



CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDY SOFIA

CAS WORKING PAPER SERIES

Issue 2

Sofia 2009

This publication presents part of the research outcome of a project carried out at the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia under the title

ROLES, IDENTITIES AND HYBRIDS

Multiple Institutional Cultures in Southeast Europe within the Context of European Unification

*Available in electronic form at
www.cas.bg*



CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDY SOFIA

CAS Working Paper Series No. 2/2009

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Preferred Citation: Şerban, Stelu, *Institutional Trust within the Local Society from South Eastern Europe. A Transformation Perspective*. CAS Working Paper Series No. 2/2009: Sofia 2009. *Roles, Identities and Hybrids*, a project of CAS supported by the Volkswagen Foundation, Germany.

STELU ȘERBAN

**INSTITUTIONAL TRUST
WITHIN THE LOCAL SOCIETY
FROM SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE.
A TRANSFORMATION PERSPECTIVE¹**

The aim of this paper is to identify the incentives of the institutional trust on the regional levels of two neighboring areas along the Danube. The approach is a comparative one; two border zones from northern Bulgaria and southern Romania, having a certain similarity as regards historical past and social organization, are juxtaposed. The research took place both at the level of these circumscribed geographical areas and in particular localities. The hypothesis was that the networks of social trust have a strong influence upon the civic and political commitments. By the term ‘commitment’ I mean the social reliability for roles and position takings in the frame of the local institutions (mayoralty, political parties, civic and cultural associations).

It is some scholars’ contention that in the former socialist countries the ramifications of the clans, cliques and local clientelism hinder civic and political participation (Wedel 1998; Benovska-Sabkova 2001). Moreover, these deep-rooted networks “capture the state” (Wedel 2001; Sampson 1995). The fact that (semi)-traditional ties (kinship, neighborhood, patronage) work against the civic and horizontal association was a topic studied in the West European countries, too (for Italy s. Banskfield 1958 and Putnam 2001). Still confronted with this state of affairs, people in the post-socialist countries often chose the minimal cost strategies, i.e. to adapt, to avoid or to simply ignore

1 I owe thanks to several individuals who have helped me during my research. First I would like to thank the CAS administrative staff, who promptly answered me whenever I asked for their help. In Sofia, too, my colleague and friend Bojidar Alexiev, who wasted his time in helping me find the statistical data. He also provided me with a first-hand bibliography about the regions of Belene and Nikopol. In Teleorman, during the fieldwork, on behalf of the local authorities, I received support from Daniela Popescu (Alexandria), Angela Velicu (Turnu Măgurele) and Liviu Călin (Seaca). Last but not least, I express my warm thanks to Ilia and Mitko, who during the fieldwork in Bulgaria shared with me many of the pleasant as well as unpleasant circumstances.

it (Mihăilescu 1996, Benovska-Sabkova 1997, Sandu 1999a, Chevalier 2001, Chelcea 2002). It has to be noted that, according to quite a few scholars, these strategies were shaped in the communist decades and partly stem from that period (Hann 2001, Roth 2000).

The fieldwork areas

The research unfolded on both shores of the Danube, in two areas located approximately along the middle stretch of the border between Bulgaria and Romania. Whilst in Romania 10 villages and one town (Turnu Măgurele) were researched, in Bulgaria the study area covers 6 villages and 2 towns (Belene and Nikopol). In choosing these areas I have taken into account several criteria: i) their geographical proximity; ii) their relative level of social development²; iii) multiculturalism/cultural diversity³.

Beyond these commonalities, there are differences that should be remembered. First, there is the considerable difference in regard to the residence of the population. So whilst in Teleorman the rural population is far more numerous than the urban one (in 2002, the rural population constituted 68%), in Pleven, on the contrary, urban dwellers are more numerous (68%, of the population). Furthermore, although the density of the population is almost the same (75.5 pers./km² in Teleorman and 72 pers./km² in Pleven)⁴ there are differences in the size of the localities. The villages from Pleven have an average size of 974 inhabitants per village, while those from Teleorman are bigger, i.e. 1271 inhabitants per village⁵. There is a similar difference in the size of the towns. Except for Pleven, all the other Bulgarian towns are small (from 2390 in Pordim to 16036 in Cerven Briag), yet more in number (13, Pleven included)⁶. A dense network of roads links all of these Bulgarian lo-

2 The main point here was the *relative* poverty, through which, according to some views (Portrait 2000 and Sandu 1999b), these zones could be described.

3 In the Romanian area, besides the majoritarian group, which is of Romanian ethnic origin and Orthodox belief, there are also small groups of Romani/Gypsy population as well as Neo-protestant believers. In the Bulgarian area, besides the Bulgarian Orthodox believers, there are Turkish and Gypsy ethnic groups as well as Roman-Catholics. Unlike these groups, whose presence is recorded in the censuses from the post-1990 years, the populations of Bulgarian-speaking individuals in Teleorman, as well as Romanian-speaking people in Pleven are counted on the side of Romanians, respectively Bulgarians.

4 However, in Pleven there are huge discrepancies between the municipalities in this respect (2002 Census). Thus in the three municipalities bordering the Danube – Belene, Nikopol and Guliantsi – the population density is respectively 44, 33 and 37 pers./km², whereas in Cerven Briag and Levski the figures are 73 and 63 (in the Pleven municipality the density is 184 pers./km², yet without the population of the city of Pleven the density drops to 34 pers./km²). A comparison with the density of the communes bordering the Romanian Danube shore is indicative (s. Table 1).

5 There are also differences in this regard. Thus, the medium sizes of the villages are in the Belene municipality, 519, in Nikopol 831 and in Guliantsi 1175. (see, for comparison Table 1).

6 In Teleorman County the towns' population is: 50 496 in Alexandria, the county capital, 31 849 in Rosiori de Vede; 30 089 in Turnu-Magurele; 11 512 in Videle; 15 672 in Zimnicea.

calities to each other. In the Romanian area the localities are more isolated⁷.

Table1. *Population density in the communes and the size of the villages of these communes in the Romanian area*

Commune	Sea ca	Izvoa rele	Fur cu lești	Crân gu	Tra ian	Is laz	Se gar cea- vale	Lun ca
Indices								
Density of population (pers/km ²)	29.43	73.12	52	67.6	40.8	64.6	53.06	99.5
Size of the villages (pers./village)	1447	3004	996	734	2216	3101	1287	1664

Source: 1. *Direcția Județeană de Statistică Teleorman.*

Rezultatele recensământului din 2002

(The Department of Statistics, Teleorman County. The 2002 year census results)

There are few differences in terms of rural development (roads, running water, public lighting, phone facilities and TV cable systems), but the most important aspect is the structure of local administration. Unlike Bulgaria, in Romania there is a neat administrative separation between the urban and the rural centers. So whilst in Bulgaria the main administrative centers are municipalities (*obshtini*) to which the local centers, mayoralties/*kmetstva*, belong, in Romania all the municipalities are urban localities. To the latter we have to add simple towns. In turn, rural administrative centers are called communes/*comune* and these have a mayoralty. To them belong the few villages located in their vicinity.

Whilst in the case of Bulgaria the special administrative organization shifts the differentiation between village and town, in the case of Romania this difference has to be seen in the perspective of the rural – urban cleavage. It has been argued that in the long run national modernization in South Eastern Europe has led to the retrieving of rural cultural patterns instead of following the course of clear-cut urbanization. Some scholars have even coined the term (r)urbanization, in an attempt to explicate this tendency (Roth 1997:16). In a historical perspective, the urbanization and industrialization policies conducted by the communist regimes have enhanced even more the shift of urban-rural differentiation (Hirschhausen 1998 : 258). However, whilst in Bulgaria the communist modernization aimed to transform the rural commu-

⁷ In Pleven there is an average of 0.355km of road/km², whilst in Teleorman the same average is only 0.26.

nities by developing the infrastructure and the economy (Benovska-Sabkova 1997:114ff)⁸, in Romania the authorities encouraged either migration to the cities, or, in the early 1980s, the commute from the rural areas (Bădescu and Radu 1980:91-98).

After the breakdown of the communist regimes, the attempts to resettle the national economic system have led in Romania to the falling down of commuting. The former 'worker-peasants' remained in their native rural areas trying to adapt to a genuine social environment. Yet their former urban and industrial socialization drove them to choose other survival strategies than those shared by the non-commuting population. There has been shown, for instance, that even on the scale of one county the variations in commuting patterns gave birth to a strong differentiation of local economic strategies. Hence the town-countryside relations have undergone a subtle process of change, in which the administrative setting matters far less than the cultural patterns (Hirschhausen 1998 : 265-269).

Although initially I had the intention of conducting interviews only in one village in each part of the compared regions (Seaca in Romania and Lozitsa in Bulgaria), I have decided to extend the interviews to the settlements in which ethnicity matters. Thus I also conducted interviews, informal discussions and direct observation in the village of Izvoarele⁹, in Romania, as well as in the small town of Belene, in Bulgaria.

In both regions I have applied the associative map questionnaires, too. The localities from Romania where I did this were villages located around Turnu Măgurele, Seaca, Năvodari, Furculești, Spătărei, Crângu, Islaz, Traian, Segarcea-Vale, Izvoarele, and Lunca. In Northern Bulgaria I applied the questionnaires in the villages of Lozitsa, Biala-Voda, Dekov, Dragash-Voivoda, Cerkovitsa, Vubel and in the towns of Belene and Nikopol.

The study has to highlight the multicultural situation that characterizes more conspicuously the Bulgarian zone, mostly the small towns like Belene, Nikopol and Guliantsi. For this reason, it was fuzzy to take the interviews, for instance, in Belene. In this respect, the telling examples are the headmaster of the local secondary school (*sredno uchilishte*) and his deputy/*zamestnik*¹⁰.

8 Benovska-Sabkova have analyzed the wishful thinking of the policy of urbanization in Bulgaria (Ibidem 114 n.3) as well as its doubtful effect on the change of the urban-rural equilibrium.

9 Most of the people from Izvoarele speak Bulgarian. I have also conducted in-depth interviews with a few clerks from the towns of Alexandria, county capital, and Turnu Măgurele. The objective of these interviews was to obtain feed-back information about the resources of political and civic local participation, and about local joint projects with the Bulgarian side.

10 Although claiming a Vlach origin, the director does not speak Romanian (I took the interview in Bulgarian). He is, one of the most influential persons in town; besides the position of the headmaster, he has a seat in the municipal council and also belongs to the leadership of the local organization of the Socialist Party (BSP). Although in the interview all of these roles appeared, it was hard for me to link each of his statements to a specific role. The same thing happened during the interview with the deputy/*zamestnik* – a woman who, besides this position, also holds a place in the local branch of the Association of the Vlachs in Bulgaria.

The accommodation of the theoretical framework

As I said above, the hypothesis of my research is that in both areas there is a certain degree of trust, manifesting itself especially in the commitment toward local institutions. The transformation paradigm provides the frame for testing this hypothesis. By using this paradigm I am trying to avoid the obstacles induced by the so-called ‘transition’ perspectives. So whilst in the latter case the supposition of a full description of the initial and final stages of a certain social change sequence makes the analysis rather normative (Stark and Bruszt 2002 : 108-110, 135 n.4; Sandu 1999b:10,25; Verdery 1999), the transformation shifts the accent to the change as such, to the ways of adapting and innovating under the pressure of circumstances, including even the spatial ones (Heller 1998: 18).

In addition to that, the transformation perspective provides a wider scope for the ‘path-dependency’ approach and makes possible the analysis of the micro-social change. It has to be noted that laying emphasis on the path-dependency processes sets the approach apart from the theoretical views in which *past*-dependency prevails. In this sense, I do not consider the changes in post-communist systems likely to be closely dependent on a previous historical situation (Meurs and Begg 1998). On the contrary, following some redundant arguments I am trying to see the transformation as “an analysis done in parallel with the exploration of the manner in which the strategic choices, often extremely cautious, continually shape the direction of the public policies” (Stark and Bruszt 2002: 12).

In this sense, the institutions have a core role and the path-dependency analysis brings it once again to the fore: “the institutions make more than to force; they provide possibilities. Only by a political and economical building the institutions as well as the practices appear. Our task is to shed light on the routine activity, which, being based on the organizational reflexivity and social pragmatism, provides the means by which the actors recombine the resources”(Ibidem)¹¹. By considering both these dimensions, the approach aims to offer support for the transformation governance, i.e. for its adjustment and regulating (Smith and Swain 1998:45).

So I would like to list some of the reasons why the transformation paradigm seems more appropriate to me for the topics of the paper. First of all, I rely on some fieldworks observations. Although that might appear impressionistic, I consider it worth noting. More specifically, I am referring to the sequences in which people talk spontaneously about their most recent and personal life

11 Stark and Bruszt argue that the institution concept they use stems directly from Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of “practice routine” (Stark and Bruszt 2002: 136 n.8). In this sense, the social practice as well as its consequences and accumulation become a central issue.

experience. In Bulgaria, the examples that seem relevant are the rich stories about the diseases that were almost unknown before 1990. These include high blood pressure/*kravno* and brain stroke/*udar*. Apparently, that way of perceiving the post-1990 changes reveals a definite and deep position. I found similar attitudes in Romania, where people have developing a rich discourse about 'poverty' (they say 'we are poor devils/*amărăți*'), and see this as the most conspicuous effect of the post-1990 change.

Needless to say that neither *kravno* and *udar*, nor *amărăți* could be directly linked to the actual social situation. In fact, these accounts are nothing more than a sort of 'ethnography of transition'. In this perspective, David Kideckel recently studied the effects of increasing the stress and the drop in life expectancy in the uncertain circumstances of post-communist transformation in two regions from central Romania (Kideckel 2000)¹². His conclusion is that "the stress of post-socialism and related declines in general well-being is one sad commonality of both regions. Increasingly, citizens from both regions suffer from early, untimely death whose specter haunts these post-socialist communities. The discourse of death was everywhere in Făgăraș and Valea Jiului (the researched regions – m.n.) and cries out for ethnographic understanding" (Ibidem : 18). In this context, what happens in the villages of my research is not at all a 'transitional time'; yet it imprints in the local society more lasting memories, attitudes, values and commitments. This is the reason why citizens focus on the local history with its former closed natural economy and society (Benovska-Sabkova 1997)¹³.

Another process that underpins an important turbulence of the post-communist era is land restitution. In comparison with the initial reform design, which presupposed the restoration of a previous state of affairs, some surprising factors came to the forefront and turned that process into a complicated drama. Amongst these, scholars most often mention the 'elasticity' of the land (Verdery 1999), the ethnicity and the matter of gender equality (Pickels 2001; Meurs 1998), the issue of local identity (Kaneff 2000), the influence of the local elites and group interests (Giordano and Kostova 1997; Sandu 1999b).

What these authors maintain is also noticeable in the areas of my research. The most striking factor was 'the elasticity of the land', a situation that has seriously hindered accurate land restitution. Furthermore, since during the communist era the plots of land shifted between the neighbor collective farms, from the very beginning this blocked the application of land reform laws and

12 Another peculiar reaction to the post-communist transformation is the revival of sorcery and magic. In a recent article two young Romanian anthropologists argue that such a phenomenon, at least in the villages from SW Romania, could be an effect of the post-1990 years (Chelcea and Lăteș 2003).

13 The appeal to the historical past and practice does not always have the goal to forge survival strategies. More generally, I would say that this attitude orientation occurs in the situation of collective indecision/uncertainty (Șerban and Dorondel 2004:46)

even fueled open group conflicts. In Seaca, for instance, an area from the northern part of the village's arable land passed to the neighboring village of Crângu. After 1990 they kept the situation unchanged, but, as compensation, the people entitled to this share of land took possession of the plots shifted from Traian, a village located to the west, where the state farm retained ownership of a big area.

In Năvodari, the other village from the Seaca commune, it all evolved into an open conflict. Since the authorities have postponed the returning of part of the land that had previously passed to the neighboring village of Vânători, the people from Năvodari took forcibly the plots they were entitled to. The villagers from Vânători reacted exaggeratedly at the hint of their Mayoralty. In the end, however, the county authorities intervened on behalf of the legitimate owners and the situation was defused.

In Bulgaria, the elasticity of the land did not arise as an ardent issue. Except for the town of Belene, which was a village at the time of land collectivization, in the rural localities people retained the former collective farms. But even in Belene, the situation ended peacefully. In exchange for a share of land, which passed to the neighboring village of Biala-Voda, they received the plots along the Danube shore in a former swamp, ameliorated and turned into arable land in the communist period.

It is not hard to imagine that in an attempt to cope with the shifting ownership of land the locals have attempted to compensate for their losses in a wide variety of ways. The most widespread approaches are corruption charges, as well as endless trials amongst the heirs. I think it is also important to note some innovative devices that local people accepted instead of an *in situ* restoration of their rights. In Izvoarele, for instance, it seems that what mattered was the criterion of future efficient land use. In his interview, L.P., mayor between 1992 and 1996, when the land law was applied in the village, very clearly said that. Because the original topography of the village's arable land had vanished the people lacked the markers of their former lands. Therefore, L.P., together with the committee in charge, and after a public meeting with the owners, made the decision to reconstitute the respective plots of land according to both the residence and the mechanical endowment of the owners. Thus they tried to manipulate restitution so that people with neighboring plots should live in the same street or neighborhood in the village. Also, when compiling the list of people owning tractors and mechanical devices, they tried to spread the land owned by them all over the village's arable land. By having these two goals in mind, L.P. wanted to encourage a future association, formal or informal, of the residents. Relationships among neighbors would make cooperation easier and the balanced distribution of the tractors would facilitate their most efficient use.

Another significant local choice regarding the land issue was the restoration in both areas of the former collective farms (TKZS in Bulgaria, CAP in Romania), albeit in a slightly different form. In Bulgaria, this choice was more obvious. It is not only that in a few villages (Lozitsa, Dekov, Biala-Voda) the land remained compact as it was before 1990, but the technical and managerial personnel kept their positions. In Lozitsa, for instance, until 1998 there functioned one single association having as president the former TKZS president. In 1998 she resigned from the association leadership, but not due to the residents' pressure. An old conflict with the mayor flared up¹⁴ hence she chose to move her office to a neighboring village, Debovo. The people hired another managerial team and yet the results deteriorated, giving rise even to some corruption allegations¹⁵. Asked to return, the former TKZS president rejected the offer.

In small towns like Belene only part of the land was brought into the associations, the rest being cultivated by the owners themselves. In addition, few leaseholders found the resources to set up large farms. They have also attempted to move to the neighboring villages, but it seems that the villagers have rejected their presence¹⁶.

The will to liquidate the collective farm was firmer in the Romanian villages. I have referred above to the Izvoarele village. People claimed back their land in Seaca, too, but the way they did this was rather peculiar. One year after the beginning of the land reform, faced with the difficulties, the owners of half of the village's arable land merged in an agricultural association. The rest of the people either joined small associations (the maximum number of these was 7), or cultivated the land on their own. The former have an informal character and consist mostly of the neighbors and the kin. Their size is up to 100 ha, the level of mechanization is low, and, like in the case of individual cultivation, the products are used solely for subsistence.

As far as the association is concerned, at the very beginning a new leadership was established, the former technical personnel (the agronomists and the accountants) were retained. The associates had the right to take on individually as much land as they could manage¹⁷. They received, however, in exchange for a sum of money, technical help on the part of the association's management. The rest of the land has remained under the association's management

14 He, too, had been a functionary since 1978.

15 In 1999 the vineyard production was sold for one million old levas, but the people claim that the money never came.

16 During my research in Lozitsa the people from the agricultural association met twice in order to elect a new president. Meanwhile, in the shops in the village center appeared notices calling them to lease the land to an entrepreneur from Belene. Therefore, I asked about the success of this attempt. The people firmly replied that since this leaseholder does not live in the village he would cheat them. Therefore they rejected his offer. This criterion, i.e. the one of being "native", was a widespread stance, too, in the local election, held in the fall of 2003.

17 That has been happening for a few years in Lozitsa, too.

and is cultivated by it. There are no leaseholders in Seaca, but I have heard about them in the other villages¹⁸.

Although the influence that land restitution exerts upon the transformation in these areas is likely to be similar, the consequences differ. In the Romanian area individual land cultivation is more common¹⁹. This is because in the case of Bulgaria the authors of the reform paid more attention to restoring the collective/group management of land. The latter fact could be understood either as a need to maintain the local identities or as an effect of a long-term cooperative tradition cultivated by the state. Here is a relevant quotation in terms of the shaping of local identities: “Property relations are made concrete in local institutions that are built with village labor and became embedded in the collective history of the community. The physical structure of the agricultural cooperative is the ‘real’ symbol of these relations. Thus, from the villagers’ perspective, reformers have attacked the very heart of ‘community’ by the liquidation of their cooperatives” (Kaneff 2000:14). But the other factor, the tradition of cooperatives, has an adverse, negative effect: “Cooperatives developed as a parallel, “alternative” world to capitalism. They forged a powerful everyday and institutional subculture. Their dense network operated according to the rules of “soft” credit, their structures were repeatedly bailed-out, their banks extended broad-scale substandard loans and the weak cooperative units became “schools” for bad governance. The strength of cooperativism had also important ideological side effects. It injected deeply into society collectivist values and even molded everyday behavioral patterns that eventually flourished during the communist regime...The Bulgarian cooperatives’ success story is a clear example how poverty (and legitimate discontent) is digested through egalitarian, corporatist, populist and even autocratic (totalitarian) ideologies” (Abramov 2003:6).

As Romania belongs to the same cultural and geographical area, these factors could also be deciphered. However, it has to be noted that in Romania the cooperatives tradition was not as developed as it was in Bulgaria (Lampe and Jackson 1982: 372-373, 451-455). In addition, because of the peculiar way in which the Romanian modern state appeared, the cooperatives movement was unevenly spread. Therefore, though not exclusively, when ‘land decollectivization’ occurred in Romania, the local identities issue was not openly contended. The identities mattered indeed (Verdery 1999), but in the foreground were either personal, kinship, ethnic and gender identities (Idem. 2004).

18 Unlike in the Bulgarian localities, these people are not local, but with strong connections at the governmental level. One is just the president of the County Council; another, an influential businessman who has benefited several times from the dubious privatization of the state enterprises.

19 This statement could be extrapolated at the national level. So, whether, on the one hand, in Romania there has been observed a general tendency to individually cultivate the land (Mihăilescu 2000:5), on the other hand, through the surveys it was concluded that whilst the land cultivated in the cooperative farms constitutes 24.1% of arable land in Bulgaria, the same figure is only 2.5% in Romania (Nemenyi 2000: 6).

Putting aside the differences, one similarity is much more important: that the people are aware and worried about being caught up in the networks of social and economic influxes. The former networks of linking and circulating the resources have collapsed and the new ones are still emerging. People are strongly aware that the ‘cost of transactions’ of any social action is higher than the cost of raw production or, to put it more accurately, than the cost of subsistence. Particularly, they seem to disregard the politicians’ idea to reconstitute the land after 1990, which had as a hidden premise the assumption that the value of the land in itself is enough to make it profitable. Therefore, as I will try to argue further, the locals are biased to avoid risk-taking actions, a strategy that in fact perfectly fits their long-term and recent historical experience. Once again, I see that as a strong argument for replacing in the analysis of local social change the transition perspective with that of transformation.

The set of concepts

If the transformation paradigm is perceived as a basic theoretical frame, then the main concepts should be worked out in this sense. And I will refer first to the concept of **institutional trust**, which I view as anchored on the level of the local culture, precisely in the horizon of *expectancy* as regards given circumstances. That means, on the one hand, that a *general outlook* on the trust issue is missing at the basic level of the local society (villages, small towns). However, on the other hand, by the *pragmatic/concrete* content of their expectancy people are able to define the institutions, their actors as well as how these actors behave when they take institutional positions. This is the aspect that scholars refer to as “institutional performance”. More precisely, this means that “A highly performing ... institution has to be in the same time flexible and efficient: i.e. to be open to the citizens’ requests as well as to be efficient in the utilization of scarce resources for satisfying their claims” (Putnam 2001:23).²⁰ This non-ideologized view on local institutions has resulted from the weak effect that, generally speaking, ideologies had on traditional/modernizing societies. In fact, I will show, in analyzing the results of the as-

20 As a working definition I would say that an institution is a *procedure* through which the behaviors of the actors involved in a social action are *predictable* to a certain extent. Such an arrangement differs from contractual views, mainly because its putting into practice depends on the prerequisites of the *local culture* and calls to attention people’s expectations, values and needs. This approach is close to Stinchcombe’s idea of institution (Stinchcombe 1968: 107,182; Leca 1986: 164ff, 206ff) as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, to what Mary Douglas means by institution. On the one hand, Stinchcombe sees by an institution “a structure in which powerful people are committed to same value and interest” (Stinchcombe 1968: 107) and he considers it successful if by its ‘completeness’ and ‘development’ the institution answers the citizens’ “needs” (Leca 1986: 164ff,206ff). On the other hand, Douglas accepts the “conventional” character of the institutions, yet she highlights that “for a convention to transform in a social legitimate institution it also needs a cognitive parallel convention to support it” (Douglas 2002:70). The institutions are, anyway, ultimately linked to and constructed by the individuals’ behaviors (Wallace 1988:44).

sociative map, that people express their trust in a concrete, emotional and even vindictive manner, at least in the researched areas.

Institutional trust links the circumstances of a collective action, which unfolds in the public sphere/space, to the involved actors (individuals, associations, government institutions, either local or central). This means that these actors have to identify common goals and means of action. However, it has to be emphasized that institutional trust is only a function of a set of attitudes, values and opinions socially shared with regard to the public sphere and common interest. Therefore, since the institution presupposes a certain degree of trust, the notion of expectancy/trust is intimately bound up with this issue.

Scholars claim that the existence of a certain degree of social trust could have 'good' effects, but 'bad' ones as well (Bădescu 2003). The empowering of certain groups could lead to the fulfilling of some interests and rights, in open disregard of the public interest and the rights of the other groups. This happens in societies that are being modernized, as well as in those with ethnic and/or religious cleavages. It has been argued, however, that even in these societies the trust in the local institutions became a 'public good'. Since it is rooted in the networks of local solidarity, "a spontaneous social capital" arises (Putnam 2001:188).

Local solidarities play a key role in coordinating collective actions. Furthermore, I would say that in order to draft a plan for the collective action the actors have to be aware of one special horizon of expectancies, in which the mutual recognition of personal values matters more. This group feeling evolves into a general frame of reference that often replaces both the ethics of humankind and an organic vision of the world (Idem).

It could be argued that this reference to trust limits the effects only to the members of the groups. I would dare oppose this argument because I believe that in this manner the people vividly share a minimal cooperation and trust. This could be seen as a modest/minimal requirement, but the main point is to have it available. Secondly, I would state that this trust reference is not as exclusive as it might appear at first sight. My argument is that after 1990, at least for the areas of my research, a cluster of political and civic attitudes appears and is merging into a salient concept of *civic identity*. This identity dispels, even if partially, the mistrust and defuses the conflicting situations. It can also afford the opportunity to 'use' openly the local networks of influence and trust.

Civic identity is thus another concept that I would like to develop. In this sense, on the one hand, it is important not to think of this topic exclusively in legal or constitutional terms, but in relation to the cultural practices and attitudes that make them effective. The cultural and historical elements thus form the basic level, and my research draws upon these data. In this respect I

follow Foucault's argument that human rights, "a discursive entity produced within the modern nation states", must be discussed "in terms not of legalistic discourse which emphasizes the role of rights in establishing legal access to privileges, but in terms of the dimensions which have been generated by the development of this kind of human identity – persons with 'rights'" (cf. Shapiro 1984: 214).

On the other hand, I disagree with the perspectives according to which citizenship should be linked to an open policy of identity building. In this sense, the French author Jean Leca argues that citizenship is an outcome of five identity features, all of them emerging in the course of political modernization. He deliberately states a viewpoint against the 'contractual' perspectives, which, he contends, are fully based on the concept of citizens' self-interest. In order to be precise, Leca quotes the statements of a 'contractual' theory, that of sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe. He summarizes Stinchcombe's point of view according to which citizenship is related to the institution to which the people are committed.

It has to be noted that, in Stinchcombe's perspective, the institution is the key concept designed to cope with the matter of citizenship. Although Leca does not see Stinchcombe's theory as wholly belonging to the range of 'self-interest' views, he objects to its 'procedural' way of approaching citizenship. His argument is that institutional arrangements, like those proposed by Stinchcombe, only orient the people toward a 'civic loyalty', but on no account do they provide full citizenship.

However, it seems that the 'procedural' approach to civic identity is more accurate in the areas of my research. And I would like to illustrate that by referring to the situations in which the *matter of ethnicity* arises. Thus if someone takes into consideration the census figures in the Bulgarian and in Romanian areas as well, the image would be of an almost homogenous society. Yet there are examples like the Bulgarian speaking villages located near Alexandria and the Romanian speaking villages from the nearby town of Nikopol that could hardly be seen as identical with the social majority. In fact, although they declare at the census a belonging similar to the majority of the population, they develop/build up the local institutional arrangement, which provides them with a distinct, non-political identity.

Furthermore, recognizing the cultural minorities provides opportunities to lay down the prerequisites for civil society in a genuine manner. In Belene, for instance, S.Y., the former local leader of the Movement for Freedom and Rights, after leaving the party shortly before the 2003 local elections, took the chance to run as an independent for a place in the local council, and won a seat. Although he was surprised by this success, he did not stop there, and has begun to organize an NGO aiming to enhance the identity and civil rights of the Turks in Belene. He perceived that as an alternative to the ethics of the

Movement for Freedom and Rights, which he labeled as open to corruption.

During my research S.Y. attempted to extend his scope of action by calling upon the Association of Vlachs as well as several local NGOs to join him. The president of the local House of Culture gave him an impetus, as well as the technical assistance. As regards his initiative, it is significant how S.Y. reacted when I asked him to tell me what the basic reason for his commitment was. First, he took out of a drawer the legal documents concerning the registration of the NGO and began to read. I insisted on his sunning up the matter in a few words, but I could hardly persuade him to state his view. He said that in his opinion the development of the local minorities interweaves with the development of the whole local community. Although I felt that to be an ad-hoc explanation, I did not insist further. My guess was that, although this explanation was ready-made, it made sense and S.Y. believed in it. In fact, what I find really important in this case is S.Y.'s choice to be involved in a civic, non-political organization, in the frame of which he had found the incentives for action²¹.

Civic identity is not at all a static, 'reified' entity, yet it presupposes a negotiation of its constitutive features. In this respect, *role* taking is the key situation. This means that the **role** is a concept intimately related to the activities performed in the context of a specific collective action. The classic distinction between social structure (the level of social positions/statuses) and social organization (the range of roles accomplished by individuals keeping a specific status) shed a proper light upon a role's conceptualization. In addition, regarding modernizing societies scholars have listed the stages of role changing and social commitment: "Only when such small and simple societies are undergoing substantial change, as when they come in direct contact with the norms and behavior patterns of some other society, are role conflicts likely to be severe. After all, if it is sharp enough, social change cannot help but become a matter of change in social roles as well as in the social aggregates within which the roles exists" (Nisbet 1970:159).

However, in order to avoid the traps of the functionalist paradigm, the 'processual' dimension of role taking needs to be pinpointed. Precisely towards what sort of roles are people biased and how does this affect the vesting of the institutions with a certain trust? Here the 'cultural complexity'/hybrid brings me closer to the role takings. In short, that concept is the foundation of one 'open', 'anti-essentialist' and 'dynamic' outlook (Wicker 1997: 32).

On the one hand, there are enough arguments to reject the use of the 'hybrid'/'cultural complexity' concept. First and foremost, the lack of generalization the facts it refers to cannot be overlooked. In addition, the hybrid/

21 I have met with a similar attitude in Izvoarele, the Bulgarian-speaking village from Romania, in the case of L.P. I will refer to that a little further down.

cultural complexity induces a hidden premise according to which the identities blur-up and the way back to them is highly uncertain²². But, on the other hand, I would say that in order to have a situation of ‘cultural complexity’ the identity should not necessarily become dissolute. And, only provisionally for the moment, I would like to mention that in the areas of my research certain networks of local sociability are not only strong, but also indelibly imprinted in people’s minds. This means that the hybridization stops at a certain level, beyond which lie the core attitudes of identity.

In fact, here it is worthwhile to remind the distinction made with regard to hybridization: an intended vs. a spontaneous cultural complexity. Furthermore, whether this distinction is put into relation with the above-mentioned issue of rural mobilization (namely, do ideologies pervade the rural communities and, if so, with what sort of consequences?), it could be said that with regard to the researched areas the *intended* hybridization is only *marginal*. Though more visible in the case of the Romanian villages, the intended/ideological/political cultural complexity does not exhaust the local identities. Thus there is a wider room for spontaneous hybridization, *sui-generis* sociability and cultural invention.

What really matters in this sense is the role changing within the institutions, as well as the individual expectations and conflicts involved in this process. In this respect the concept of civic identity is a sort of cover under which the local institutions, mutual trust and solidarity networks became open to all the members joining the group. In this sense, I have said above that institutional trust is a sort of “public good”, and the attempt to monopolize it to the benefit of one or another subject is rather improbable. Moreover, the “role performance” keeps both the identity and the individuals bound to “structured social relationships. They require that positional designation be attributed to and accepted by participants in the relationships” (Stryker 1968:559)

In order to close this more theoretical part of my paper I would like to illustrate the process of role taking with the example of L. P. from Izvoarele. Although L.P. did not hold positions in the communist hierarchy, after 1990 he committed himself to the local social life. The institutions that he got affiliated with him were the school and the local organization of “Bratstvo”, the Association of Bulgarians in Romania. In both L.P. played a leading role. As regards “Bratstvo”, he was amongst its founders, whereas in the local school he set up a syndicate later affiliated to a national level federation.

Despite this ‘embedded’ involvement, it seemed very curious to me that he deliberately avoided getting involved with the political parties. He resolutely says that he never joined a political party. Instead, he trusts in non-political support, which in fact, proved to be a successful strategy, when, in 1992, run-

22 See the discussion at the NEXUS team meeting from 2nd of April (www.cas.bg/forum)

ning for the mayor's position in the local election he won. The way he gained his support is extremely relevant to understanding the functioning of both local solidarity and civic identity. In order to manage his plan, L.P. had the idea to form a group of friends asking them to make discreet investigations about the problems that in people's view might be most important. This action was not yet an electoral campaign. L.P. purposely avoided it. On the contrary, that seemed to be a sort of sociological inquiry, whose results L.P. used to build up his electoral platform.

In 1996 L.P. did not embark on the electoral race. He was discouraged, even scared, by the strong influence that the county authorities as well as the central government had on the local institutions. He was approached by the secret services, who asked him to explain the reasons for organizing some cultural festivals with the joint participation of people from Bulgaria. In fact, on the one hand, as I personally found from the questionnaires, this local-central cleavage is still functioning both in Romania and Bulgaria. Yet, on the other hand, that could only stir up political involvement. With regard to non-political/civic activism there are fewer impediments. Perhaps this is the reason why L.P. has eventually chosen later to be active only in local non-political institutions and NGOs (the school, the local House of Culture, the "Bratstvo" Association).

In my opinion, L.P.'s example embodies the complicated course that role taking follows in these communities. It involves many types of roles as well as the different stages of taking them. For instance, it could happen that while someone is leaving behind political roles, he commits himself to civic ones. In addition, working out the advancement strategies could take place simultaneously with choosing the resistance or preservation ones. In the final analysis, at the core level the local networks of solidarity matter more than the belonging to the formal organizations. So summing up these comments, I would say that here we see functioning the attitudes of a certain local civism, a certain participative, either civic or "communal", culture. Still, its roots are not the respective ideologies, but this vivid process of role taking that joins the diverse members of a group.

The map of institutional trust

On the one hand, in measuring social/institutional trust the emphasis is put on one single dimension, mostly the voluntary membership (Bădescu 2003). The difficulties of a multidimensional measuring are acknowledged; especially with regard to the attitudes and roles. On the other hand, since the strong influence that the degree of social trust has on the smooth functioning of the institutions of democracy, throughout Europe a different 'map' of institutional

trust can be traced (Dogan 2001). In that respect, considering only Bulgaria and Romania, there are institutions with a closer degree of social trust (parliament, trade unions, public administration, police), whilst in regard to some other ones (church, army, justice, press media) the trust considerably differs (Idem).

In order to cope with these matters I have used an associative map questionnaire for collecting part of the data²³. Thus I have aimed to link the concept of institutional trust to the spontaneous images/representations that the people made up. The associative map is a technique initially peculiar to social psychology (Abric 1994), but which thereafter proved successful in other areas of the social sciences. I have preferred it with respect to my subject matter for its accuracy. Being inspired by psychoanalysis, its basic idea is that with a minimal influence on the part of the field researcher the data the subjects provide have a high degree of accuracy. Its major disadvantage is that the data analysis is difficult. Hence, I preferred to explain the attitudes cluster regarding institutional trust not by working out its “semantic field” (Rosa 2003), but by using the interpretation of interviews and direct observation findings gathered in a few representative localities.

Before starting the data presentation, I would like to make some comments. First, the big difference of the refusals to respond to the questionnaire in the two areas is surprising (from the 217 subjects in the Romanian area 26 refused to answer, whilst from 167 in the Bulgarian one only 6 subjects refused). A reason for this could be the imminent local election in Romania (6th June 2004)²⁴. Indeed amongst the refusal motivations²⁵ there were several males who made that connection²⁶. However, since most of the refusals came from women, this “political” explanation is, at best, partial²⁷. It would be more plausible to interpret it as a symptom of a general climate of mistrust, a climate more accentuated in Romania than it is in Bulgaria. Some motivations suggest that fact. Here is what some of the interviewees said: “We are women...We do not leave the house...We have no opinion...What could we say?...Do not ask us anymore...”²⁸. For all the mistrust oriented toward an outsider, a person foreign to the community, I would go further and see here a deficit of interpersonal trust.

23 See Appendix 2 for examples of such questionnaires.

24 In Bulgaria the local elections were held in October 2003.

25 I have insisted that the persons who refused to answer should motivate their attitude. Most of them did.

26 Some of them told me: “I do not want to have anything to do with politics”.

27 Whilst in the Bulgarian area all refusals came from women, in Romania there were 17 women and 9 men who refused. In addition, it has to be noted that in Bulgaria three of the six refusals I have recorded in Cherkovitsa, a village with the majority of population speaking Romanian to a certain degree. That may matter because they heard me speaking Romanian with my assistant and, in addition, I did not hide the fact that I was coming from Romania. It is possible that the real reason for refusal should be the fear of having trouble with the authorities.

28 Curiously enough, this was said by a group of women from Islaz, who, staying on the street, made comments about the Mayoralty. When I got closer to them they stopped talking. Therefore I would interpret their refusal not as lack of involvement, but as proof of mistrust.

Secondly, the degree of difference between the representative sample and the sum of questionnaires applied has to be noted in both areas²⁹. It can be seen in *Appendix 3* that the males who answered in Romania are far more numerous than the females (139 males as opposed to 52 females). In Bulgaria there is no difference, though. On the contrary, the females answered slightly more often in comparison to the males (88 females as opposed to 73 males). It could be assumed that in Romania the “bearers” of the public image are male individuals, while in Bulgaria this image is more balanced.

There are, in the same respect, important differences along the axis of age segmentation. Whilst in Bulgaria those who express their views are older and more educated (both Bulgarian youngsters and illiterate people are missing in the questionnaires), in Romania this tendency is indeed discernible without being well pronounced.

Thirdly, I would like to stress again the exclusive descriptive place that this mapping of institutional trust has in this project. I will attempt further to build up an explanatory scheme yet not by using the statistical method. I will do that only in the next section, where my premise will be the findings of the interviews and field observation; I will be using the concepts of transformation, civic identity and roles for data analysis.

In order to work with a representative sample I have randomly selected from the total questionnaires 97 units in Bulgaria and 137 in Romania (see *Appendix 3*). The resulting samples are representative in terms of gender, age and education for the localities I have researched (8 in Bulgaria and 10 in Romania)³⁰. In Romania, in the sample I have included the 17 female refusals³¹.

The findings are to be summarized in the following tables. The variables that I use come from the combination of two axes: *Refusal vs. Involvement* attitudes (N – A) and *Concrete vs. General* labeling (C – G)³². Whilst on the first axis I have confined myself to three values (-1, 0, 1), on the other one there

29 It has to be noted that I have purposely applied most of the questionnaires to people happening to be in the street. My aim was to obtain a “public image” of the institutions. I have avoided, however, applying the questionnaires in the center of the villages, the usual locus of the “public space”. In addition, I was trying to ask either isolated individuals, or those who were in groups of no more than three persons.

30 Because there was no such data in Romania, I have taken the educational dimension with respect to Teleorman, the county where the 10 localities are located.

31 I will further state the meaning of these refusals. I have taken them into account because in Romania the number of female informants is far lower than that of male informants.

32 See Appendix 2 for the codification of a few questionnaires. On the *Negative – Active* axis whilst most of the times the “-1” value corresponds to associations like “They are doing nothing...”, “They are corrupted...”, “They care only about their interests ...”, to the “1” value correspond expressions such as “They should have done that...”, “To do that...”, “We need...”. The answers that did not match these two values were qualified with “0”. Whereas the “0” value could mean a moderate degree of trust, I see the “-1” and “1” values as a high degree of mistrust and trust respectively

On the *Concrete – General* axis the increasing degree of “knowledge” matches the five values. While to the “-2” value I have attached expressions like “The village/we need roads...”, “We need jobs...” to the “2” value correspond general qualifications like “good”, “nice”, “big”.

are five (-2, -1, 0, 1, 2). In addition, in order to make the further argumentation clearer I have included only the image of four out of the 6 items of the questionnaires. These are: the community, the political parties, the mayoralty and kinship. However, in the next part I will also refer to the image of NGOs and foundations, but only in an illustrative way.

By combining the values of the two axes we are provided with 15 pairs of attitudes: -1,-2; -1,-1; -1,0.....1,1; 1,2. I have presented the questionnaires' results in these pairs, regarding each of the four items considered. In addition, also regarding each item, I have worked out four variants of trust in a separate table:

N-trust; this variable covers all attitudes marked with -1 on the N - A axis, completely letting aside the C - G values. The N-trust variable expresses the dissatisfaction and mistrust of the respondents.

A-trust is seen analogously with N-trust, but on the N - A axis this covers the attitudes marked with 1.

The O-trust variable encompasses the pairs of attitudes, which, while on the N - A axis have 0 value, on the C - G axis have either 1 or 2 values. In fact, this is the most widespread attitude expressing a relative degree of trust combined with a general image. The subjects who belong here are rather ignorant as to the given item.

K-trust quantifies a very interesting attitude. In spite of featuring a 0 value on the N - A axis, since on the other axis they take the values of concrete labeling (-2, -1, 0), the subjects expressing it are in a sense competent regarding the given item.

As regards the first item of the questionnaire, the *community* (village or town), important differences regarding each area can be seen (Table 2). In comparison with Teleorman, the neutrality/passivity degree in the Pleven area is higher. Thus, whilst in Pleven more than half of the sample (53.6%) displays attitudes of the (0,1) and (0,2) range, in Teleorman only 43.7% of the subjects match these. In fact, in Pleven there is a higher distance amongst the opposite categories: on the one hand, there are passive/neutral people;

Table 2.

Attitudes \ Area	-1,-2	-1,-1	-1,0	-1,1	-1,2	0,-2	0,-1	0,0	0,1	0,2	1,-2	1,-1	1,0	1,1	1,2	Non-Answ.
Pleven	-	12.4%	4.1%	15.5%	3.1%	-	3.1%	4.1%	25.8%	27.8%	-	-	-	-	-	No
Teleorman	6.6%	12.4%	3.6%	5.1%	-	-	4.4%	4.4%	16%	27.7%	-	-	-	-	-	12.4%

Note. The values of less than 3% were not considered.

on the other hand, a consistent minority (27.9%) shares two poles of mistrust: (-1,-1), the ‘competent’ mistrust, and (-1,1), the ‘ignorant’/undefined mistrust. But in the case of Teleorman the mistrust spans over several categories: from the well informed people (-1,-2) to the subjects who have refused to answer (12.4%).

The manner in which the four trust variables are distributed displays more clearly this polarization (Table 3). Besides the A- trust, which in fact takes low values as regards all the considered items, in what concerns the ‘community’ item, it is interesting that the K-trust is low, too, especially in the Pleven area.

Table 3.

	Pleven N-trust	Teleorman N-trust (including the 17 refusals)	Pleven A-trust	Teleorman A-trust	Pleven O-trust	Teleorman O-trust	Pleven K-trust	Teleorman K-trust
Total (%)	36.1%	40.1%	3.1%	4.4%	53.6%	43.8%	7.2%	10.9%

Trust toward the *political parties* shows a different content. Neutrality attitudes are not dominant anymore (Table 4). Instead, especially in the Pleven area, K-trust takes the top position (in Pleven 24.7% of trust attitudes

Table 4.

Area \ Attitudes	-1,-2	-1,-1	-1,0	-1,1	-1,2	0,-2	0,-1	0,0	0,1	0,2	1,-2	1,-1	1,0	1,1	1,2	Non-Answ.
	Pleven	-	5.1%	6.2%	7.2%	6.2%	-	24.7%	-	13.4%	31.9%	-	-	-	-	-
Teleorman	4.4%	9.5%	-	8%	-	7.3%	13.1%	8%	4.4%	21.9%	-	-	-	-	-	12.4%

Note. The values of less than 3% were not considered.

belong to the (0,-1) category). The mistrust decreases, yet the polarization is still strong, especially in Pleven. This polarization, however, is not grounded on the N – A axis, but on the C – G one (the ‘competence’ axis). With regard to Teleorman, the diversification of attitudes runs deeper. There is one single dominant category, (0,2), with 21.9%. The attitudes rank in the mistrust area, but divide into several categories as far as the C – G axis is concerned.

Similar to the community, the trust in political parties involves committed attitudes to a lesser degree (Table 5). A-trust is also low, although not so low as it is toward the community. K-trust exceeds the counterpart variable of the community. However, whilst in the Pleven area the K-trust capital roughly equals N-trust and O-trust, in Teleorman only this latter provides the weight of K-trust. Therefore, in Teleorman N-trust keeps the same high value as regards the community.

Table 5.

	Pleven N-trust	Teleorman N-trust (including the 17 refusals)	Pleven A-trust	Teleorman A-trust	Pleven O-trust	Teleorman O-trust	Pleven K-trust	Teleorman K-trust
Total (%)	24.7%	38.7%	4.1%	6.6%	45.4%	26.7%	27.8%	28.5%

The trust in *mayoralties* has a still more different structure. If in the Teleorman area, in comparison to the political parties criterion, the score of mistrust (N-trust) rises (43.1% as opposed to 38.6%), in Pleven this variable drops to a very low value -11.4% (Tables 5 and 7). A factor that could account for this situation would be the imminent local elections in Romania³³. In this sense, we have to note the high difference of Mayoralty O-trust in the two areas. So whilst in Pleven the percentage of (0,1) and (0,2) values grow up to 60.8%, in Teleorman the same values remain at only half of that – 29.9% (Table 6).

Table 6.

Attitudes \ Area	-1,-2	-1,-1	-1,0	-1,1	-1,2	0,-2	0,-1	0,0	0,1	0,2	1,-2	1,-1	1,0	1,1	1,2	Non-Answ.
Pleven	-	5.2%	-	3.1%	-	-	13.4%	6.2%	43.3%	17.5%	-	-	-	5.2%	-	No
Teleorman	8.2%	10.9%	6.6%	5.8%	-	-	8%	9.5%	31.9%	8%	-	5.1%	-	-	-	12.4%

However, I would say that it is not the imminent local election accounts for this sort of mistrust, but a more enduring attitude toward both the mayoralties and the parties. I will bring up this issue again in the next section. The reason lies in the dismantling of the different functions that mayoralties have in the two areas.

A point of interest is the relative high degree of A-trust (Table 7). There is, in this respect, a certain reliability on the part of the people actively involved

Table 7.

	Pleven N-trust	Teleorman N-trust (including the 17 refusals)	Pleven A-trust	Teleorman A-trust	Pleven O-trust	Teleorman O-trust	Pleven K-trust	Teleorman K-trust
Total (%)	11.4%	43.1%	8.2%	8.9%	60.8%	29.9%	19.6%	18.2%

Note. The values of less than 3% were not considered.

33 In Teleorman my research was unfolding in January, February and the beginning of March, 2004. The local elections took place at the 6th and 20th of June, 2004.

in the functioning of this institution. In a way, this is understandable since the Mayorality is the closest institution to their everyday life. Furthermore, in connection with this aspect, the higher value of K-trust is also significant (19.6% in Pleven and 18.2% in Teleorman)³⁴.

The trust toward the fourth item, *kinship*, again brings the two areas closer. The lack of interest, O-trust, is a value similar in Teleorman, as well as in Pleven – 44.5%, and 51.5% respectively (Table 9). In addition, the pattern of attitudes distribution is similar (Table 8).

Table 8.

Attitudes \ Area	-1,-2	-1,-1	-1,0	-1,1	-1,2	0,-2	0,-1	0,0	0,1	0,2	1,-2	1,-1	1,0	1,1	1,2	Non-Answ.
Pleven	-	7.2%	8.2%	5.1%	-	-	5.1%	19.6%	25.8%	25.8%	-	-	-	-	-	No
Teleorman	-	5.1%	5.8%	7.3%	-	-	5.1%	14.6%	24.8%	19.7%	-	-	-	-	-	12.4%

Note. The values of less than 3% were not considered.

Yet another very important aspect is worth noting – that of the absence of attitude polarization. Unlike the trust in community, the trust in kinship has in both areas a single-pole structure; in the close categories (0,0), (0,1) and (0,2) belong 70% of the Bulgarian sample and 60% of the Romanian one (Table 8).

In Table 9 it can be seen that the degree of N-trust is lower in both areas. Actually, in Teleorman N-trust in kinship is the lowest in comparison to all the considered items. However, in this case, too, female respondents keep the higher percentage, even higher, curiously, than with respect to the other items (73%). Yet, they are also more active (32%), although once again, less competent (42.8%).

Table 9.

	Pleven N-trust	Teleorman N-trust (including the 17 refusals)	Pleven A-trust	Teleorman A-trust	Pleven O-trust	Teleorman O-trust	Pleven K-trust	Teleorman K-trust
Total (%)	22.7%	32.8%	1%	2.1%	51.5%	44.5%	24.7%	20.4%

In order to draw a picture of the trust issue, first of all I would like to note the absence in both regions of the K-type of trust in what regards the ‘community’. So whilst as regards the ‘community’, which is *not* an institution,

34 In the Teleorman section we also have to include the subjects who share the categories (-1,-2), (-1,-1) and (-1,0) (Table 6). In this way the degree of ‘competence’ increases.

K-trust takes low values, the image of the other three items (political parties, mayoralty and kinship), all of them institutions, embodies this 'cognitive' trust. Secondly, whereas the trust in the community is strikingly polarized, in the case of institutions the trust either tends towards or is grounded in one pole of attitudes.

With regard to these two aspects I will attempt to argue further down that trust in the community does not provide the incentives for role taking, yet it lays the foundation for building-up and maintaining a *traditional* identity. This is rooted in the strong feeling of belonging to the local society as well as in a general image of one's own community. In regard to the institutions, on the contrary, since their image presupposes a cognitive, K-type of trust, this fact frames the space of the *role-taking* process. These roles could be either traditional, if the institution is kinship, or modern, through involvement in the political parties and mayoralties.

In the same sense, I will interpret the extremely low values of activism (A-trust). Thus, since the community reference has the exclusive function to build up local identity, the role-takings in the public, 'civic', space appear to be improbable. It is no accident that in the questionnaires the labeling of NGOs and humanitarian foundation items was either confusing or ignorant³⁵. Further, I will try to suggest some prerequisites that shape people's expectations so that they are ready to assume civic roles. These impulses have as a broader frame local identity, which, as I said above, is characterized by "traditional" way of constructing identity. So I will bring to the fore the functions that some local institutions have in the process of merging past with present. The outcome is a specific type of "civism" and "civic identity" likely to be defined as I have done it above.

Trust, mistrust and local politics

The degree, as well as the type of trust, varies in regard to the reference to which the subjects are oriented. So it is important to keep in mind that the greatest distance separates the community, on the one hand, and institutions (mayoralties, political parties, kinship) on the other hand. This should be viewed, as I said above, as a consequence of the different functions that the community and institutions perform. A little bit further down, I will put forward the arguments supporting this statement.

I think that one more observation is important: although the trust takes a rather similar form, the factors that influence it are specific for each area.

35 I will point out further some meaningful details of applying this part of the questionnaire.

Most essential is the administrative organization, a factor that provides specific assets in the functioning of the institutions. In Bulgaria the municipal/*obshtinska* system makes the villages closely dependent on the administrative center, which is in all cases a town. Hence, the local institutions that could shape the village's life – the school and the house of culture – are caught up in an institutional network that reaches beyond the confines of the village. In addition, the other institutions, like the church, have lost their authority and functions because of communist ideological cleansing. For instance, whilst some villages (Biala-Voda, Dekov) do not have a church since their *intra-muros* area/*ognishte na selata* moved in the communist years, in others (Lozitsa) the church is ruined. In this sense, since the local governance resources are transferred from the villages to the municipalities, the mistrust of the Bulgarian population has as a source this rather strong dependency on the municipalities.

In Romania the rural – urban cleavage is deeper as well as symptomatic. It is meaningful, for instance, that though rather recent, passed in 2001, the law of organizing the local administration already has tangible effects. In fact, this law does nothing more than to emphasize the aforementioned rural – urban cleavage. Its most enduring effect is the strong, mainly financial, dependency of the local institutions (the school, the house of culture and even the church) on the commune center. In this way the commune mayoralties have become the target of a tough political competition, which, in contrast to the situation in Bulgaria, only rarely goes beyond the area of the commune.

Yet, despite this advantageous setting, in Romania the mistrust in the community is higher than that in Bulgaria. In fact, the mistrust in the Romanian area has its roots not in the institutional dependency but in a higher level of interpersonal mistrust. Hence, in Romania the mistrust towards mayoralties is far greater than it is in Bulgaria. It could be contended, however, that the mistrust towards the mayoralties could be yielded also by the bad, even corrupted functioning of the institutions. Yet, whilst this is true in regard to the mayoralties, in the case of kinship, which is a traditional institution insusceptible to corruption, in Romania the degree of mistrust is also high. Therefore, I will conclude that in the Romanian area the mistrust in the community has its roots in the lack of interpersonal trust.

In regard to the community the most striking feature of trust is, as I have mentioned earlier, the low value of K-trust (knowledge-based trust). On the contrary, N- and O-trust hit the top values. The rationale behind this situation could be the specific community function that is to contribute to and frame the building of local identities. Yet, things vary from area to area. The *loci* of this difference are found in the ways of telling oral histories. Although such references abound in both areas, the information type and source diverge.

Thus in contrast to the villages (Seaca and Izvoarele in Romania, and Lozitsa in Bulgaria), in the towns like Belene the versions about the past of the community are less rooted in history, either oral, or written. In order to explain this difference we should take into account the urban-rural cleavage. The urban way of thinking, more analytical, has made the perception of local stories about the community more critical. In addition, the multiple networks of sociability, a common phenomenon, provide another factor of influence, as the recent fieldworks found out in the localities on the right bank of the Danube (Staevska 2004). In this respect I would mention the practice of everyday communication, ranging from unexpected street meetings, especially those from in the village's center, to mutual visits, parties and friendship networks.

Yet even with regard to local history, the influence of the local *written* history has to be noted (an influence much more extended in towns than in villages) due to its diverse sources and way of interpreting past events. On the one hand, this type of history does penetrate deeper into the local culture, mostly by granting people attention. On the other hand, that sort of history/histories gradually replaces the undisputed versions of both oral histories and the history managed by the local cultural institutions (school, house of culture).

As for the villages, in Lozitsa I have also witnessed this impetus to record and thus use the local history. So more than half of the interview I conducted with the former president of the House of Culture was, in fact, a reading from the monograph on the village, which he had written several years before. The source was so authoritative than in spite of my attempts to stem the interview to the oral sources, he went on with his reading. In Lozitsa, not only this sort of stories are authoritative but also those regarding the "recent history". In another interview held in the village, a woman, the daughter-in-law of the former land owner/*chorbadjia*, when asked to give her account of land collectivization, showed and finally gave me a book written by Stoiko Danchev, a communist activist born in Lozitsa (Danchev 1981). In her view, the book gives an exhaustive account of the history of these years. Moreover, it is not even disputed by the former kulaks or their descendants from the village.

In the Romanian villages there is virtually no written history. People refuse to rely on local monographs both in Seaca and in Izvoarele. Therefore, the community's past is left in the domain of more or less accurate oral histories. In fact, special emphasis is laid on the history of the communist decades. In Izvoarele, especially, they clearly remember the opposition to land collectivization as well as its rough repression. The people are still afraid to speak about that and this also contributes to the local-central cleavage to which I have referred above.

Undisputed accounts of local history, contribute most significantly to the image of the community. Therefore, the values of knowledge-based trust (K-trust) are low. In addition, another trust variable, activism (A trust), albeit

small with all other items, reaches the lowest values on the community criterion. Thus, the people from both areas do not have a pragmatic, focused orientation in terms of their community. The role taking is therefore minimal. The community lacks civic commitment.

In fact, this assumption could also be taken into consideration after a look at the results of the associative map. When asked about the 'NGOs' and 'humanitarian foundation' items, only rarely did the respondents refer to mutual aid, personal commitment, social mobilization, or, at least, to the control of the government/administration's performance³⁶. Furthermore, the subjects showed during the interviews a conservative outlook, a lack of 'institutional imagination', as regards the functions of the local institutions. For instance, in Seaca, they said that while school should be concerned with the supply of no more than a minimal education, the church should confine itself to fulfilling the 'spiritual needs' of the believers (G.G., the priest from Seaca).

The community image and trust remain basically unaffected by the system's transformation in both countries. These provide, instead, the material for forging local identities. Therefore, I would emphasize once again that the areas of my research are deeply immersed in traditional ways of preserving their identities. This does not mean that they refuse to embrace modern patterns, innovations and structural changes. Yet, their actions are determined by this 'conservative' frame of reference. Secondly, they transfer the risks of role taking processes from the community to the local institutions.

Unlike the trust in the community, when it came to working out the trust in the institutions, political parties and mayoralties, the subjects provided a higher proportion of concrete attributes. At first sight, that might infuse in the local culture a pragmatic orientation. However, during the interview only rarely did this orientation emerge. Hence, I would state that these concrete attributes are rooted rather in both an emotional dependency and person-centered images³⁷. Therefore, the trust in institutions, even when expressed in concrete attributes, is grounded either in an image, a person, or in the local patterns and practices.

Among the factors that determine this way of embedding trust, I would foreground two: 1. a particular way of perceiving politics and 2. a severe separation of the local society from the central government. Further I will approach

36 In Romania, during the interviews as well as in the informal discussions, after applying one questionnaire I purposely provoked people by asking them about the miserable state of the streets in the village. In most of the cases they said that they are waiting for the Mayoralty to fix them. And when I asked: "But why don't you organize yourselves?" the answers suggested, besides the expectation that the Mayoralty should do the repairs, also a mistrust towards their neighbors.

37 Regarding the last local election in Belene, T.T. who is the leader of the Socialists and has conducted their electoral campaign, said that in this campaign they had relied on canvassing, personal links and the attitude of understanding the electorate's needs. In his view, the former mayor lost the elections, because after an 8-year mandate his personal commitment might have withered away.

the manner in which each of these factors influences the trust in political parties and mayoralties. In addition, a special consideration will be given to their effect on role taking processes.

The particular manner in which the people from these areas perceive politics is illustrated by the account of a visit that the leader of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and Todor Jivkov, his Bulgarian counterpart, made in Belene in 1978. The visit's aim was to inaugurate the works at a hydroelectric plant on the Danube that in the same time should link the two countries by the bridge of its barrage³⁸. The visit, like all other similar events, had to be carefully "screened" by the local activists. Usually, the people who had to show their "enthusiasm" took to the streets, organized by local activists. However, a former activist, T.T., said that this time the visit raised a special concern, that of the language in which Ceausescu should be greeted. If they used Romanian someone might see that as having an ethnic underpinning, because of the existence of a Romanian-speaking minority in Belene. Still, if they greeted Ceaușescu in Bulgarian, he would think of that as an offence. Nobody had the courage to make the decision; hence Ceaușescu faced a mute crowd of people.

After the visit was over, the Pleven organization of the Communist Party summoned the responsible persons and probed into the reasons for this incident. Finally all of them were dismissed. In T.T.'s view, the people from Pleven were stupid; even today, he cannot account for their decision. He could only say that they did this because, generally speaking, the central government is unable to understand and consider the local traditions as well as their bearers.

In fact, in both researched areas politics is nothing more than a general image of the "state" that the political elite has brought ever since the eve of modernization (Schopflin 1993). Beyond this general outlook, the images of the political system's institutions are blurred, and are most of the times embodied by certain individuals. Therefore, the state does not relate to the local communities and its institutions have an even smaller 'tangible' function. Politics is staggering in front of the doors of the local communities. Against it there stand either, in T.T.'s words, the local traditions, or, as I would put it, the local practices, the citizens' expectations, and last but not least a sort of traditionally rooted identity.

38 In fact, this sort of events has a manifold significance. One has to note the villagers' images and stories, a very rich source of expressing their attitude to top-level politics. For instance, I had the chance to be present at the visits made by Prime Minister Simeon and President Parvanov in Belene. They came to support the resumed construction of a nuclear power station, whose building started a long time ago. The public interest was so much higher as the project could generate jobs. In addition, they have talked a lot about politics and central government, as well as about their personal preferences either for Simeon or for Parvanov.

Romanian politicians embark on similar pilgrimages. The people from Seaca and Navodari said that the president of Romania recently paid a visit to the aforementioned hydroelectric plant. Another site favorite with politicians is the fertilizers factory in Turnu Magurele, whose managers are replaced whenever the party in power changes, because it is a state-owned factory.

In this sense, one could wonder why in both areas the associative map data shows a higher degree of knowledge-based trust (K-trust). Furthermore, this variable reaches significantly high values as regards the political parties (whereas K-trust for the mayoralties is up to 20%, that rises to almost 30% for the parties). In fact, there is a relatively consistent capital of “political competence”, which still does not convey motivations for collective actions. In my view, the main factor that impedes this transfer is precisely that separation between local and governmental politics.

On the hand, there are administrative reasons that determine this situation. I have mentioned them earlier. In the case of Bulgaria, that separation is attenuated to a certain degree because some institutions, the house of culture, the church and even NGOs, grant more autonomy with respect to the local political institutions. Therefore, their institutional effects reinforce the communities. It could be noted, though, that in contrast to Romania, the rural part of society remains out of this movement because these communities are first of all the municipalities.

On the other hand, the organizational setting of the large-scale/national institutions does not encompass local society either in Romania, or in Bulgaria. For instance, the local political leaders have never thought of running in the general elections. E.M., who had held two mayor mandates in Belene, came back to his basic profession after losing the election. He did not think of running on the list of his party at the general election. The reason was quite obvious, he said. It is a common practice that the regional organization, from Pleven in his case, should dictate the content of the candidate lists. They usually choose their own people³⁹.

In Romania the organizational setting is based in the rural centers; therefore, at least at first sight, there is some political commitment. There are, for instance, communal party organizations that are granted autonomy, though this autonomy is still low. The local organizations have to cope first with the influence that the county organizations exert on them. In 2000, for instance, in Seaca, on the list of candidates that won the local elections they put, against the agreement, the local medicine woman. She was not native. She did not even live in the village (she commuted from Turnu Măgurele) and only recently had she joined the party (switching from another party). The local party politicians got upset, but did not rise openly against that. However, in 2004 they took action to expel her from the local organization. In addition, what contributes to the appearance of local politics in Romania is the high degree of political migration. In Izvoarele, for instance, just during

39 A similar opinion shared S.Y. He declared that before leaving MFR, the party of the Turks in Bulgaria, he tried several times to speak either with its president Ahmed Dogan, or with the central leadership, about the critical situation of the party local organization. But they never listened. This was in fact, one of the most important reasons for his leaving MFR.

my fieldwork they managed to rearrange the local organization of the Social Democrats, the party in power at that time. Therefore, they refused to give me any interview. After a while, I found out the reasons for the refusals. Almost all of the persons involved had been in other parties, some embracing a radically different ideology, and held local offices (the president of the local organization had been a few years before the mayor of the village, supported by a liberal party).

The two aforementioned factors determine in both areas the trust in the parties and mayoralties. The associative map displays, however, a subtle difference in terms of each of these institutions. While as regards the mayoralty K-trust drops, A-trust (the trust based on active involvement), has a higher value. I would explain this by the different effects that each of these factors exerts. With regard to the mayoralty, on the one hand, the personalization of the institution⁴⁰ as well as its more intimate link to the local society makes its image less descriptive. So, personal knowledge supplies its representation. Therefore, in the interviews the reference to the mayoralty was far more extensive and detailed. On the other hand, the mayoralties represent, in the citizens' eyes, the community vis-à-vis county and central institutions. There is, thus, a higher potential for their improvement through personal commitment.

Trust, roles and identity

In what follows, by means of a few examples, I will focus the analysis on the influences of the two aforementioned factors on the role taking processes as well as on the making of a sort of civic/communal identity.

Among the situational circumstances that provided opportunities for role taking after 1990, the land restitution was, chronologically speaking, the first. For the reasons mentioned above, in Romania the land restitution created more biases and tensions. Yet, after a certain period of time, people in both areas conceded most of the arable land in the associations. On the one hand, this form of land use has its economic motives. The association, at least theoretically, makes easier the mechanization of work and takes care of large-scale supplies and marketing. The people are fully aware of these advantages. On the other hand, the agricultural associations had at the very beginning a political dimension, in the sense that for taking the decisions, even those with a strictly technical character, people were politically committed and seldom assumed social roles.

One reason for this political affiliation lies in the laws, passed immediately after 1990, regulating the functioning of agricultural associations. More spe-

40 In many of the questionnaires the subjects have associated the image of one or another mayor with the 'mayoralty' itself.

cifically, these laws enhanced the political grounding of these units by stipulating the principle “one man, one vote” as regards decision taking. Each associate has thus one single vote, irrespectively of the capital he/she has brought into the association⁴¹. This system allowed the preservation of the association’s leading council, even if its performance was obviously bad. For instance, whilst, in Lozitsa the former TKZS president kept this position until 1998, in Seaca, despite the open charges of corruption the initial managerial team was replaced only in 2003.

The principle ‘one man, one vote’ overlaps, in fact, with the practices inherited from the communist era and it matches the need for an identity model that the former collective farms fulfilled (Kaneff 2000). It is evident that this sort of influence prevents people from actions that involve role taking. However, there are other circumstances that make the agricultural associations a factor conducive to generating social roles. More specifically, there is their strong bond with the mayoralties, which, besides the strictly functional dimension (whilst the association has to be registered at the mayoralty, the professional hired at the mayoralty could provide the technical assistance), has a strong influence on the competition for role taking. It is no accident that the people in both villages have described the mayoralty-association relation as close yet problematic.

In this respect illustrative is the manner in which the Seaca mayoralty got involved in replacing the managerial team of the association in the autumn of 2003. On the one hand, because of the low level of production due to previous abuses of power by the association’s managers, passions flared up and part of the associates considered dismissing the manager. Instead of calling a general association assembly, they did make an appeal to the mayoralty. Furthermore, the mayor considered himself their mandatory defender and suspended the activity of the former managerial team. In addition, he ordered a financial investigation, entrusting it to one of the former censors who supported his intervention. Although the legal administrative council opposed these actions, the association’s offices were closed down and the management were forced to quit.

During my fieldwork passions had already subsided. Nevertheless, during the interviews neither the mayor, nor the associates considered the legality of this decision. Therefore, I would state that there was something else at stake here. First, it is important Election Day was not far off. Secondly, we should also highlight the villagers’ reliance on role taking as well as their trust in the mayoralty.

41 By the Law 36, issued on 30 April 1991, in art. 62, the Romanian Parliament enforced the principle of managing the agricultural associations. This stipulation displeased a few associates from Seaca, who left the association. In Lozitsa too, there were some deceived members of the association. They have remained in the association but have chosen to cultivate their plots individually.

In Lozitsa, too, this sort of events took place, but they occurred in the autumn of 1998, before the local elections. The heads of both the agricultural association and mayoralty had fought a war for a long time. In fact, all these events unfolded right after they had come into office (on the verge of the 1980s). After 1990, the conflict deepened and in the middle of 1998, V.K., the mayor, attempted to impose his protégé. As in Seaca, in the autumn of 1998, he enforced a convention of the associates' assembly, who decided to replace the former managers.

There are circumstances in which role taking is still more intense. However, all of them stem primarily from local politics. As the associative map shows, local political institutions are far more familiar to and attractive for the people than civic and humanitarian associations. This is the reason why I have focused the interviews mainly on the topic of local politics.

In order to explain this, it has to be noted that, on the one hand, despite the long period of communist rule, politics in these areas has opened the doors to political participation and has afforded opportunities to identify with and confront local issues. On the other hand, the two factors I have mentioned above, i.e. the peculiar way of conceiving and practicing politics, and the separation of local politics from the central government, exert their influence over participation incentives and role taking.

In fact, in local politics these processes depend in a visible manner on both the individuals and the community's problems. In the Romanian localities for most of the interviewed subjects was vital that the candidate for a local political function "be a humane individual/*să fie om*". It is interesting to delineate the sociological parameters of the local construct of 'humanity'. Here are some criteria: the candidate has to live in the village, to be married, to have a household, a job and so forth. In addition, by no means should he break the moral rules of the community as well as the state laws.

In Bulgaria, too, this label covers the potential role keepers. In Lozitsa, for instance, it was important, that the former mayor was becoming more and more dependent on alcohol. In strange way, the people connected this behavior with the open conflict he had with the former TKZS president⁴². In addition, V.K. has moved together with his family to Belene⁴³. While V.K. fails to match the image of the 'standard' candidate, his main competitor, the present

42 Asked about the reasons for her involvement in the electoral campaign of the present mayor from Lozitsa, L.B., a woman from the village told me that, although she had a handicap, she decided to do that because of V.K.'s scandalous behavior with regard to A.T., the former TKZS president.

43 I have mentioned above that S.B., the former mayor of Seaca, is living in the neighboring town of Turnu-Măgurele. That was in fact, in the villagers' view, one of the most serious reasons for his being replaced.

mayor, has moved from Nikopol to the village⁴⁴. Moreover, the people said that as regards her behavior they feel no dissatisfaction.

The image of the individuals who could embark on social roles has another main feature. He/she is by definition entrenched in the local and regional networks of influence. On the one hand, this positioning provides the resources needed to cope with the current problems of the community. It is easy to understand that since the self-help attitudes and involvement in community problems are so low, the dependency on the regional and central assets is crucial. For instance, V.K. from Lozitsa depended for his influence on the connections he had in Pleven before 1989. Thus he succeeded in extending the public lighting network, repairing the roads as well as bringing water supply to the village. The same happened in Seaca, recently, when the mayoralty won some financial support from the World Bank to repair the school. In this case, people say that the relations of the former mayor were useful in allocating the money.

On the other hand, those with 'connections' could better represent the community on the large-scale level. However, what is at stake in this representation is not the local interest, but presence in the public sphere. Therefore, the macro-political equilibrium, more precisely the existence of political parties with distinct identity and image, influences the local competition for social roles.

The role taking process depends also on the bonds of friendship of the person who might take a role in the network of local sociability. This does not necessarily mean the dominance of supposed interest groups; not even the preeminent place that some traditional institutions, like kinship, could have. On the contrary, sociability comes from the overlapping of several networks of relations, which often have different agendas and patterns of solidarity. In a theoretical sense, the process could accurately be described through the aforementioned concept of "unintended hybridization". In this respect, I have mentioned the example of L.P. from Izvoarele, as well as the rules of social everyday life in the Bulgarian localities.

With regard to the latter point it is interesting how the present mayor of Lozitsa used the existence and effectiveness of these networks. Although she has only recently moved to the village, she has succeeded in winning the inhabitants' trust. A group of friends and supporters helped her to visit each house and to speak with the people. She focused her message on the marginal groups, old people, unemployed, disabled, like the already mentioned L.B., who despite her handicap made use of the phone to summon up people's support⁴⁵. In Seaca, too, this sociability has proved useful. For instance, when I asked a

44 Her husband was born in Lozitsa.

45 It was very curious that when I applied the questionnaire on the 'mayoralty' item in Lozitsa several people assumed a satisfied look and said: "Oh, yes, our Prespa". Prespa is a local word of endearment.

local councilor if he knew the political platform of his party, he said yes, but he added that it was more important to be close to the people, which he does, being an electrician and maintaining the villagers' appliances free of charge⁴⁶.

The complexities of institutional trust as well as the ways of the role taking processes provide the raw material for an *ad-hoc* identity, which overlaps with the core of the local, tradition-based identity. This could be called a "civic identity", yet in a different sense than the one usually applied in the political sciences. On the one hand, it is not a normative identity, but rather a "communal" one, i.e. an identity whose meanings and practices people share. Although the topic of "communal" identity is not a recent one, scholars have rarely addressed it. I will not make a point of it here, but I will note the common ground it has with the concept of civic identity. On the other hand, this concept is rooted in a particular pattern of civism, whose influence is visible every time when people face the issue of political and civic rights. It has to be stated, though, that when such circumstances arise, people prefer negotiating, making compromises and finally choosing *ad-hoc* solutions instead of initiating open civic actions.

In such a way, for instance, the people from Belene cope with the matter of ethnic and religious minorities, a subject that I have broached above. In Romania, this sort of situations can also be found. In order to illustrate this further I will refer to the Seaca village, in which there lives a substantial Gypsy minority⁴⁷. Until the end of land collectivization in the village, there were only one or two Gypsy families. Like many of the Gypsies from South Romania, their business was singing folklore tunes. The emergence of the collective farm (1954-1955) and its development after 1959 provided several opportunities for the Gypsy nomadic groups to settle. At the very beginning they attempted to do it in Năvodari, the neighboring village dependent on Seaca. They failed because some people rose against them. Instead, due to the authorities' liberal attitude and the natives' tolerance they could stay in an area of the village of Seaca. Later, this part was included in the residential space of the village and the mayoralty, with the consent of the collective farm, assigned to them spaces to build houses. In return, they had to take on jobs as workers on the collective farm. In a few years by there was a significant influx of Gypsies from the neighboring villages.

While at the beginning they observed the agreement with the authorities and took jobs on the collective farm, later the members of the next generation turned to industry and began commuting. Besides, in the 1980s part of their work force started to seek other kinds of jobs in agriculture. Led by some more active members of their community, they organized themselves and

46 This political incentive was in a way intriguing. Therefore, I asked more people about that. All of them confirmed that M.V. maintains their appliances; hence he is a popular figure.

47 Another significant minority living in Seaca is that of the Adventists.

began to seek work in the state farms, far outside the village. The rationale of this option was very simple: the payments were higher than in the village's collective farm. In addition, their organization helped them to hoard the resources. Some representatives went to explore the work requirements. After finding a good farm, they concluded a verbal agreement and only then did the whole work group come.

This strategy proved to be beneficial after 1990, too. This time the mayoralty provided them with some opportunities, first by giving them, according to the 1991 Land Restitution Law, half a hectare of land. The Gypsies immediately turned to the vegetable crops (before 1990 they had worked mainly on this sort of farms). Furthermore, they leased from the other villagers plots in order to extend their plots⁴⁸. Being very well organized, they managed to sell their products even in Bucharest (120 km away). In the recent years, though, they have changed their priorities again, opting for emigration.

The outcomes of such fast-paced changes in their life strategies became visible, mostly in the form of a few big houses that some Gypsies have built in the village. Besides, since there is a great numbers of houses for sale in the village, many Gypsies buy houses in an area once forbidden to them. These facts did not go unnoticed. Some natives have expressed discontent, but without fueling public opposition. In fact, on the one hand, the native population is tolerant. Furthermore, they recognize and even admire the Gypsy community for their organizing capacity as well as for their mutual help. In the same way, the Gypsies appreciate the natives' tolerance because unlike in the neighboring villages, they do not provoke scandals. On the other hand, already settled, in spite of their strong ethnic identity⁴⁹, the Gypsies have accepted the institutions of the native population, like the lineage kinship and household. In fact, in the view of many natives they were so successful in their settlement due to their accepting these institutions. And that is true since the lineage and mononuclear household meet not only the social demands of the Gypsies from Seaca, but also their economic needs. More specifically, the principles of mutual help and re-distribution for the community's sake are put into practice through these institutions.

It is significant that the Gypsies from Seaca did not mention any relationship with the local institutions. One of their leaders, S.D., said, for instance, that, since they need to know Romanian, they never required learning their mother tongue in Romani, in school. Moreover, they keep speaking Romani in their families, and they are quite happy with this state of affairs. In local politics the Gypsy community does not have a pronounced presence either. S.D. him-

48 At that time some natives with entrepreneurial skills joined them, like L.C., who later became the mayor of the commune.

49 Almost all of them speak their mother tongue. In addition, they have preserved their traditional institutions.

self ran in the 2000 local elections. Despite the support that he had from one of the few parties of the Gypsy minority in Romania, he failed to win a seat. Therefore, in 2004 he chose to run as an independent candidate. It has to be stated however, that both the Gypsies and Adventists have local councilors, but on the list of the main parties.

The case of the Gypsy community in Seaca, like in fact, the minority situation in Belene, is a good example of how civic identity is based on a certain degree of institutional trust, as well as on the role taking processes.

First, it has to be argued that this civic identity is a result of the trust in the institutions, but, through the community/social group, the former exerts a feed-back influence on the latter⁵⁰. In this sense, the minority issue is a matter that directly concerns the local community. On the one hand, neither in Belene nor in Seaca, the regional and governmental institutions might have an influence. On the other hand, in both cases the local community has managed to provide accurate solutions to the minority issue.

It is true that in Romania the high degree of mistrust in each of the three considered institutions, kinship, the mayoralty and the parties, makes these solutions rather short-termed, whereas their effects could seem highly unpredictable. However, in this case, what matters more is the minorities' reluctance to take roles within the frame of the existing local institutions, an attitude that in fact, does not impede the open expression of their identity (the Gypsies and Adventists declare at the censuses their identity).

In the same sense, we should note that in the Bulgarian area, while the mistrust toward the local institutions is lower, the neutrality/passivity is higher. There are, however, local institutions (the house of culture) and patterns (sociability) which, being autonomous as regards politics, provide the frame for the building of civic identity. In addition, since in both areas these institutions depend on persons and situations, it makes sense to speak rather of a "situational" civism, in which the community's mediation is essential.

In the light of the second statement of the above scheme, civism is "useful" because it refers either to the community's development or to the sense of belonging to it. Indicative in this respect is, for instance, the clear-cut option of S.Y. from Belene, who has decided to give up on political affiliation for a civic, community-based commitment. His strong reason was, as I have said, the idea that at the local level the minorities' prosperity is linked to the community's development. In Romania this idea has been expressed, too. Asked, for instance, about the relations with the Adventists, one councilor of the Orthodox Church from Seaca, said that the Adventists belong to their village: „they are part of us”.

50 On this causal scheme see (Douglas 2002: 74).

In fact, civic identity is neither an intended effect of institutional trust, nor do the local people know its causal link with the latter. The notion of civism in itself is strange to them. These statements are obvious only at first sight, if someone looks at the results of the associative map. It would be misleading to stick to the level of these results, since, as I have argued above, the people share the meanings and behaviors of a sort of local civism. It will not make sense therefore to ask them openly about a certain formal knowledge of the civic prerequisites; it would be more meaningful to observe and interpret their behavior in circumstances regarding ethnic and/religious difference.

Concluding remarks

The distance between Bucharest, the capital of Romania, and Rousse, the closest town from Bulgaria, does not exceed 100 km. However, if someone chooses to travel to Bulgaria by taking the train from Bucharest, he will be a little surprised by the long time, almost four hours, that this travel takes. What could that mean? Does it actually mean anything? First, we could say that, at least in this case, the time for passing the border differs from the time spent within the borders. Secondly, it is a little startling that although the Danube border between Romania and Bulgaria is so long, there is only one permanent customs office on the Danube, situated on the bridge between Giurgiu and Rousse⁵¹. So it seems that in spite of the Romanticist view, according to which the Danube River is a “dustless highway” (Ispas 1997), this river severely separates the two countries, at least for now.

Let us follow our route from Bucharest to Rousse and use our imagination. Let us say that because of this lack of ‘bridges’, the people who have to pass either from Bulgaria to Romania, or vice versa, are compelled to use the route Bucharest – Rousse. Further, someone could imagine a train compartment, which, because the train has only one second-class car, is overcrowded. In this compartment, there is an old woman who, although having Romanian citizenship, speaks Bulgarian and Aroumanian, too. Her parents were Aroumanians and settled in South Dobroudja after World War I. At the beginning of the 1940s they migrated to North Dobroudja. She left them and moved to Bucharest, where she married a Bulgarian. In the compartment, she talks in a lively manner with the two Aroumanian girls from Peshtera who are studying medicine in Bucharest. Next to them, there are two Bulgarians who have

51 Despite the official discussions, which were held before as well as after 1990, this is the sole bridge that links Bulgaria to Romania. Only recently they have started, after a long period of exploration, the preliminary works to another bridge on the Danube, that between Vidin and Calafat. In comparison, someone could note that although the The Danube flows only on Romania’s territory over a far shorter distance; however, there are two bridges and they have the intention of building another one.

done some shopping in Bucharest. The old woman knows them because she also practices this sort of business in Rousse. In the compartment, there is also a young Romanian who has Italian citizenship.

All these people seem to like each other, but they disperse in Rousse, after the exchanging hasty good-byes. The compartment is emptying, yet there a question lingering: what sort of social group have the people from this compartment formed? Do they belong to 'Balkan society' or it was only a matter of circumstance that they met and behaved in this manner? Perhaps the answer lies in between these two options. This example is actually the very illustration of the civic/communal identity about which I have talked above. Thus, being different does not exclude mutual understanding, trust, as well as sharing a common identity.

But what kind of difference is that, given that it affords the creation of a common identity? First, it has to be stated that this difference is not individual, but group-centered. Therefore, in approaching it, "methodological individualism" misses the point. For instance, as I found through the associative map, the people from these areas trust in the community but without having a concrete idea about it. On the contrary, they show a great mistrust vis-à-vis the institutions, having, however, a more precise image of them. I would argue that this is because their perception of their social milieu is 'situational' and practice-based rather than individualistic.

Secondly, this difference is not rooted in the individuals, but in the groups. In other words, the differences are most pronounced in the belonging of the individuals to the local groups. On the one hand, the social interactions, role takings for instance, give rise to difference. On the other hand, there are deeper layers that influence it. More specifically, these are the value orientation, the practices and the structures of common knowledge. As has already been argued, these differences are effective at the level of one single community (Mihăilescu 1999).

This perception of difference might be seen in relation to a broader theoretical issue. This refers to the manner in which the people from South-Eastern Europe perceive and imagine themselves. Indicative in this sense is the manner in which some authors have seen this matter: "Why am I dealing with cross-border regional identity and not with the Balkan region as a whole? The question arises precisely because the "Balkans" are known to have been constituted by an external Western perspective that identifies them as an entity, ignoring the distinctions within these selfsame "Balkans." And this common characteristic is predominantly associated with Balkanization, seen as violent sub-regionalization which entails multiplication of nation-states. I believe it is futile to replace – in yet another sweeping generalization – this Western generalized image with a homegrown and just as generalized one that highlights the positive, Southeast European face of these selfsame Balkans at, say,

the everyday level or as a specific regionally spread common culture. I think it would be more productive if, being on the Balkans, we sought to identify the distinctions within those selfsame Balkans and the tendencies towards positive regionalization concerning the surmounting of borders, and not just towards autonomization of local nation states' (Kabakchieva 2003: 1).

In this respect, the boundaries in the Balkan region could be imagined as spaces of multicultural diversity. Some local prerequisites like bilingualism, autonomous local institutions, and duty-free economic areas on the one hand, should be preserved and even enhanced. On the other hand, keeping the model of Western democracies as a cornerstone of political and civic development, one could discern in it nothing more than the local incentives. Obviously, that means a long-term program of transformation, whose costs might exceed the apparent benefits. However, these latter ones could be lasting, as well as useful for the people living in this corner of Europe.

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