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LEADERSHIP, INVOLVEMENT AND RETREAT: INDIVIDUAL SOURCES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN URBAN ROMANIA

Introduction. Objectives

Recently, 'active citizenship' has become one of the motifs in the official discourse of the European Union. The Western European focus on this sort of citizenship has its origin, on the one hand, in the presumed decline of traditional forms of governance and the emergence of new social movements, but also in the pressure towards a more thorough social inclusion that could be achieved by the instruments of citizenship.[1] If active citizens really exist, their presence is crucial for the democratic health of political communities suffering from the 'legitimacy crisis' that Habermas (1976) diagnosed in the late modern Western Societies, as well as for social development in communities that feel the retreat of welfare states. The issues of democratic governance and social inclusion are not more acute in any European country than Romania, where the prospects for these two dimensions are usually seen as very grim.

My study tries to cover some of the topics that are exposed in this introductory paragraph. First, I shall try to conceptualize active citizenship using the language of collective action theory, rendering profitable the developments from the various traditions of thought on surmounting social dilemmas. Having defined the active citizen, I will use interview data attempting to uncover the mechanisms and motivations that lie behind a person's patterned behavior as an active citizen. Finally, I will discuss the consequences of my findings for the theories of participation in collective action and for the democratic governance and social development programs in Romania.

The concept of active citizenship

Looking for the source of active citizenship is not merely a scholarly issue, but the quest for it is hindered by conceptual ambiguity. The combination of traits which combine features of direct democracy, social movements and social citizenship under vague concepts like 'agents of change' is hard to grasp for a single person and even harder to operationalize. No wonder that current research on the topic[2] is hardly reliable: it lacks a clear definition of active citizenship.

Understanding the idea of active citizenship using the language of social science is also difficult because the concept itself has been used primarily in the field of political thinking. But two other important reasons are the liberal bias concerning the topic of citizenship and the fragmented nature of the social scientific discourse on issues related to participation. The first diverts the search for resources of active citizenship to the realm of organized political action, conventional or even contentious, or reduces the idea of active citizenship to action in a simplified vision of civil society. The second obscures the grounds for a theoretical synthesis.

The liberal bias about association

In recent debates on social and political organization, liberal and communitarian views compete. Adepts of the so-called 'third way' accept liberal democracy, with its focus on human rights and the rule of law but are doubtful about the benign impact on human freedom in an unrestricted market economy and propose a quest for human happiness by accepting the importance of communities for personal accomplishment. The communitarian accent on collectivities and their capacity for autonomous organization and on direct forms of democracy collides with the liberal rejection of the state, virtually unrestrained scope of action for the powers of the market, a focus on the autonomous and utilitarian individuals and with the explicit circumspection concerning participatory democracy and the civic competencies of all citizens (Almond and Verba, 1989). The liberal discourse on active citizenship is loaded with the premises of the liberal narrative on politics and society, and what concerns us most is the focus on political action and conventional forms of associative membership. A reason for this could be the association of the concept of citizenship with liberal thinking, which needs little demonstration, and the over-representation of the liberal and neo-liberal rhetoric in the current

social sciences, especially in the political sciences. In this respect citizenship is assimilated with the virtues of the 'citoyen', or the 'burger' whose most important means of public action is associative, much as the Americans that de Tocqueville described. According to this simplified version of liberalism, active citizens should belong to a middle class of joiners, in the traditional sense of class, in a permanent state of hostility towards the state, seen as the Leviathan. On the empirical level, the consequence is an overemphasis on associative membership, as an indicator of or, even more, predictor of democratic health of a society (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1993).

If the debate in Western political thought is distorted towards the liberal edge, in the transition countries one can find an almost uniformly biased view. This is reflected in negative prospects seen for democracy and democratization in some countries based usually on the significantly lower figures for voluntary membership (Howard, 2003). One can reject this associative bias with the help of several logical and empirical arguments.

First, according to the figures analyzed in several works by Skockpol and Crowley (2001) the associative participation of Americans was, from the beginning neither as grass-roots, nor as autonomously organized as the Tocquevillean tradition pretends. It was rather that the state lacked the administrative resources to cope with crisis situations like the Civil War. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of the community development movement in the Britain of the late 70s and 80s, which consisted in community initiatives fostered primarily by the state (Marinetto, 2003). More than that, though the liberal literature gives little chances for community involvement in the poorer countries or collectivities, the casuistic literature contradicts such a thesis with examples such as Baiochi (2001) provided about Brazil, which is a proof that good leadership can compensate for low civic skills even in the lowest strata of the society.

Second, the class bias of conventional associative membership is certainly documented, especially for the so-called 'new social movements' whose members overwhelmingly belong to the 'new middle class' (Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995). At the same time, conventional voluntary associations are less and less representative of citizens' interests and more and more professionalized (Skockpol, 2003). In the former communist countries, bias is nurtured by the liberal origin of most sponsorship for newly emerged NGOs, which rarely address any issues

salient on the public agenda, are clearly managerial, and lack the legitimacy of any reference to community or collectivity.

Indeed, if one inspects the figures of voluntary membership in Romania, there is hardly any. According to the Public Opinion Barometer of May 2002, of the 7% declaring membership in an association, more than a half consists of union members while the rest is split in Hungarians and Neo-Protestants. The alternative view to that of a vibrant civil society is that of an atomized world sunk in mistrust and deception, which is hardly able to do anything collectively without state direction. But if we take seriously the arguments listed above, voluntary association is neither the single indicator of civic resources nor the best. A conceptualization of active citizenship has to consider all the various ways in which societies' capacities to solve collective problems occur.

What is known in Romanian as *Scara* [*de bloc*] [3] is ideal from this point of view: it constitutes micro-mobilization using the terminology of social movement theory. According to McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988) a micro-mobilization context is 'any small group setting in which processes of collective attribution are combined with rudimentary forms of organization to produce mobilization for collective action'. They have clear limits, evident situations of social dilemma, produce collective goods or preserving collective properties, and possess a simple organization that customarily includes democratically elected leaders. Since they are numerous, comparisons are easy to be done while the quasi-random distribution of individuals across *scari* allows for control of other variables.

Reconstructing active citizenship as involvement in collective action

There are several recent traditions of scholarship devoted to participation that have produced interesting results without much communication among them. Yet these also bear marks of liberal bias. One is the rich theoretical and empirical investigation of political participation and political socialization, the second is the mentioned younger but equally prolific preoccupation with voluntary participation, a third orientation is the recent research and theory on social movements, the last is two decades' work on community involvement in community participation which has been most popular among community developers and development specialists. To these research domains, one can add

the contribution of debates on the topic of 'social capital' which avowed the centrality of issues of collective goods for social sciences and emphasized more than ever the importance of cultural and sociological variables in the explanation of basic economic and institutional phenomena.

It is equally true that the above mentioned segmentation is determined primarily by the different institutional and scientific loyalties of those engaged in the field. Therefore, delivering a conceptually coherent discourse on active citizenship is difficult. This requires a conceptualization able to cover the similarities and conducive to a theoretical synthesis that capitalize on the valuable results of all research. Our first endeavor is devoted to produce such a definition of active citizenship.

These three directions of research can be understood as reflecting specific dimensions of active citizenship and not merely as diverging schools of thought. In all of them, the focus of study is on individuals engaging voluntarily in solving collective problems at various levels, and who are more or less institutionalized, whether on a larger or smaller scale.

In all the three cases mentioned above – political participation, associative membership and community engagement – the main common issue is that of the voluntary reflective involvement of individuals in the provision of what economists call public goods. One differentiating aspect is the nature of the goods produced. Political organizations and actions give voice to constituents and make their interests represented and promoted within the mainstream political institutional sphere. Work on political activism and social movement participation has stressed the identity building and promotion role of such institutions. Voluntary associations are typically regarded as oriented towards the promotion of interests common to members, be they material or cultural. Community action groups, like self-help groups are instrumentally organized arrangements oriented towards the delivery of needed goods to members. Therefore, we can define the active citizen as a person who engages actively in the production of public goods, whatever they may be.

Using such a definition we can frame the problem of active citizenship within the conceptual matrix of collective action. The basic problem of collective action, as first stated by Olson (1966), is the achievement of a sufficient rate of participation in the provision of public good, admitting that the incentives for free riding are serious. In other words, the problem

is to motivate a sufficient number of individuals to contribute to the common good against their interest in non-participation. The problem of active citizenship becomes consequently that of creating conditions in which individuals become involved in various initiatives to solve collective problems.

Leadership vs. activism

In utopian views of community action, collective action is the result of investment of similar amounts and types of resources on behalf of the members. Collective action is, actually, often a heterogeneous process in what regards the individual input as well as the form in which the contribution is made. One common variable in instances of collective action is the distinction between leadership and membership. I argue the need to distinguish between the two roles mentioned above. Those that play leadership roles are able to alter the motivations of the members of the communities and are themselves beneficiaries of a distinct pattern of rewards.

Early versions of theorization on collective action, like Olson's, did not discuss separately the place of leaders in the economy of collective action. Special roles in the mobilization process were suggested later merely through differential investment or regarding the moment of involvement. Thus Marwell, Oliver and Teixeira (1985) admit the importance of those that involve first in provision of the collective good, which can create a 'critical mass' that change the utility function of participation for future participants. In the same vein, Elster (1989) bypasses the apparent irrationality of those who contribute first and thus create the critical mass, attributing them an axiological rationality and calling them Kantians. Certainly, the oblivion of leadership in organizing collective action can be explained partially by the individualist emphasis of these schools of thought according to which the action is the more or less simple aggregation of decisions and actions of similar actors.

Even second-generation theories of collective action have been reluctant to introduce the concept and idea of leadership into explanations of collective action. Ostrom (1990) and Ostrom and Ahn (2001) examined institutions of collective action and the impact of social capital on the success or failure of collective action, but only speak rarely about leadership. One exception in this area of research is, perhaps, Samuel

Popkin's "Rational Peasant" (1977). Analyzing the Vietnamese anti-colonial organizations of peasants, Popkin acknowledges the importance of leadership for an organization's success. He calls the person that organizes a collective action "political entrepreneur," whose role is that of a person "which is available to invest time and resources in order to coordinate others' inputs for the production of collective goods" (p. 190). According to Popkin, the main task of the leader is to change the perceived structure of rewards of the actors whose contributions are expected or, put in another way, to alter the individuals' expectations concerning the effectiveness of personal contribution and the possibility of a benefit from the involvement.

Developments in the area of social movements admitted a more complicated view of the processes of mobilization, in which leadership is required for the success of collective action. From this point of view, movement analysts have usually recognized the importance of leaders as organizers (McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, 1989) and distinguished among three types of movement participants: leaders, members and adherents. Using the language of the movement theories, leaders are those that have important contribution to processes of collective attribution and organizing the collective action (Idem).

These features are most clearly, and commonsensically, emphasized in leadership theories according to which (Kouzes and Posner, 1995) leaders a) challenge processes, b) inspire a common vision, c) allow others to act, d) model the paths of action, and e) encourage members of an organization. The same authors define leadership as "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (p.30).

Moreover, leaders not only modify the adherents' function of utility for involvement, but reap additional benefits from participating compared to the rest of the community. The most important is the prestige and honor one gets from leading a collective initiative, along with a better or strengthened position in a collective network. From the start, the motivations of leaders appear to be different from those of adherents.

Knowledge about the sources of leadership in community organizations is not very settled. Popkin (1977) has noticed in his fieldwork in Vietnam that, in order for leadership to be achieved, leaders must be chosen from the most trusted and capable members of a society. This goes hand in hand with a central position in the community network structure, evocative of the highest prestige and competencies (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1988).

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To conclude, one has to distinguish among leaders and adherents. The former are those that are first to get involved, who make the others see the situation in ways that support action, who are able to organize action, but who also receive a greater rewards from the overall action, including a prestige bonus. Leaders are expected to emerge from the strata of the most central persons in the community network structure.

Building a theoretical model of participation in collective action that takes into account the distinction between leaders and simple activists is not simple, as the current literature overlooks the specificities of the two classes of actors. In the next paragraph I will provide a general overview of the literature concerning participation in collective action, while the distinction between leaders and activists will be theorized later.

Theorizing participation: who gets involved?

The various theories that have been developed in the heterogeneous field of participation research uncover five grand categories of variables linked directly to individual involvement in collective action: psychological conditions, cultural factors, micro-structural features of the collectivities, the resources available, and social class. The four types of predictors correspond to divergent paradigms of social action and organization; thus one can say that the domain is exhaustively covered by the various perspectives in the social sciences. For instance, the emphasis on cultural factors and/or community structure is specific to the social capital school, which adds a *homo sociologicus* perspective to the focus on resources specific to rational choice theoretical explanations of participation. Resource and the class analyzes regard similar features of the individual as important, but view the relationship between the individual and action differently.

Psychological theories

Approaches to social movements have proposed several explanations for activism that are reducible to the psychological state or personality traits of the individual. McCarthy, McAdam and Zald (1988) list authoritarianism, the desire to achieve cognitive consistency and relative deprivation. Even an unresolved Oedipal conflict between male activists

and their fathers has been used in the explanation of student movements. Though highly implausible, such a Freudian interpretation can be attached to the Romanian Re-ETGACE research data, where contrary to expectations, a negative record of parents was salient in several cases (Re-ETGACE, 2004).

More recently, the concept of anger has acquired some notoriousness in the studies of movements as a main motive for becoming involved in contentious political action (Ost, 2004). While Ost sees anger only as an intermediate factor between a culturally defined situation and action, for Kemper (1978) action is determined by the anger provoked by restrictions to individual's autonomy.

theories that explain movement involvement through status discontent (Lipset and Raab, 1978) and status inconsistency (Lenski, 1956) are closer to the relative deprivation argument. The empirical evidence that supports these theories is weak (Wood and Hughes, 1984) although several have attempted to account for activism in various fields, especially in politics and social movements, with status related explanations.[4]

Close to the culturally determined view of action described below is a more recent hypothesis that attributes regulated patterns of decisions in situations of social dilemmas to deeply rooted predispositions called social orientations. Corresponding to the preferences for the distribution of the outcomes in situations of strategic interaction, people can be classified into types such as cooperative, individualist, competitive, altruist and aggressive (Kullock, 1998). According to the literature, there is significant empirical evidence to support this theory: social orientations predict effective behavior in situations of social dilemma (Liebrand, 1986) and are significantly correlated with other personality traits. However, the cultural nature of these orientations is only supposed. This literature describes people in terms and circumstances close to personality traits, hence under a psychological heading. This seems as legitimate as classifying people in cultural terms.

Another less researched, but similarly significant psychological factor is the latent orientation towards social activism which has been referred to by several researches (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995). Common sense and methodological caution suggest the possibility of a latent factor of psychological nature, identifiable with a higher predisposition to get involved in collective action, whether to support its costs or lead collective action. This factor is hypothesized as a residual variable explaining everything left over by the other theoretical models, or as a third variable

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accounting for the relationships among other characteristics in non-experimental studies.

Psycho-sociological factors are relevant in many models as mediators between socio-cultural factors and involvement. One such important factor is self-efficacy, a concept approached by Bandura (1995), which is in reciprocal relationship with actual and successful engagement.

The cultural view

In the 50s and early 60s there was a widespread view that action is determined by the individual's reference to norms and values: abstract components of culture understood as an autonomous symbolic superstructure that determines individual judgments and choices. As the adherence to a culture is the result of the various stages and forms of socialization, this view has been since then embraced by pedagogical optimists because permits the modeling of personal behavior through institutionalized transmission of patterns, i.e. through civic education.

In the last recent decade, there have been several important works trying to delineate the cultural peculiarities that are conducive or opposed to a socially participatory lifestyle. One is Almond and Verba's well known 'Civic Culture' (1989), which distinguishes between participatory, dependent and parochial civic culture. There have been several attempts to conceptualize the systems of beliefs, norms or values and attitudes that explain participation, especially in the political or civil society field. Jeffrey Alexander and Smith (1993) speak of a civil religion, which is supposedly a precondition of democracy. Bellah (1980) refers to claims for civic engagement as 'secondary languages of social responsibility' of practices of commitment for the public good. Others, like Inglehard (1990) refer to civic culture as an autonomous field that explains, among other things, the readiness to contribute to the public good.

The normativist perspective of this current of thought is less concerned with the ontological autonomy of culture. It is also called Durkheimian because it holds involvement to be an expression of solidarity derived from a set of collective obligations (Hechter, 1987). The compulsion to act can be derived either from norms or from identity (as in Craig Calhoun's superb essay on the Chinese students participation in the riot on the Tiananmen Square (1991). Even a strict adept of the rational choice theory such as Elster (1989) admits that the first to get involved in collective

action are driven by submission to norms, and only those following their example make instrumental calculations.

Regardless of the pedagogical virtues of such attitudes toward participation, an assessment on the grounds of consistency and empirical evidence provides a rather negative result. On the level of basic assumptions, the culturalist perspective has been accused of being idealistic or metaphysical (Alexander and Smith, 1993). Research, on the other hand, after an impressive record of contradictions between measured attitudes and actual behavior, had to admit that the 'role of individual attitudes in shaping activism must be regarded as fairly limited' (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988, p. 706). Moreover, even when attitudes and conduct match, they are suspect of the endogeneity problem, as the recent debate concerning the relationship between interpersonal trust and associative membership shows.

Other critiques concern the theoretical depth of the interpretations of relationship between attitudes and activism. Starting from admitting the association between social class and participatory attitudes, Beck and Jennings (1982) conclude that participation is transmitted from one generation to the other not through a simple processes of socialization but via status transmission, in which schools for instances play the role of social reproducers. This stream of research was developed especially by Bourdieu and will be detailed in the paragraph on class analysis of participation.

Noteworthy in this context is Alexander and Smith's (1993) attempt to rejuvenate the culturalist paradigm. They start by admitting that earlier versions of the model were mechanical and they, together with the later correlational models, had left human action without meaning. The two authors build on structuralist premises: culture, which is thought of as a structure of symbolic sets, is formally autonomous because 'meaning is produced by the internal play of the signifiers' (p.157), i.e. meaning is produced from the relations to other symbols, a semiotic presumption borrowed from Saussure. Sign sets are organized into discourses which both communicate and play evaluative tasks. The actors evaluate situations according to binary sets of signifiers that reproduce the fundamental opposition between good and bad, which give meaning to the world through analogy and metaphor. However, autonomy concerns not only culture, but actions too, with regard to culture, even in Alexander's terms, and the connection between individual acts and culture remains unclear. Two views are proposed here: cultural codes are resources to

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make actions accountable, and culture is also part of the institutionalization of social structures to which it adds the power of a norm.

It is quite evident that moving from description of discourses to explanation of action is a long way off. Therefore, looking for the causes of action in attitudes, motivations or, more generally, in discourses of the subjects bears heavy methodological risks that can be avoided only through careful experimental designs. On the other hand, is legitimate to look at how people account for their acts in situation of social dilemmas, as reflective of possible discourse of engagement and disengagement.

Network effects

Research on collective action has noticed the impact of community network structure on participation. According to some accounts (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988), people participate not for psychological or attitudinal reasons but because their structural location in the world makes it easier for them to do so. Thus, one of the most important predictors of future involvement is being connected to a movement member. McAdam, in his famous study of the involvement in the Freedom Summer movement of 1986, has found that those who attended the action until the end had had twice a greater probability to hold strong ties to other joiners that those who had withdrew earlier. Likewise, strong or dense interpersonal networks encourage the extension of an invitation to participate and ease the uncertainty of mobilization (McAdam, Paulsen, 1993). This is also applicable in neighborhoods or formal organizations, which provide the necessary networks. Adding to these findings, Kim and Bearman (1997) concluded that actors increase their interest in the production of collective goods if they are connected to actors with higher levels of interest who contribute. Consequently, collective action is put into practice only if there is a positive correlation between the interest in the realization of collective action and power, or of network centrality.

The micro-context for mobilization qualities of *scara* has been already discussed. In addition, *scara* have network structures that are expected to influence the outcome of collective action. Following the literature, I expect that leaders and joiners to be among the persons that have the most central positions in the networks of ties in the neighborhood. As my research does not include network analysis, a proxy for network centrality

is required. It can be found in the length of belonging to the network: the longer one stays in a collectivity, the more he/she interacts with other members and becomes more strongly and densely connected to other members of the community. According to this logic, network density in a *scara* is a function of residential mobility, since I expect to find among the least active members those that have shorter common histories with the collectivity. On the other hand, at least theoretically, interest in the collective good is constant, and thus does not have to be taken into account.

Resources and activism

Adherents of this position maintain that involvement has to be understood primarily from the point of view of the goals and means of the actors. We have here a Weberian standpoint, characteristic for promoters of rational choice theory or methodological individualism. Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1999) argue that using resources as predictors of participation has important methodological advantages over attitudinal models: attitudes are volatile, difficult to measure, and hard to compare across individuals. Resources, by contrast, are usually factual. In addition, assessing the effects of attitudes involves endogeneity, a problem discussed above.

Resources have been recognized as important predictors of social participation in several research traditions. Mancur Olson (1966) was the first to predict that heterogeneous groups will have a greater probability to succeed in producing the public good, because members with greater resources will have a greater incentive in the good, and, we can add, lower opportunity costs associated with their investment. Recent syntheses (Varughese and Ostrom, 2001) have shown that empirical tests of heterogeneity hypothesis produced divergent outcomes. Hence, the causal mechanism relating the distribution of resources and interest and the probability of initiation and success of collective action is more complex.

In political science it was popular in the 70s and the 80s to explain political participation through the additional resources for involvement that a higher status provides. The lack of specification of the causal mechanism linking socio-economic status with participation, except for the straightforward effect of time and money, was later corrected by Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) through the introduction of the concept

of civic skills which they define as 'communication and organizational capacities that are so essential to political activity', but which can be defined as general competencies accumulated during one's life span that can be transferred from one domain to the other.

There are several factors that explain the various endowments of individuals with civic skills. One is formal education, which determines engagement in two ways (Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry, 1996): the better educated are more capable of understanding their environment, to communicate and organize per se, but also have more central positions in social networks. Besides that, workplace, voluntary organizations and churches are other institutional settings in which civic competencies are accumulated. In the area of social movement, strong evidence had been gathered to support the idea that a history of prior activism increases the likelihood of future activism. Although the 'know how' derived from direct experience of participation can explain the involvement, other intermediary factors have been also proposed (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1988). For instance, during participation in different voluntary organizations, the actor can develop an identity of 'activist', together with the corresponding role set, and search to enact that role. The longer the history of previous activism, the more important the 'activist' role becomes in a person's identity. Becker (1963) proposed an alternative hypothesis, which involves considering the actor evaluating the opportunity costs of exiting an activist career in which he had already invested some resources.

One yet rarely explored question in Romanian studies of activism is the impact of prior membership in voluntary organizations on present involvement. There are obvious reasons for this gap: the democratic history is too short to justify a significant membership history, while the communist organizations were hardly voluntary, so their impact on skill and civic attitudes is difficult to assess using the available literature. In a recently published article, Marc Morje Howard (2003) was able to prove the somewhat counterintuitive correlation between the lack of activism in the communist period and the avoidance of involvement in post-communist East Germany and Russia. Still the impact of membership and activism in comprehensive 'voluntary' organizations like the Union of Communist Youth or the Communist Party is largely unevaluated. For most of the Romanian adults aged over 35, these organizations were the only chance to be activists. Did the people involved in such organizations acquire civic skills which would nurture future activism? Did they

inculcate identities of activists, of persons who become involved in situations of social dilemma, that are still in action and compelling people to embark in collective action? Or, on the contrary, did such organizations make idea of voluntary action seem obsolete or illegitimate by the power of negative learning?

Another general dimension that determines the availability of individual for social participation is the person's life cycle. With every transition in the life-cycle, such as that from un-married status to family holder, a different set of circumstances and obligations intervenes, encouraging and hindering participation in situations such as those described in our research. According to McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988), men become more participatory after marriage, which is not the case for women. Men have friendship centered networks, which encourage engagement, whereas women retreat into kin centered networks that are less favorable for social involvement. Several questions connecting life-cycle characteristics with involvement can be asked with immediate relevance for the issue of *scara* level collective action. Does being young discourage involvement, since youth prioritizes other problems, while the elderly have more incentive to involve in collective initiative and fewer cross cutting motivations that could divert them from community problems? Or, on the other hand, do older people find it difficult to invest in collective goods because of poor health, while employed and married adults may find participation costly due to their limited time?

Class effects

Conflict theories of social activism are ready to note a statistical correspondence between social activism and the membership in the middle class. This is proof of the socially reproductive effects of conventional political and voluntary activism that eliminates the voices of people from the lower social strata. At the same time, activism contributes to the strengthening of class advantages of the active classes. The process by which activism is connected to class politics was specified in several ways among which the most salient is the class culture or the class habitus theses. Both theses assume that members of classes which are identified on the basis of material resources act following cultural imperatives which are class specific and are transmitted inter-generationally through various processes of socialization. For

example, McClleland (1976) describes members of the middle class as more ambitious, achievement oriented, autonomous and active, in contrast to the members of the working class who are passive, past oriented and submissive. Bourdieu (1984) refers to class unconscious, named habitus, which reflect the unrecognizable connections between the class positions – describable in terms of appropriated capitals, and social choices.

The transmission of class culture, or habitus, from one generation to other, and of the corresponding patterns of decisions regarding social participation justify the prediction that leadership, activism and non-involvement should display some sort of correlation with class origin. The population in *scari* is heterogeneous concerning social origin, therefore, although since the relationship between class and activism half a century ago in NW Transylvania is not clear, building hypotheses is no easy task. However, the literature is rather clear in one respect: the higher the social status, the more active the person, so we expect to have mainly inhabitants of higher social origins among the leaders and the collective action joiners, and mostly people of peasant and working class background among the least active.

Research objectives

My research has two main objectives: 1) to investigate the factual covariates of involvement in its three facets of leadership, engagement and passivity and to test the several of the propositions from the theoretical paragraph and 2) to reconstruct analytically the justifying discourses of involvement and non-involvement.

Data and methods

Testing models of participation in collective action is not an easy task, as seen in the split picture of this research area and theory. My choice was for a qualitative inquiry in which I controlled for many of the intervening variables. I realized 28 biographical interviews with subjects distributed evenly in three main analytical categories, leaders, activists and passive members, selecting as a sampling unit a single mobilization contexts: the *scara*. The 10 leaders were the elected *scara* leaders – with

the exception of one former leader who acted as a replacement in a situation in which the collectivity blocked the appointment of an official representative. Nine active members were selected randomly from lists of nominees provided by the leader, containing residents of the *scara* that participate constantly and consistently in the collective actions carried out by the community. The same selection procedure was used for the identification of the passive members, which were described as neighbors that contributed least to the achievements of the *scara*.

The *Scara* as a context of public good provision

Families grouped in blocks of flats faced common issues; problems that affected the quality of life for everyone in varying degrees. Degraded rooftops, leaking pipes and dirt in the common spaces can be addressed only through collective involvement, which means at least monetary contribution to a collective paycheck. *Scara* have other features that make them attractive to research of our kind: clear boundaries, which solves one of the concerns raised by Ostrom (1991) for such institutions and formal regulations stimulating self-organization and self-government. According to the Law no. 114 of 1996 on homes, neighborhood issues are solved within Inhabitants' Associations, which consist of various *Scari*. Any *scara* can secede from a larger Association and create its own Inhabitants' Association. The Association is regarded as a self-organizing institution of local democracy in which leadership and decision-making are established through democratic procedures.

Moreover, the problems facing the numerous *scari* in Oradea, such as painting walls, roof repairs, maintaining the sewage system and an interphone, service, are quite similar, thus assuring that this variable remains mostly constant. These problems coe from the outdated character of the buildings, most of which are at least two decades old, and from the new standards of comfort that have accompanied the modernization of the country. Of course, each *scari* has unique problems to solve, but the issue here is the community's capacity to cope with them.

One methodological problem comes from the presumably heterogeneous social constituency of *scari*: some blocks of flats are inhabited by affluent persons, while others are populated by the socially deprived. The current situation displays certain features of residential segregation according to social status, meaning that between the blocks

of flat there are differences in average income, life-style and social status. However, blocks of flats are by far less segregated than other residential types. According to recent social measurements, the richest families are living in houses located in the newest suburban neighborhoods while the poorest strata are located in century old houses situated around the city centre. People living in blocks of flats such as those introduced in the research belong to a large and mixed stratum of middle and lower class inhabitants.

Results
Scari as producers of collective goods

Against the pessimistic view of atomized collectives, incapable of overcoming social dilemmas, the *scari* of Oradea which I investigated display high capacities to solve common problems and improve the quality of life for their members through collective action. In the last five years, which constituted the period of reference for our interviews, many of the *scari* endowed themselves, through monetary contribution and the labor of their members, with thermally insulated doors at the main entrance, interphone devices that make the *scara* more secure, tiled rooftops to replace the original flat bitumen roof, and newly-painted main staircases. Depending on the locally defined needs and priorities, other collective investments have also been made, such repairs in the sewerage system or of basement.

All these achievements not only increase the comfort of the people living communally, but reduce the various costs of living. They represent, therefore, valuable investments. Significantly, the collective good qualities mentioned above have been realized through genuine collective action, without outside control or investment.

Yet my data also show that the capacity of collectivities to surpass social dilemmas is by no means equal. Two of the ten *scari* investigated did not report any collective good realized in the last five years, while other two collectivities succeeded in providing themselves only with minor benefit compared with the rest. Investigating the sources of community capacity for successful collective action is fascinating, but goes beyond the objectives of the current research.

Careers – Biographies

Testing the propositions described in the theoretical part of this paper supposes systematic comparisons of our subjects with regard to several of their biographical characteristics. The following paragraphs will briefly present the results of such comparisons without paying much attention to theorization. Only then I will integrate the results into a tentative explanatory model that will attempt to make intelligible the noticed patterns.

The characteristics compared in the following pages are social background, generation, and organizational history, counting both functions included and current occupational status.

Generations

The most striking aspect in terms of birth year are the overrepresentation of those between 46 and 60, and the virtual absence of the generation was born after that, especially those born in the 1960s. This contrast is most clear in the case of leaders and active members of *scara*, where only three persons out of 19 were born after 1960. Virtually all the *scara* leaders and their collaborators were born in the fifteen years that span from 1945 to 1960, i.e. aging from 45 to 60. In other words, the bulk of *scară* activists and leaders consists of people around retirement age. The inactive members' sub-sample is less homogenous from this point of view, including two persons that are rather young – born around 1980 and one person, born in 1964.

These features may be explained by at least two important factors: the actual structure of inhabitants in blocks of flat and selection biases. Selection biases due to operators could have operated especially in the case of active and inactive members of *scara*, as the interviewers had to choose from lists of collaborators and non-collaborator provided by the *scara* leaders. In the case of leaders, the possible distortions were introduced by the selection of the *scara*, which was done both on theoretical and opportunistic grounds.

Social background

To measure social background, I used the social status of the parents. Since the data were not of questionnaire type, the categories I have used were quite simple: peasants, workers and higher status background. The classification was done taking into account the parents' highest occupational status mentioned or, if occupation was not available, the parents' schooling.

Out of 28 interviewees, 13 come from working class families, 9 have peasant background and only 3 have parents with higher status – teachers, lawyers of clerks. There is no information for 3 persons. This structure is consistent with the occupational structure of the interval in which the subjects were born – mainly the period from 1945 to 1965. In addition, the distribution of social background in the three main categories of analysis is similar.

Organizational membership

One focus of my biographical interviews was the organizational biography of the persons concerned. By this, I mean formal membership in any kind of non-professional organization that could have taught civic competencies or indicate a participatory orientation on behalf of the person. The inventory of organizations collected from the interviews is not very diverse: it includes mainly former proto-political organizations like the comprehensive 'pioneers', former political organizations of the Union of the Communist Youth (UCY) and the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), labor unions, the army and voluntary organizations like sports clubs, religious associations or current NGOs. As expected, considering the age of the respondents, the comprehensive political organizations of the communist regimes were most often mentioned while present voluntary membership is very low.

Analyzing this feature within the three basic categories I found some interesting patterns. In the case of *scara* leaders one discovers two symmetric and opposed organizational careers. There is a consistent group of leaders who do not report membership to any organization. The other category displays a typical communist organizational life-path: they started with the "Pioneers" organization, continued with the UCY and reached a climax in adult life with acceptance in the RCP which was

paralleled by membership in labor union. The organizational biography of active members resembles that of the leaders with one important exception: its representatives did not make it to the RCP. Put more clearly, they have gone through the "Pioneers" and the UCY, but did not join the RCP or the labor union in adult life. Patterns of organizational biography are least clear in the case of inactive members, which is not very surprising considering the structure of this sub-sample. In their case, they typically belonged only to the "Pioneers" organization and the armed forces.

Positions

Under this heading I have searched for hierarchical positions regardless of the context, be it formal schooling, political organization or on the job. As emphasized in the theory, people with special leadership aptitudes are often gratified by being promoted or obtaining leading position ahead of others. There is also the possibility that a high degree of involvement in any kind of collectivity entails progress in hierarchy.

The main types of leading positions in formal hierarchies mentioned by our subjects in their biographical narratives related to pupils' self-management, political organizations, army and employment. The current community engagement status is strongly correlated with this feature. From leaders, to active members and ending with inactive members it is a constant decline in the total number of positions. Practically, this figure halves down from one category to the next: there are 20 positions collected for leaders, 12 for active members and 6 in the case of inactive members.

Most of the leaders had had at least two positions during their lives. The 9 hierarchical careers include apparently random combinations of leadership positions in the classroom, the former UCY and professional life. One could easily notice that members of this group, although most of them were members of the RCP did not attain even lower leading positions in the ruling party. Half of the active category had had no leading positions, while the other half obtained some positions in the classroom and in their job. In contrast to the leaders, their position attainment is both lower and does not include leadership in the former UCY. Inactive members of the sample stopped their ascension during schooling or, as in the majority of cases, did not have any position.

Occupations

I made an inventory of jobs for every subject, classifying them in general occupational categories. The overwhelming majority of the subjects were employed as workers. From the interviews results that, usually, a worker born around 1950 changed, until now, two or three jobs. Concerning this issue, there are not very deep contrasts between the three categories, except for a slight presence of non-workers, especially lower ranking clerks, in the groups of active and inactive members of *scara*.

Currently, most of my subjects are occupationally active. In numbers, this means that 21 subjects are employed at the moment while only 7 are retired. It is interesting however, that 4 of the retired subjects are leaders of the *scara*, suggesting that there is a connection between retirement and running for the leadership of *scara*.

Discussion

Our data allow significant insight into the mechanism and factors that encourage or hamper people to engage in or lead community initiatives in urban Romania. The absence of statistical data makes much of the interpretations here tentative. Nonetheless, the factual information supports some theses of the resources and networks model, supports the hypothesis of 'latent activism', is indifferent to culturalist model and rejects the class-culture theory.

Class does not seem very important

One important conclusion that can be drawn from the analyses is the rejection of the habitus, or class culture hypothesis. Subjects in all the three main categories are distributed similarly according to their social background making implausible the thesis that an orientation toward social activism and leadership or, vice versa, to passivity or retreat, is specific to one class ethos or other.

If this hypothesis is confirmed, how could our negation be explained without reference to methodological shortcomings? Instead of explaining social reproduction in terms of class ethos, is simpler to think in terms of

status advantages expressed in material and cultural resources. These tend of reproduce themselves because they are also the instruments of status attainment and are transmitted easily from one generation to the other. One simple justification for our finding is the radical overthrowing of the social stratification in Romania after the Communist party came to power. Social ascension was through administration was only possible for to representatives of the working classes. Thus, the communist regime set up organizations and institutions through which the members of the lower classes could move upwards on the status scale. In this way, the chances of status attainment in Romania had been leveled.

Resources

One major difference between leaders, activists and passive members is that concerning the content, length and attainment of organizational biographies of the majority of people in our sample. Most of the leaders achieved Communist Party membership and leadership positions in the Union of the Communist Youth, whereas active members had been only members of the UCY and older passive members of the *scari* did not reach even UCY membership. To understand the interplay between varieties of accomplishment in communist organizations and current availability for community actions, one has to start with an inquiry into the communist organizational landscape.

The so called 'voluntary' organizations that functioned from the early 50s to the end of the 80s, encompassed large masses of different categories of people. The Pioneers, the Union of Communist Youth, the Romanian Communist Party and the trade unions had been the main institutionalized channels used by the communist administration to keep activism and social mobility under political control. They were the only organizations in which a person interested in social activism could make a career. On the other hand, advancement on the social ladder was conditioned often by these organizational mechanisms until a certain point, as access became more and more selective from one level to the other. For example, entrance to university at the beginning of the communist regime depended on membership in communist organizations, and membership in the Romanian Communist Party was necessary for workers to be promoted to leadership positions or receive benefits, such as a larger flat. However the higher-ranking positions in the political and administrative structure

were conditioned by additional criteria among which higher education played an important role.

Few of the subjects from our study have graduated from university. This shows, on the one hand, a pattern of residential segregation affecting older blocks of flats and, more important, the limited effect on status attainment membership in communist organizations had. One might legitimately ask what has become of the generation of leaders and activists that have higher education, or who occupied positions in the hierarchy of the RCP. I would answer that they achieved better rewarded socio-occupational positions that allowed them to obtain homes of better quality. Nonetheless, for the generations of those concerned here, a block of flats represents a stable, long term residence. Hence this pattern of spatial segregation makes up the macro-context of mobilization in the block of flats. It has determined the formation of socio-economically homogenous dense networks of neighbors that assume the costs of mobilizing community resources for the provision of public goods. By pushing persons of higher socio-economic status into other places, it has created the context of mobilization for collective action of actors that otherwise are thought being less active and has proven that the dependence of propensity for activism and leadership on social standing is relative.

In closer link with the topic of our research is the evident correlation of organizational career, organizational status attainment and present involvement in community initiatives which adds a piece of evidence to the established correlation between current activism and prior movement membership. The causal link among organizational membership and current leadership and activism is not yet established. Both directions can be assumed. These findings add a lot, however, to our understanding of accumulation of resources for collective action in present day Romania.

Three hypotheses from the theory can be invoked to make this relationship intelligible. Both of them explain the diverging paths of leaders, activists and passive members as well. One plausible possibility theorized by Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) suggests that civic skills are acquired within organizations. In each organization listed in biographical narratives, people had not only the opportunity to express negative opinions about communist organizations, but also to exercise their organizing and communication skills. The ability to talk to people, to persuade about the need and urgency of collective action, to delegate responsibilities, to overview the development of the collective activity,

to sanction and reward and to keep contact with the higher officials could have been practiced in the UCY, RCP or the communist unions. This applied as well to the needs of the neighborhood as articulated the prospective leaders, or to the capacity for working in coordinated teams. From this point of view, it is not far from truth to say that Communist organizations produced human capital for post-socialist community initiatives.

Another credible causal mechanism supposes the internalization of an 'activist's' role, together with an 'leader's' role during organizational membership and promotion, which people enact in their local context in mobilizing for the solving of neighborhood's problems. Most probably, both causal mechanisms function simultaneously. Those that have experience as leaders, and the corresponding skills, and identify with leadership roles within the community feel compelled to get involved and get the lead. Likewise, an identity as a 'joiner', or as an active member, forces people who had been active in youth to get involved in collective action.

The reverse causal implication must also to be taken seriously, at least because it is not clear what criteria the communist organizations applied when recruiting members and future leaders. As common sense and my own memories suggest, promotion in leading positions and privileged admission to higher order organizations – like accession to UCY from the 8th grade – were conditioned by the performance of some activist and leadership skills, corroborated, of course, with a good degree of compliance to the regime's ideology. Hence, it is worth considering the hypothesis that a long career in the communist organizations was conditioned by the possession of something that one could call an 'orientation towards activism' or 'leadership aptitudes', combined with the opportunism required by upward mobility in highly bureaucratized hierarchical structures. Obviously, this orientation or aptitude received a boost through membership and a gratification through advancement at their time.

To conclude, membership in communist organizations was conditioned by the presence of some qualities that also predict the availability for involvement in community actions. Promotion in these organizations, on the other hand, required aptitudes that can today be equated with leadership. Those who did not detain these qualities are among today's passive community members. The presence of 'latent activism', without 'leadership' constituted the precondition for a short organizational career,

excluding access to leading position and today manifested in the apparently altruistic contribution to the common good. Finally, those with both 'latent activism' and 'leadership' benefited, all other things being equal, from richer organizational trajectories, which rewarded them with functions and continued today with leading roles in community initiatives.

Three other causal forces mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper are at work, according to the factual data presented: the network effect, the resource model and the life-cycle of the persons concerned. This last factor, of course, is related to the other two.

Part of the argument on the topic of network effect has already been developed. Macro-structural forces, namely residential segregation connecting the socio-economic composition of the inhabitants of a block of flats to processes of social stratification, had made the higher ranking working class families born between 1945 and 1960 the most stable residents in the type of housing we have taken as a micro-context of mobilization. People in this category are less likely to move for several obvious reasons: first of all, due to their age and socio-economic status, they lack the motivation and resources to search for better housing environment. On the contrary, as they retire, their revenue is declining and their flats become real assets. The same incentives are not present for people in earlier stages of their life. People with more mobile social trajectories have a motive to change their apartments, either cheaper or more expensive.

This stability – most moved into their actual apartments more than 20 years ago – was the basis for constructing some dense networks within the *scari*, which provide a sense of identity and security. These networks are also the infrastructure that helps mobilization by easing communication, imposing obligations through the force of reciprocity and inhibiting the tendency to free ride through mutual monitoring. Moreover, belonging to these networks is associated with a higher interest in the collective good as people in this category plan to live longer in the same time. Consequently, actors more integrated in this *scara's* 'core' network have a higher probability of participating in community actions, while those less included in them, usually the socially mobile, the younger and the impaired, will be less attracted to collective action.

People at this age not only have already constituted networks within the neighborhood, which help mobilizing for the collective action but do

also have more time. Attending meetings, laboring for the *scara* or administrating books are time consuming. As people retire, they acquire more of this capital, while other possibly more important distractions come less often. The opposite is true, on the other hand, for the younger residents whose employment and orientation towards career and family keep them away from a large scale involvement in community initiatives: their contribution is usually limited to monetary payments. Age has an opposite effect on participation, since physical well-being declines usually with the years, as does the capacity to become involved in collective action. We have thus uncovered one of the main sources of passivity concerning community action: the lack of health among the elderly.

To sum up, I will describe in ideal-typical fashion the three categories of actors in collective action at *scara* level. Leaders and active members are recruited from the same pool of working class families, aged over 55, living for several decades in the block, and constituting a dense network in the neighborhood which I call the 'core' of the *scari*. They are worried by the quality of life in the neighborhood, are the first to engage in action to solve to common problems, and rely on the other members of the 'core' network. Members of the both categories had proven moderate to high degrees of activism in their youth within the communist organizations, which is a proof of their latent activism, but also added resources, skills and identities to their ability to cope with collective issues. Those who had been members of the Communist Party and attained leading positions in the Union of Communist Youth or in the workplace usually lead the collective action. Their better leadership skills can be but one justification, but the search for the gratification that power offers could also be a motivator. Passive members of the *scara* constitute a more heterogeneous category. Being excluded from the informal 'core' network could be a good reason to stand aside. Some older members nevertheless do not have the physical prowess to participate in collective action, while other, younger, may think that family and career are more important.

The activists' discourse

The presumed impact of cultural factors on social involvement was emphasized in the theoretical section. Meanings of action within the context of the community were reflected through the narratives produced

in interviews. In the next pages, I will approach three important topics reflective of the cultural dimension of community engagement: self-descriptions of the three categories of actors as indicators of identities and feelings of self-efficacy, representations of family socialization practices, and accounts of action within the collectivity.

Narratives of self
General evaluations of oneself

Involvement in action and initiative is correlative, among other things, with a positive image of self. In the same time actions perceived as successful enhance ones' image of self. These two relations are well reflected in our interviews, which proved good opportunities to manifest specific degrees of self-esteem in at least two ways: explicit statements of positive worth and relative weight of positive and negative qualities. Thus being a leader seems to improve self-esteem. Only among leaders plainly state a positive self-perception:

"I was never ashamed and I will never be."
 Q. What are the qualities you miss as a scara leader?
 A. I cannot figure out any.

In discourse, positive or negative perceptions of self are visible less through the admittance of some defects, but though foregoing the chance to claim positive traits. While people seem to be reluctant to categorize themselves in negative terms, there are meaningful differences regarding the weight and, as will be further discussed, content of positive attributes. Actually, the number of self-ascribed positive traits decreases from leaders to active members of *scara*, and is lowest for the inactive members. Although this might be partly a simple effect of the discursive scarcity of the inactive members, it may also reflect a lower self-perception among those classified as inactive by their neighbors.

Such a contrast between the positive self-evaluation of leaders and the past-loving, self-denying image of the inactive members of *scara* indicates the variation of self-efficacy among the groups in the study, which is known as having a circular relationship with practical effectiveness.

Descriptors

Although the characterizations that can be reconstructed on the basis of out narratives are far from homogenous, some meaningful patterns can be found comparing the three basic classes used in our analysis. The most clearly structured self-image is that of the leaders whose description are centered on leadership. They consider themselves characterized by **involvement** (activism, participation), **good leadership** (management and organizational skills) and **perseverance** (determination and ambition). Their defects, if mentioned, refer to their performance as leaders, members of this category accusing lack of communication skills, bad health or being too soft with people:

> "Q. Which are the qualities that you lack?
> A. I don't quite know how to talk to people…That is I am not able to become closer to people. This is the way I am.
> …
> A. Besides the fact that they say that sometimes I speak too loud, that I quarrel to quickly…"

> "Maybe I should be tougher on men, but I do not succeed because I am too understanding."

Involvement, good leadership and perseverance of leaders are completed sometimes with normative traits like honesty and a sense of duty. Sharply defined as they are, the contours of the leaders' self-image provide evidence of an identity in which taking the lead is an important marker.

Active members of a *scara* have a more blurred self-image. They consider themselves involved persons as well, but the rest of the image is less clear. One important aspect is their weaker stress on leadership and determination. This feature is emphasized by the fact that all defects mentioned in this category are linked to a lack of determination, ambition or courage. In other words, active persons seem to be, at least partially, persons socially engaged who lack the guts to advance to leadership status. The emphasis on the lack of personality traits required for leadership suggests that activism is on the same continuum with passivity and leadership.

"Q. Tell me about the fact that you did not like to be a leader. Why is that so?
It very much depends on the person's temper. I am a timid person and I didn't like to become involved very much."

"I give up rather than striking back…and I am sorry of this because they think I am fool."

The way inactive persons describe themselves says a lot about the way they became excluded from instances of collective action. Briefly, they display a positive orientation to the past (*paseism*) and a negative orientation to the present. The positive traits they mention, rare as they are, refer to the past, suggesting a kind of nostalgia and break with the less glorious present. In contrast with the past, the present is the ground of manifestation of defects and lacks like feelings of powerlessness, defeat, inactivity or lack of ambition shortly, feelings of low self-efficacy.

We have identified several trajectories of exclusion. The differences among them are visible in the way inactive people talk of themselves, besides the already recognized pattern of paseism and negative assessment of present. Those I have called the defeated show clearly the syndrome of depressive realism (Alloy and Abramson, 1979) and external locus of control while exuberantly describing the achievements of past and accounting for the misery of today.

"Unfortunately yes, at 32 I brought a 3 year old kid with me here to Oradea and I came with my husband to the place where he moved with his job and my fate changed totally. I got cut off from my friends, from my native town, from my friends and I started from nothing. ... I have learned, I had will, stranger, alone and I managed myself…not really because here I was no longer a leader…I felt cut off from reality, not being in the right place, like a flower that you move from a place to other and … dries out…"

To recapitulate, self images supplied in the interviews give evidence of the feelings of self-efficacy of leaders especially and, on a lesser scale of active members. In contrast with them, passive actors find little positive things about themselves but praise highly the past or show signs of depressive realism. In addition, past experience have endowed leaders with a special identity whose characteristics explain their actions, and is reflected in the self-attribution of some peculiar personality traits like ambition and determination.

Family socializations and class culture

The main finding under this heading confirms the previously noticed negative depiction of family relationships on behalf of the most active agents. In terms of content, there are several contrasting patterns among the three categories considered for analysis which revolve around admitting or rejecting parental influence. Leaders and active members of *scara* tend to reject parental influence explicitly, while half of these two categories admit positive, 'conventional' socialization within their original families. In comparison, all but one of the inactive members of the sample recall the parental influence positively.

In rejecting parental influence, one can see elements of an individualist, autonomist worldview, as in the case of a leader who claimed always to have taken decisions independently.

"My parents never influenced the way I was going to organize my future activity.
Q. But the so-called 'healthy habits', the care for the common good, solidarity or compassion?
A. I stayed too little around them that they could influence my mentality and my behavior. I have always known what path to choose…alone, without directions."

On the basis of the transcripts, we can speculate about the meanings of this lack of recognition. One subject had his biography driven by historical forces – i.e. collectivization – against the will of the parents who had been preparing him to work the land. In this case, we can talk of a **historical fracture** between generations. Another possible interpretation is that of a **social distance** between the subjects and their parents, or better, of upward social mobility that is associated with a cultural break from one's origins. Our data supports this hypothesis, since all but one of the subjects rejecting parental influence graduated with baccalaureate degrees. Such a degree was a prerequisite for high status 20 or 30 years ago, and marked a social ascension compared to their lower working class or peasant background. One should note that this mobility went along with residential change from countryside to city, which also implied a shift in lifestyles.

Finally, I could propose a more speculative interpretation: signs of a blunt rejection of social origins can be seen as a discursive solution to a **social complex** that may be a key to their social ascent and leadership.

Although this psychoanalytically flavored thesis might sound vain, there are some grounds for it. Some respondents in this situation, both leaders and active members, admit learning important social values in schools, or political organizations such as the UCY. Moreover, two leaders that recognized the positive influence of their parents also recognized that their parents provided them with a strict pedagogical environment that did not exclude physical coercion. In addition, the inactive subjects tend to appreciate positively the influence and the pedagogy used by their parents. This is consistent with the time orientation pattern that we have already discussed. Leadership, and in a lesser degree activism, requires the capacity to break with one's past, including one's parents and a culture that might be felt oppressive.

This principle embedded in our data becomes more evident when we look to the values presumably acquired through socialization. Self-censorship is among the most important things inactive members learned from their parents; expressed in terms such as 'order', 'discipline', 'right behavior', 'being respectful' or 'civilized,' These words never appear in the case of leaders or active members with conceptually looser moral ties to their parents.

One plausible view of these patterns might consider them all at least partially valid. To sum up, the leadership position entails a negation of the cultural inheritance from the previous generation, a logic that works for activists as well, though less emphasized. It is either a reflection of a culture of autonomy, of personal achievement that could hardly admit a dependence on a collective memory and culture, or determined by the need to break with a culture that is seen as oppressive or illegitimate in a given situation. Vice versa, by glorifying one's ancestors and a culture in which conformism plays a great role, the inactive members recognize their social failure, or simply rationalize their conformity and lack of initiative.

Moreover, the apparent negation of parental cultural influence suggests clearly that norms and values are not transmitted mechanically from one generation to the other: and agency is possible regardless of class automatisms. Descending from working class or peasant families, most of our subjects were taught compliance to rules and authority. In spite of this, some people in this category stressed qualities such as autonomy, courage and ambition, adding evidence to our conclusion that class culture does not play an important role in determining individual patterns of social engagement. Social reproduction remains, nevertheless, an issue,

as the upward mobility of the persons in the sample is mainly structural, attributable to the transformations of the occupational opportunities generally. Such a contrast, added to the explicit opposition to family values and pedagogies, shows that the educative efficacy and social reproductive power of family are relative and have to be understood in a broader context that takes into consideration factors such as the social trajectories of the actors and their families.

Why get involved? Why stay aside?

Involvement is evidently the central concept in our research. How do people justify their involvement in solving collective good provision problems, or vice versa, their abstaining from action? This paper approached these important questions as the key issues by the interviewers and their subjects as well. One important observation here is that involvement *(implicare)* concerns both contribution to the collective action and engagement in leading the action. Conceptually, at this level the two domains are regarded quite similarly.

Our analysis will approach first the structure of discourses on involvement, then attempt an in-depth interrogation of the interpretation of participative acts for several important groups of subjects.

If we analyze in detail the motivations and benefits invoked for acting or for restraining from involvement, we obtain a picture that is quite suggestive of the well-known Weberian distinction between instrumental and axiological rationality. While people heavily explain participation using normative frames of references, abstaining is justified mainly 'rationally'. More exactly, people engage themselves in collectively beneficial actions, apparently driven by values or norms, but calculating resources, secondary outcomes and the conditions for actions.

Table 1. Justifications for action and inaction

Involvement	Non-involvement
Intrinsic motivations (action related gratifications)	
- entertainment	- bad memories of involvement
- pleasure	- pleasure
Cultural drives – values related gratifications	
- love of cleanness	- family first, then the *scara*
- doing good things for fellow citizens	
- social responsibility	
- responsibility for the collective good	
- educating others	
Cultural drives – norm related gratifications	
- shame	- promotions based on connections (perceived unfairness)
- duty, norm	
- A feeling that "something has to be done"	
Secondary benefits (extrinsic motivations)	
- financial	- no pay
- social approval, appraisal	- lack of appreciation
- independence	- authenticity
- coercion	
- benefits of leadership	- being the leader means problems (costs of leadership)
Resources	
- has time	- no time
	- bad health
	- lack of cultural resources (being from country-side)
Group problems	
	- lack of solidarity/ cohesion
	- difficulties in organizing the group

The above table gives apparent credit to conventional theories of collective action (Elster, 1989). It suggests that abstaining from action is instrumentally rational, while participation can be justified only with reference to norms and values. A practical consequence of this would be that participation could be fostered through ideological socialization whereas too calculative points of view can hinder the realization of collective action. Moreover, extrinsic motivations – i.e. selective incentives, be they positive or negative, can influence largely the outcome of collective action along with the more recently discussed factor of group structure (McAdam 1986, Kim and Bearman 1997). However, as with all post-hoc accounts of action, the results listed in the table may merely reflect justifications.

Seen in this way, the results are still stunning, since they explain social engagement through cultural motivations or extrinsic motivations, while passivity is grounded on lack of resources or made meaningless because of the "side effects" of activism or non-activism. Confronted with the explanatory model built in the factual analysis section of this paper, the normative force behind the involvement of active members and leaders is less curious. Norms are social because compliance to them is socially sanctioned. In other words, reference to norms can, in some instances, be an indicator of social integration. Knowing that the active and leading members of the *scari* are caught in dense networks which I called the 'core,' we understand the salience of the normative justifications for involvement of those from these categories. Much of the normative phrases reflect what we could put under the heading 'social responsibility': 'doing good for fellow citizens', 'responsibility for the collective good' or simply, 'social responsibility.' Concepts that reflect the coercive force of the norm are no less reflective of practical social interaction: duty, shame, something has to be done.

This peculiarity of the active members' discourse can be explained nevertheless in a more cynical way. We know now that they have better communication skills which include a greater capacity to elaborate socially desirable or legitimate accounts, part of the art of mobilizing for action – of oneself or of the others. It is possible then that the focus on norms, i.e. on non-egoist motivation for involvement, to be just a practical enactment of their social communication skill exercised with the interviewer.

Many of the categories above support the hypothesis of rational involvement, according to which the actors take into account the costs and the benefits of the engagement. Non-active members provide as

explanation their lack of resources for engagement, especially of time or of good health. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, leaders and active members complain the most about the costs that involvement, especially as leader, entails.

> "Q. Did you like being better then the others, to lead?
> A. No, I have always wanted to stay in secondary positions as I thought that being in charge means trouble" (active).

> "I have never put pressure on anyone but I said it is OK if they choose me as well as if they didn't…Because there no real gain as there [at the labour union] if you get involved in problems you have to argue with the bosses, to discuss with everybody the issues because there are people who do not understand some problems…You explain them once, twice, three times but they still do not understand. But there are also people who know and understand the problems… and I have to quarrel with the management and with other people, so I do not have much to gain" (active).

> "All agree that since we don't have a formal scara leader nobody argues, there are no more shouts like: you are 3 wage earners and wait from me, while I am retired? And I give you 4000 [lei] so you can earn 300,000? It was really offensive to tell this for 4,000 lei. Therefore, not only they have changed him but he [the former leader] said: no more, I don't stay any more, I am no one's [carpa]" (leader replacement).

However, leaders derive many gratifications from their engagement besides the civic gratification of doing one's duty, to use the label proposed by Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995). These rewards include, for instance, financial rewards and social prestige, but they can also be effective in maintaining a commitment for the common interest.

The quotations already suggest that engagement in leadership of community actions is challenging not only because is elicits additional investment of time and other resources, but because of so-called "transactional costs" – mentioned in the institutional literature – that can be translated into the costs produced by low community social capital. Members of the community do not trust each other, or at least do not trust their leaders, so they are not willing to contribute. Others are simple free riders who can be also judged in terms of civic attitudes: they do not contribute or, worse, destroy the goods produced through collective effort and work of the leadership. As predicted by the theory of collective action, this situation deters engagement.

The discourse of community initiatives actors

Analysis of discourses of *scara* leaders, active members and socially inactive inhabitants of *scari* displayed patterned accounts of involvement and non-involvement. One can speak of discourses of activists and non-activists as clearly discernable. However the demarcations in the narratives of the three categories are not always clear cut, but rather variable, so we can talk of a continuum of various discursive dimensions whose combinations make the specificities of the interviews from the three groups. Thus, leaders are placed at the one edge of the continuum and inactive members at the other, while active members are somewhere in the middle, displaying both the characteristics of leaders and inactive members at the same time.

First, the discourses are reflective of different feelings of efficacy and self esteem which correlate positively with availability for involvement. The passive members of the *scari* are the less likely to communicate generally, which is evident in their shorter and rather poor interviews. They praise the past and are not able to find positive attributes of themselves.

Specific social identities correlative with patterns of engagement could have been discerned especially in the leaders' accounts, who defined themselves mainly using resilient personality characters like determination, ambition and courage. Resilience is the factor that adds light to the negative reference of leaders to their social background. Their social success, expressed in the sentiments of self-efficacy and not in factual indicators of social status, has been achieved at odds with the cultural and material determinations of their social background. In this regard, the situation of active members is at least curious. Instead of activists' identities, we have insinuations of fallen leaders: when talking about themselves, active members of the community seem to regret the lack of traits that leaders can boast of.

Justification for action or non-action is also specific to the three categories. Involvement is justified primarily through compliance to norms while abstention from contribution to the collective good through rational computation. This might be the Romanian equivalent of "secondary languages of social responsibility" mentioned by Bellah and Hammond (1980), or the discourse of civic engagement, to paraphrase the theories of Smith and Alexander (1993). For both types of actions, though, secondary gratifications play a great importance. I have rejected a

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simplistic culturalist conclusion regarding the factors of engagement in collective action and proposed an alternative interpretation of these discourse patterns proposing a structural determination of justification which would epitomize various degrees of community integration and pressure.

Synthesis: A multilevel model of leadership and activism in community action

Activism cannot be understood merely as an individual trait nor as mechanically determined behavior by implacable forces acting at the larger scales. Moreover, in understanding individual choices of action or non-action, people have to be taken as well as victims of contingencies and agents. In this paragraph I will propose a multilevel model of variations of activism on the basis of the findings from the previous chapters corroborated with the propositions from the theoretical introduction. Some of the relationships in the model are merely simple hypotheses that still expect to be tested.

Activists and leaders manifest themselves as such only in a context of mobilization, that is, a situation beyond the control of an individual. The micro-context of mobilization for collective action is typically the product of forces at the macro-level. In our case, the context for mobilization is the dense social network formed around the *scara* which is in turn the by-product of the macro-phenomena of residential segregation which affected the housing landscape in Romania in the last 15 years. People included in the tight networks situated at the center of the *scara's* social life not only receive important communications more easily collectively, but are also more easy to mobilize as social homogeneity, frequent and constant interaction, and shared challenges increase their commitments to norms of social responsibility and generate feelings of trust and reciprocity. Most of the leaders and active participants in collective initiative are recruited though this 'core' social network.

Despite of this, sometimes people outside of the communities 'core' network take over the lead of community action. Furthermore, some people from this micro-context abstain from collective action. Individual factors play important roles in determining the decision finally taken concerning if and in what degree a person becomes involved in the

provision of public goods. In this regard, life-cycles, strongly correlated with age, and biography are very important.

Life-cycle determines a person's availability for involvement, influencing in great amount the actors' perception of the costs and benefits. In the terms of the conventional theory, resources are important, but mainly via the life-cycle. The moment in the cycle of life is decisive for the priority given to competing tasks and spheres of life, the amount of time and money available for investment in collective good and the physical wellness that is conditioning significantly the possibility for engagement. Most willing to engage for the collective good are people around retirement age. People in the same age period are among the passive members of the *scara*, but this time because of health problems. In the same category belong the members of the younger generations which have other priorities.

Biography, on the other hand, seems to be a path in which various civically valuable psycho-sociological and cultural assets are accumulated. Such individual civic capital includes leadership skills, civic skills, leadership and, maybe, activist identities and internalized role sets, self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. Apparently, these are acquired through successful activity within a formal organization, success which is materialized, among other things, by reaching a leading position in them. The complexity of organizational careers and the number of leading positions obtained correlate positively with leadership and activism.

One curious and still unclear aspect in the actors' life-trajectories is the motor behind their initial successes. Since the idea of random initial successes, which opened through a virtuous circle of experiential learning the way for later ascension, is hard to admit, I dare to reiterate the idea that social involvement is sustained by a latent factor which could be either psychological or cultural. However, the cultural opposition between the leaders and their parents suggests that the background driving force behind activism and leadership is psychological.

Another unclear aspect is the relationship between leadership and activism. Although there is literature suggesting that there could be a conflict between the two roles, my data suggest that they are facets of the same phenomenon. In short, activism seems to be a way to leadership in some cases. In others, activism is a manifestation of failed leadership.

Conclusions

Studies on active citizenship have been affected by a lack of clear conceptualization that disturbed measurement and undermined the validity of the conclusions. This problem can be overcome by defining it as participation in the creation of public goods. Thus, active citizenship inherits the conceptual and theoretical developments of several research traditions in the area of political science, sociology, and development studies while being able even to beat some of the reductionisms of a peculiar point of view. Social participation s multifaceted and context dependent, and should not be reduced, consequently, either to activism in voluntary organizations, or to political engagement, as works in the liberal tradition insinuate.

Looking at the issue of social participation in Romania from this angle does not provide the same pessimistic results as some recent works in political science assert. My study of leadership, activism and retreat in *scara* has shown primarily that urban collectivities in Romania can and do solve collective problems, thus producing collective goods. In order to understand collective initiative, a good conceptual tool is to differentiate leaders from active members, and both from inactive members. Generally speaking, leaders and activists at the local level are mobilized through social networks that are products of long-term social processes and interactions. The more active members of the community have time, health, civic skills, feelings of self-efficacy and a sort of basic activism. Persons more likely to engage in solving collective problems have a positive view of themselves and refer to norms to justify their actions.

Networks and norms important for the success of collective action constitute the basic components of what is usually called social capital. Our study provides insights into the production of this asset, so important for social development. Macro-sociological phenomena produce the dense networks that are required to induce the feelings of reciprocal obligation that determine individual decisions to participate.

Contrary to some theories, especially those referring to participation in political life and voluntary association, social engagement is only weakly dependent on social background and social attainment. Leadership is, indeed, associated with a higher status attainment, but activism generally is class-indifferent, at least in Romania. If other researches in other settings have produced different results is mainly because they have investigated class-specific forms of engagement – such as joining social movements or voluntary organizations.

The place of cultural variables in explaining action remained unclear. However, the consistency of associations between some biographical characteristics and the availability for involvement make me believe that cultural resources play a secondary role, mainly as toolboxes for justifying actions or inactions. Even identities as 'leader' and 'activist,' which can be formed during a long career of involvement and successes in various settings, are just mediators between an initial psychological impetus for engagement and later better culturally wrapped instances of participation.

Extending participation is not, subsequently, a simple question of awareness raising and competence training. As resources for involvement are already in the field the issue is to stimulate the formation and functioning of micro-contexts of mobilization, of networks and organizations that can easily set the agenda and organize for collective action. Community networks, for example, can play an important role in this respect. In the long term, however, schools and other training organizations should develop the civic skills and identities of persons building on their aptitudes and orientations toward civic engagement.

Many unsolved problems yet remain. Extending the concept of active citizenship should not obscure its political and democratic dimension. Community participation is mere localism if lacks the instruments of democratic governance, which involve participation in decision making at the local and larger level. At this level, the institutional setting in Romania is evidently defective and I would suggest that searching for the causes and solutions should be done at the supply side and not to some mostly imagined democratic deficit of Romanian citizens. Romania has resources for active citizenship, but the most severe difficulty is nevertheless to uncover it, not to produce it.

NOTES

[1]   Among the recent documents defining 'active citizenship' one should mention the 'Crick report' (Crick, 2000) and the Amsterdam Treaty (CEC n.d.c. 2005). For analyses of the conceptualization of active citizenship in Eu member states and in accession countries one could consult the literature reviews of the ETGACE and re-ETGACE projects.

[2]   Two examples are ETGACE and re-ETGACE, international research projects funded by the EU through the Framework Program that have preferred a very broad operational definition of active citizens as agents of change. As a consequence, a very fuzzy mixture of public administrators, political figures, NGO leaders and entrepreneurs provided the source data devoted to establish the conditions for learning of attitudes and skill specific of 'active citizens'. Besides the arguable composition of research population, due to this heterogeneity, the national results were hardly comparable and the final international reports inconclusive

[3]   Unfortunately I did not find any appropriate English equivalent for the *scara de bloc*. In Romanian, scara de bloc designates both a physical and a social reality. It refers on the one hand to a group of flats that share the same entrance and the same staircase but signifies the community of living that usually evolves around this common space. Nothing similar to this can be found in English therefore I decided to use in the text the Romanian word typed in Italics.

[4]   See, for the example the inconsistent empirical analysis published by Sandu (2004) on the sources of political action attitudes in Romania.

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