wife sick with cancer) was solved also due to the fact that the Roma gathered every day for prayer. A leader of the Roma – Orezan – prayed at the time (in the restaurant used as a prayer house) as follows: "Get Sister Lidia well... because our brother Nicu built our synagogue..." (Reference to Luke 7.4-5).

A very important aspect consists in the fact that from the initial nucleus of ministers or presbyters formed in the area of Bârlad, six of them continue to preach in the countries to which they emigrated. Testimony to the work

of these ministers was given by the Pentecostal ministers from the country, since they were invited abroad very often.

* * *

The way in which the Pentecostal Church is organised is rather similarly recalled by Minister I. Florea from Vaslui. This minister has had missions in the area since 1992. If Mr. Florea personally witnessed numerous conversions of the Roma, it is interesting that he himself converted. Mr. Florea admits that until 1987 he was a Christian Evangelic and then he became Pentecostal. This process was outrun by the parents. Unfortunately in Vaslui the official acknowledgement from the officials only came after 1990, until that date the reliance on Suceava being something normal. Mr. Florea remembers that in 1993 in Murgeni there used to be a group of 10/ 12 people (youth and unmarried for the most part) who were Protestants. One of these youth, Florea Mihai, had a son, Florea Cantemir who at the age of 13 contacted some Pentecostal followers in Galați. This young man would go to Galați every Sunday to take part in the mass, although his parents disapproved of it. “Now the boy is in France (Nancy) where he built a Pentecostal church” states the minister. At one point a boy died and then ministers from Galați and Bârlad had to come. A minister from Bârlad had an important impact on the Roma since he himself was Roma and was able to speak, in particular, to them in Romani. In fact, the Roma wanted to confirm the fact that one of them had accepted the respective religion and, at the same time, was aware of their problems. M Florea also recalls the visits accompanied by minister Cotleț from Filadelfia Church. What is uncharacteristic in such situations: the minister remains within the community, dines with the Roma, spends the night over at their place, etc. This allows strengthening the connection between the ministers and the Roma and facilitates dialogue considering the fact that the Roma had no ministers to assist in their baptism (from the age of 18) but also in other cult activities. Once the number of Pentecostal Roma increased, they were forced to regulate a series of collective behaviours we will detail as follows.

3.1. *Early marriage*

The issue of these marriages is by no means new; in fact it is an issue which has long made the subject of various social programs. Minister I. Florea has explained the Roma that the practice of early marriage had to stop once the Pentecostal religion was adopted. After a closer look at the problem, the minister noticed that the practice mostly remained the privilege of the old. They have always explained that the Roma are more precocious and start

their sexual and family life earlier. On the other hand, there still is a highly widespread tradition: the parents establish the marriages, they buy the girls (young brides) without even asking the youth involved for their consent. These traditions are closely connected with the understanding of the roles of the spouses in the family: the woman has to have children, take care of the household, cook and, outside the household she could also be required to beg. On the other hand, many Roma families abide by a long standing rule concerning meals: men eat first, then the women and finally the children.

There is also a practical tradition connected to the way in which marriages were done during the communist period. “Back in the day, says the minister, there was no marriage ceremony (civil or religious)... the marriage was only done if the boy was sought to join the army. A man could be exempt from army service if he had at least two children... in this case, the man would look for a woman with several children, they would take their IDs to the town hall to conclude the marriage, but the woman would remain in fact with her man. The other could thus prove he had children and would be exempt from his service in the army. If they weren't sought for the army, *they wouldn't get married*”.

Nevertheless, from a Pentecostal stance, couples are not accepted outside civil marriage. Those who had “fake” documents, as in the example quoted above, were asked to divorce in order to marry the people they lived with. Let us though recall the fact that a number of marriages were also encouraged by a measure taken by the Romanian Government in 2006 through Law 396 according to which couples who legalised their relation received 200 EUR. This law was repealed by Law 118/2010. During that time, many Roma legalised their lifelong relationship in order to receive the money.

Finally, we draw the conclusion that being Pentecostal means “organising your documents”! However, precocious marriages have not been completely eliminated. It is hoped that at least future generations will reach a percentage of maximum 10% early marriages. Unfortunately, at a certain point, young girls are considered to be “ripe”, mature enough to be sold/negotiated.

3.2. Pentecostal Christening

As minister I. Florea told us, baptism remains the fundamental act of acceptance of the new faith. The baptism is at the age of at least 18 years old and believers are prepared in advance for this important step. Those who decided to submit a “baptism demand”, in fact a form filled in under their own responsibility through which the new responsibilities are taken on. Why is baptism performed at the age of 18? “The Bible does not speak

about the christening of little children... it is a practice of the Orthodox Church... it is however important that the man be old enough to decide for himself.” Each of those who want to be baptised is put under observation. Ministers go within communities and ask the people whether the person has changed to the good. Those who are baptised have to stop begging, playing dice, or buying and selling animals, adultery, drinking or smoking.... If any of these passions is resumed after baptism, then a series of ecclesiastical sanctions are applied, ranging from verbal reprimand to exclusion.

3.3. Development of the local church

Confirming the results of D. Kiss (2009) cited below religious life is divided between three local Pentecostal churches, even if from a doctrinal point of view there are no differences. There is also a view according to which the Roma would like to have three churches just like the Orthodox have. However, these divisions are rather given by the fact that the Roma are divided into several clans or families (Biciulesti, Pantichesti, Muruiești, Sândulești) although all the members are relatives. Their places of worship are also differentiated.

The first of them is located at the main road; it is also called Church “Filadelfia” and it is attended by Muriu Brigadier, a presbyter and local counsellor. The building has been recently finished, but the top floor is still in construction. Images of the collective building of this place of worship can be accessed at the following address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EERt1dr3Lfw>. The room where the mass is held is commodious and it can receive as much as 100-200 believers, to which is added a series of annexes. This is also the location of the day-centre Star of Hope. The daily activity is hindered by an agricultural exploitation situated in the vicinity of the church.

The second place of worship is located at the centre of the urban area in the building of the old motor depot. The prayer house has all the necessary amenities, lacking only a heating source, which makes it difficult to continue using it during the winter. The tiles on the walls point to the previous use of the building.

A third place of worship – and also the most impressive – was built at a 500 metres distance from the main road. The church is also called “the Gate of Heaven”. The building moves through its size but it is not completely functional. In exchange, believers gather in a prayer house in the neighbourhood (see image above). It is still a challenge to find out how the Roma managed to build a new place of worship. The person in charge, a Roma

named Orezan explains: “When we started the building, the only man (for whom I constantly pray), brother Viorel from Suceava gave me 40 million lei; then I asked from others, orthodox or not... «if you give money for the Lord, not for the people»... now I need another 14000USD for the floor-board”. How did everything begin? It seems that it all started from an ex-policeman who went to Bârlad and became a billionaire. Mr. Orezan asked the businessman who first helped with 3 trucks of large stone, iron, 100 bags of cement, tiles, etc. The fence was also over a billion lei, and for the doors there was another sponsor. Orezan admits that all these efforts had been impossible without prayers. “Now the church is standing... I might be able to finish it...so that people could come for salvation” he concluded.

For the survival of these places of worship the donation rule from the believers is the tithe⁷ but the rules could differ. All the places of worship have a series of specific heating expenditures: heating, electricity, etc. Moreover, a certain amount could be for the main branch in Suceava. The salaries of the ministers are also paid from donations outside the country. In the 90s, the ministers received around 50 USD through the Church Filadelfia from Suceava. Beyond these aspects, the parishioners have low financial resources. This is precisely why for certain services there is no tax. However, if a minister comes from another locality, he receives money for transportation, and meals and housing are also provided if necessary. Things are identical in the case in which a minister is called in the West by the Roma communities in the UK, France, Germany, etc.

Each Pentecostal church in Murgeni has a leader, but at community level there is a single presbyter who can officiate funerals, blessings and baptism of children and this is precisely why every now and then it is necessary to invite the ministers from Vaslui, Birlad or Suceava.

In time, the issue of a Pentecostal cemetery will also be raised! The orthodox priest confessed the fact that he suggested them “to build a cemetery of their own... they have their rules” suggesting that there are enough differences between the two religions as regards *the dead*. The Roma declared they did not have the money for such an investment.

3.4. Social and behavioural change

All the people interviewed from Murgeni admitted that the Roma have changed significantly over the last years. An important role is assigned to

⁷ In Orthodox communities, the contribution is 50 lei/year!

religion, the adherence to the Pentecostal cult. “The church has brought in radical changes”, argues minister I. Florea. Adding that: “Before, each holiday was followed by murder... I met Roma who remained orphans of both parents, because their parents had been killed in various clashes on the occasion of various celebrations... For instance, their greatest celebration on the 6th of August, the Transfiguration, was always accompanied by murder... the clans would fight”. Once the crime rate dropped significantly, the Murgeni section of the Court Bârlad – which was initially designed to judge cases involving Roma – was disestablished. Additionally, a series of places were closed or went bankrupt. Back in the day their parties were famous, now they are history. An important place was also played by their geographic display, which in the past led to conflicts. Nowadays, many Roma build houses among those of the Romanian, which means their density decreased.

Their social and behavioural change is also seen as a form of social control, as one young minister noticed. “Returning to faith... the fact that the community puts a pressure on them... creates a certain discipline, persuasion, constraint... there are a lot of eyes on you... beyond the eyes of God”! Besides this social control remains the mere believer who chose to adhere to this cult. Here is what Orezan declared in a true profession of faith: “This is what I judged: there are two ways, one heading towards heaven and one towards hell... it is up to you to choose: good or evil... it depends on you and your mind, how you choose, what you work, what you do... rich or poor, you will die and meet Jesus... and He says: I am the door, the truth and life... no one can reach the Father without facing Me... what have you done for Me? Did you drink? Did you lie? Did you swear? Were you tempted by girls... Jesus does not like this sort of behaviour... Well, I stopped”.

Equally dramatic is also the testimony of a Roma during one focus group. Here is what he declared: “I used to drink a lot... I used to go to Turkey and work for 2 or 3 months...I would make around 2000 pounds... I would stop in Galați and spend all of it...I didn't even take a piece of bread to my kids... I would go home, beat my wife and my kids... Now I am a completely different man... my behaviour is exactly as the one the Bible talks about”.

In his turn, the mayor of the township considered that “this conversion of theirs was very beneficial... first of all it made them give up alcohol”. Unfortunately, as one Roma declared: “the Romanians still have a negative image of the Roma, although they have changed a lot”!

* * *

The constancy of the Pentecostal religion resides in *mutual help and charity*. “For instance, several Pentecostal Roma built a house for a poor man although he was not a Pentecostal... we have just finished another house (for Pușcașu)... a family with five children... it was a mess... a few of us came from Germany, took some photos, discussed with them and then they built it very fast... they finished it in one month time... several voluntaries worked... and the people have already moved in...” – minister I. Florea said. Charity is also the help that Roma from the West give to the Roma here. There were for instance cases in which one Roma was given a cow on condition he would breed it and not cut it for meat. In other places cows can also be given with the obligation of giving the calf to another family.

From other interviews we inferred there were cases when a Roma had problems and received help from the others. An extreme case refers to the Roma who die abroad. In such cases, money is raised for repatriation and the funeral.

3.5. Religion and clan justice

The Roma have always had a parallel justice. The “Stabor” (a court formed of Roma judges) decides in all important internal causes, most of the time avoiding the law bodies of the Romanian state. Such a “trial” was detailed by the minister I. Florea. Everything started from the conflict between two drivers who transported Roma abroad. The people in litigation gathered in the centre, moment when someone threw a rock and took out the eye of a 13 year old boy. Although a civil trial has started, in the end they resorted to a Roma trial: the first owner of the bus offered 500 million RON, but then the amount went up to as much as 1.5 billion.... It was considered to be counter-productive to put the guilty behind bars and the money was helpful for building a house.

The most sensitive situations concern the incest cases where penalties are set *ad hoc*. If a Roma has sexual relations with a woman outside marriage, he has to pay a fine established by the *stabor*; otherwise, he could even risk his own life. In such situations the Church also intervenes: the guilty are excluded. After the exclusion, the trial of the *Stabor* continues. Such a case occurred in a township close to Băcești. Thus, approximately in the same period, a young man – unmarried – fled with a married woman, and a married man also fled with an unmarried woman. To begin with, all four

were excluded from the church. In order to exemplify the type of justice of the Stabor, it should be mentioned that the unmarried man paid damages to the outraged husband, while in the other case, the man was forced to marry the girl! The married man also paid money for his deed! Such judgements are final and no appeal is admitted.

3.6. Field observation: religion in act

Participation in a mass of the Pentecostal community of Murgeni is a unique experience. What impresses is the atmosphere which is particularly warm, characteristic to a community. Modest people, wearing clean clothes, get worked up and change completely. Prayers said out loud seem to be an explosion of energy. The outer observer does not distinguish too much from the collective choir of prayers, but their force seems to unchain the energies accumulated throughout the week with all the difficulties involved. The mass in itself is deeply collective, even if there are independent speakers. At regular intervals, the whole church sings, with surprising strength: the Roma have a perfect musical sense and they interpret passionately after having connected the negatives of the songs from their mobile phones to the amplifier. Their eyes, closed most of the time, reveal this immersion in faith, as if wanting to remove any thought that was far from the sacred atmosphere. The mass we took part in in November 2015 took place as follows:

Plan of the mass

1. opening (local leader) [1-2 minutes]
2. collective (loud voice) prayer [2-3 minutes]
3. continuation of the opening [2-4 minutes; the guests are presented – ministers or singers]
4. religious songs [7-8 minutes]
5. sermon of the invited minister on the prayers, starting from Psalm 32 [8 minutes]
6. collective (loud voice) prayer [5 minutes]
7. lecture of the local leader [2 minutes]
8. religious songs [13 minutes]
9. speech of a believer [7 minutes]
10. collective (loud voice) prayer [2-3 minutes]
11. speech of a believer (man) [2 minutes]
12. speech of a believer (woman) [2 minutes]
13. lecture of the local leader [2 minutes]

14. religious songs [17 minutes] among which an impressive interpretation from “sister Lenuța”
15. fundraise during the singing (mainly for paying the transportation costs for the guests)
16. word of minister I. Florea [50 minutes]
17. speech of the invited minister [5 minutes]
18. communion: breaking the bread + glass of wine
19. religious songs [10 minutes]
20. local leader: closing word + prayers

In the end, believers were invited for the meeting at 17 o'clock in the afternoon at the “Church on the hill”. Approximate total time: 2h 22'

* * *

We asked a few believers about the origin of the songs they interpreted. They said the sources are various, there is no unique model. Analysing the lyrics of these songs, we noticed their simplicity, their melodiousness and the mixture *sui generis* between the biblical sources and the destiny of this ethnic group considered to be a tragic one. Here is what one Roma declared to divinity through the song, recalling the perpetual circulatory migration:

I admit that I have traveled the world
Now I'm alone and not have anyone
No longer friends to say my sorrows
My cup is full of trouble.

Poverty mentioned in religious songs sends back to the living conditions of many Roma from Romania:

Please Lord look today to the poor
There are so many cases and sick people
May God descends into Jericho
Raise your wounded what you are fallen.

* * *

We asked the Orthodox priest from Murgeni what would be the main differences between Pentecostal and Orthodox religion. In a free intervention he enumerated a few differences: through the name pentecostal itself they expect the advent of Jesus Christ; they argue that 50 days later the Holy Spirit descended upon them; they are also referred to as the trembling, they have manifestations by means of which they receive the Holy Spirit directly and they become ecstatic; they do not have priests as performers of a service, but

ministers; they do not have the holy sacraments, they do not honour the holy icons or worship the saints; they do not worship the day of the cross, etc. Finally, the priest identified some Pentecostal Roma who continued to have certain activities to the limit of the lae, although they claim to have changed.

3.7. Survey regarding religious issues in town of Murgeni

Between 18 and 20 November 2015 we conducted a survey in the town of Murgeni on a sample of 300 subjects. The subjects were randomly selected on the main streets of the town, based on the established quota. Initially 310 questionnaires were collected; nevertheless, 10 questionnaires were eliminated. The sample is not representative and it only follows certain tendencies of the inhabitants' opinion. The structure of the sample was the following:

Table 3. The structure of the sample

Characteristic	Dimensions	Percents
Gender	Male	52.5%
	Female	47.5%
Ethnic group	Romanian	58%
	Roma	42%
Religion	Orthodox	64%
	Pentecostal	35.5%
	Other	0.5%
Education	No education, max. 4 grades	22.5%
	Secondary school	29.3%
	10 grades	13.2%
	High-school	20.9%
	School of foremen	2.7%
	Post-secondary education	4%
	Higher education	7.3%

This research focused on identifying the opinions of the respondents regarding satisfaction concerning life in the town of Murgeni, the local administration, the assessment of the relations between the Romanians and the Roma, the perception of the Romanians concerning conversion of the Roma to the Pentecostal religion, the perception on the safety of urban life. We will present a few significant results about religious issues. For example we can read responses shown in **Figure 2**.

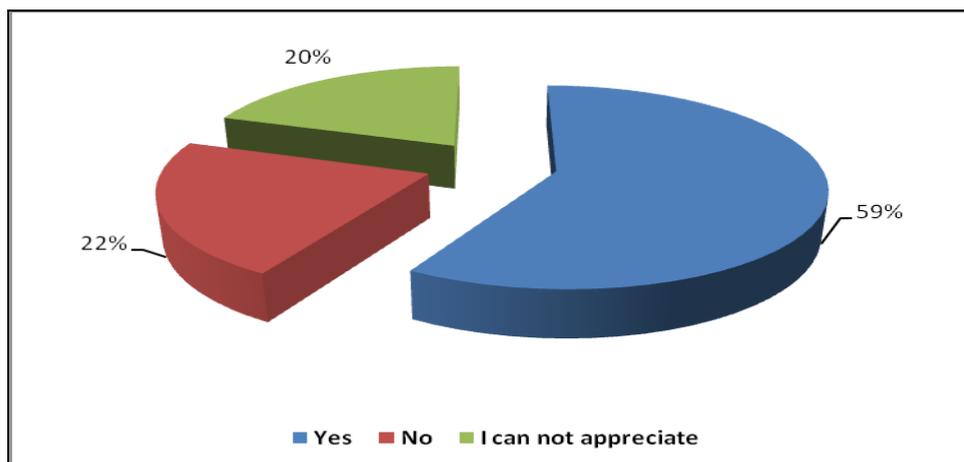


Fig. 2. After 1992, many Roma converted to the Pentecostal religion. In your opinion, has it been a positive change?

It can be noticed from the graph that 59% of the respondents consider the Roma conversion to be beneficial. Why is that? Irrespective of their answer, I asked them to mention what they were thinking about when they answered. Let us choose a few answers we consider to be the most suggestive.

Conversion to the Pentecostal religion:

- brought a positive change within the community
- brought moral good within the community
- lowered the crime rate
- brought faith within the Roma
- brought respect towards something
- eliminated aggressiveness
- the Roma no longer smoke, do drugs or drink
- they no longer fight, behave boisterously since they converted
- the Pentecostal have common sense

There are however contrary opinions, in obvious minority. After the conversion, argue some of the respondents, the Roma...

- remained the same
- have the same habits and show no behavioural changes
- sold children (in Germany and everywhere)!
- drink more than before
- everything is just a façade
- they are still stealing, nothing has changed

Another share of the respondents considers that the religion one was born in should not be changed. Impressive remains though the statement of one respondent (male, 19 years old): “the Roma are more faithful than the Romanians”. The reasons why the Roma converted to the Pentecostal religion are the following:

Table 4. Motives of religious conversion

	Romanian	Roma
For help	67.2%	16.8%
To change, to repent	5.7%	23.0%
Discovered the true way	5.2%	35.4%
It is just a façade	2.3%	0.0%
For a better life	1.1%	3.5%
Freedom of choice	0.6%	3.5%
A gift from God	0.0%	4.4%
They were influenced	0.6%	2.7%
Other	2.0%	0.9%
Ns/Nr	16.1%	9.7%

The Romanians consider that the Roma converted to the Pentecostal religion first in order to receive aid. This fact is not automatically considered to be negative, since numerous testimonies speak about the absolute poverty the Roma have always lived in. Some of the people interviewed admit that in Ceausescu’s time the Roma would even look for food through the trash thrown away from the farm, and some of them would even sleep wrapped in cellophane under their own carriage. Such shocking testimonies could continue. The Roma respondents insist upon the religious dimension and the conversion, admitting at the same time that the need for change through repentance had an essential role.

Without a thorough theological training, the respondents were however asked to describe the differences between the Pentecostal and the Orthodox. In **Figure 3** are the answers for the whole sample.

As it can be noticed, the great majority (47%) does not have a well-formed point of view! Equally, there is a series of naive appreciations; what however matters is the climate for accepting the difference, the fact that a religious belief is perceived as bringing immediate benefits and highlighting the religious influence on daily behaviour!

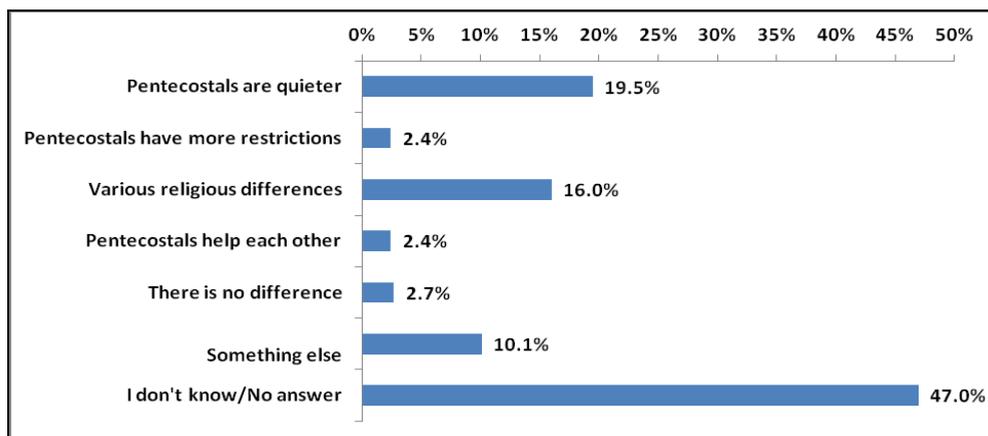


Fig. 3. Perceived differences between pentecostals and orthodox

4. Conclusions and discussions

The present study did not focus exclusively on the analysis of religious conversion, but rather on its influence on a societal general level. In Romania, such a study focused on conversion of Roma was already published (see Fosztó 2009, 167-208) a comprehensive study from the theoretical and methodological perspective. Following the suggestions of such a study and corroborating it with the situation in place, we can draw some useful conclusions in the case of the Roma from Murgeni. Therefore, the conversion of the Roma from this town constituted an important mutation in the attempt of each individual to redefine “their moral personality” (the Roma interviewed declared they accepted to eliminate from their life the vices and excesses from their past), to rethink their own image (all the Roma met have a better opinion about themselves after the conversion), identify the needs of the collectivity with other eyes (we discovered a whole series of charitable actions addressed to other Roma, or exchanged between Roma and the Romanians, which did not exist before). Moreover, noticing the religious life of the Roma from Murgeni, connections can be established between the cultic rituals and social life in general: the Roma greet each other in religious terms; it can be easily noticed that group solidarity also has a religious dimension; for many Roma, the relationship with the Romanians has become more respectful, more empathic, etc. As far as the consequences of the conversion are concerned, we preferred to introduce in the paper various fragments of interviews instead of explaining in broad lines the religious experiences (which would have required new methodological and practical

approaches). In this case we have not identified a unique model for conversion: there are cases of volitional conversion (through conscious and voluntary involvement of the subject) as there are cases of self surrender conversion (unconscious, involuntary); there are also cases of active conversion (subject voluntarily attached to a religious group) as well as cases of passive conversion (as a result of external pressures) (for all this categories see Curelaru 2018, 615-616). If we talk about 'conversion narratives' from our interviews we conclude that these should be analyzed contextually: in a way the younger who left the town to religious services in other cities was converted and in some other way the converts of the common law detainees from the prisons took place. Certainly the explanation of conversion process is difficult for most believers, which is why I have emphasized the opinion of religious leaders. On the 'protestant ethic discours' he is present in most of the interviews and in the Focus groups: the transition to the Protestant cult also brought a disciplinary approach to work but this is related to those who are already in a process of international circulatory migration. For the locals, their own well-being is a constant expectation of the help of the local administration or of those already left in the West. Other conclusions about the religious externalization can be drawn directly from the religious ceremonies which take place independently from the Pentecostal church in the town. Here is what a presbyter declared during such a ceremony: "We will now pray for all the people, for those from Murgeni, for all from the county of Vaslui...At all levels, people should go back to salvation, and those who *are* already there should remain on the Right Path!". It is an example of generalized religious vision of life.

Some other conclusions are outlined below:

- The town of Murgeni has slow economic development, and there is no coherent plan for an urban and socio-economic regeneration. To that point, Murgeni remains a town with rural characteristics and an uncertain future. The local authorities have great hope in the European funds to be attracted and we will see to what extent they could generate jobs or economic recovery in general. The support of small investors could also constitute a solution by attracting a small number of employees.
- The Roma population is predictably dependent on the social aid and random income sources as far as the work opportunities in Western countries. The jobs for the Roma may be connected to some crafts (for instance, wicker) or small initiatives that may only take place with qualified support. The Roma constitute a target population for training/retraining courses which can only be efficient if the projects are sustainable.

An idea put forward by the interlocutors referred to setting up a bricks factory (as it was!).

- There are no social workers specialised on the Roma community. A Roma expert was once engaged in a European project, but then remained an employee of the town hall and gave up. Such workers are still sought; they should be Roma, have graduated from at least 12 grades and... accept salary from the state! With the new European funds in the period 2014-2020 is expected to set up working groups for the Roma in communities with less than 20,000 inhabitants following several directions: education, health etc. Until then, we need to point out the fact that in Murgeni there is no non-profit organization to deal directly with specific problems of the Roma. A town hall clerk revealed the intention of setting up such a body in the town.
- The suggestions from our research helped for foundation in Murgeni of the *Integrated Services Center for children in difficulty "Star of Hope"* officially opened on May 2016. This center was founded by the *Star Of Hope Romania Foundation*, in partnership with *Murgeni Town Hall (Vaslui)* and *Philadelphia Murgeni Church*, within the project "Intervention in Families in Difficulty" with the support of *Star Of Hope International Sweden*, *Star Of Hope Norway* and *Star Of Hope USA*. Purpose of activities of this center: preventing school failure / dropout, preventing family abandonment, strengthening the parental role. Direct beneficiaries was from the beginning 35 children at risk of school / family abandonment and 27 young Roma. The Center has set up an *Youth Club* which encourages activities for the development of independent life skills, parental education, increasing involvement in the life of the community for young people in risk situations, including Roma. "Pushed by poverty, many families decide to look for jobs abroad, especially in Nordic countries. This means children are left home alone. They are the ones who present increased risk. The activities conducted under the «Centre of Integrated Services for Children in Need» are aimed at preventing family abandonment, school failure/ drop-out. The social, educational and recreational activities are also accessible by the children at social risk, especially the Roma children, supporting thus their social integration. Their parents will benefit from counselling services, parental education, group support"⁸ explained at the time Aurora Vatamaniuc, President of the Foundation

⁸ See the article "Suedezii și norvegienii vor să salveze copiii romilor din Murgeni de la analfabetism și sărăcie" ["Swedish and Norwegian want to save Roma children from Murgeni from illiteracy and poverty"] published in the periodical *Adevărul*, 10.05.2016.

Star of Hope Romania. The fact that the students from disadvantaged families may continue in another form activities conducted in school is an example of social enterprise through which children will no longer remain in the street unattended. Occupying the free time of the youth remains a major concern which requires the reassessment of all possibilities: sports courts, tennis tables, access to the sports facilities, amusement parks, various cultural activities, etc.

- The massive conversion of the Roma to the Pentecostal religion constituted a beneficial phenomenon for the entire community, due to the effects appeared: dramatic decrease in crime levels, preservation of public peace and order in controllable parameters, significant increase the role of the Pentecostal Church in the social life of the Roma, etc. The conversion was accompanied by material aid but it never covered all the needs of the respective minority. Access to the various aids received was preponderant especially in the 90s but it has gradually dropped. It is possible that the pressure of social control mediated by the church could have acted for the “maturity” of a significant number of Roma; this means increased responsibility for the family members, economic prosperity, normal relations with the Romanians, etc. These preoccupations took place in parallel with the opening of the borders for Romania in 2007, which allowed the Roma to travel in Europe. In other words, although the influence of religion in the lives of Roma has been very significant, a certain relaxation of the relationships in the community can be also accounted for by the massive migration to the West (I was told, moreover, that in Murgeni remained only the people who lacked the means necessary for migration). On the other hand, the fact that the Roma from abroad have formed church structures is commendable and it already shows an assumed attachment. We can also infer that a thorough religious training and sincere faith can keep the Roma far from criminal behaviour. The way in which they manage to pull through in the West is however appreciated because it reveals a certain *social intelligence* with the entire impression of *marginality* they live in⁹.

To conclude, we could argue that the religious factor plays an important part in the integration of the Roma in Murgeni or in the emigration countries, but

⁹ There are numerous articles in the French press on the evolution of the Roma in Nancy, France! For instance, the article “Nancy (54): difficile cohabitation entre les habitants et les Roms”, in. <http://www.fdesouche.com>, 14.06.2016; we could not find articles specifically concerning the situation of the Roma in Murgeni!

we cannot infer this is the only factor: facilities provided by Western countries, a policy respecting minorities of any kind, certain relaxation of police control, etc. These are all the more reasons to explain the integration of the Roma within the western social structures. It is however equally possible that we are witnessing a remigration phenomenon of the Roma to Murgeni, although on a smaller scale in the context of the new challenges related to migration wave at European level. Nevertheless, we consider that their motivation to come back definitively is reduced.

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