

12. BETWEEN ROMANIA AND HUNGARY:

RELIGIOSITY AMONG HUNGARIANS IN TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract

In our study, we examine the religious characteristics of the Hungarians in Transylvania, who once used to be part of the state-forming nation in Hungary but have long been an ethnic minority in Romania. We raise the question about the position of this group in terms of religious belonging, practice and faith between the Romanian and Hungarian societies. Our empirical analyses are based on the Romanian and the Hungarian databases of the European Values Study (EVS) 2017 as well as the database of the EVS-survey conducted in 2019 in Transylvania among the Hungarian minority. Our results clearly show the Hungarian minority in Transylvania to be closer to the Romanian than to the Hungarian society in terms of religiosity. Previous interpretations that Hungarians in Transylvania are in an intermediate position in terms of religiosity is not confirmed by our results. A slightly higher degree of religiosity of Hungarians in Transylvania compared to Romanians was found for several indicators. This is probably at least partly due to differences in social modernization, as the position of the Hungarian population in the Romanian social structure has become increasingly disadvantaged in recent decades.

12.1 Introduction

As Loek Halman has frequently demonstrated, the tension between religiosity and secularization is core to changing towards modernity (Halman & Pettersson, 2003; Halman & Riis, 2003; see also Hervieu-Léger, 2010). The decreasing salience of religiosity in contemporary societies displays differently in public and private realm (Halman, Pettersson & Verweij, 1999), which makes it important to assess differences between societies that provide common paths but different public contexts. In this, Postcommunist societies are highly relevant cases, given the speed of transformations in the 1990s and afterwards (Tomka, 2010; Voicu, 2007). Hungary and Romania, connected through the large Hungarian minority in Transylvania, provide an excellent area to study how religiosity changes.

For centuries, many different ethnic and religious groups lived in the historical region of Transylvania. Nowadays, this part of Romania is home to one of Europe's largest native national minorities: the Hungarians. According to the last census, 1.2 million Hungarians and approximately 400,000 other nationalities were residing in this region, in addition to the majority Romanians who make up three quarters of Transylvania's population of around 6.8 million (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2011).

In our study, we examine the religious characteristics of the Hungarians in Transylvania, who once used to be part of the state-forming nation in Hungary but have long been an ethnic minority in Romania. We raise the question about the position of this group in terms of religiosity that is different between the Romanian and Hungarian societies.

12.2 Social Factors Influencing the Religiosity of Hungarians in Transylvania

Until the end of the First World War, Transylvania was part of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Habsburg Empire. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it became part of Romania, along with some other areas that are

now also considered as part of Transylvania.¹ According to the 1910 Hungarian census, already before its union with Romania Transylvania had a majority Romanian population (54%), while Hungarians made up 32% of the population, and there were only 11% of Germans (Varga, 1988, p. 6).

When examining the religiosity of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, several social factors must be considered. The first is religiosity of the society as a whole. Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe (Sandor & Popescu, 2008; Tomka, 2005). Analyses about the religious change in Romania attribute it to a number of factors, some of which have an impact on the religious situation of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, too.

Romania, like other Eastern European countries, underwent a “double secularisation”, due to the modernisation process and the anti-religious nature of the socialist political system. (Need & Evans, 2001; Tomka & Zulehner, 2000) However, both processes were specific to Romania (Voicu, 2019).

Romania industrialised slowly and rather late, with half of the population still living in rural areas and a third working in the agricultural sector at the time of the fall of communism. A large proportion of those working in industry were workers commuting daily to their jobs from the villages, thereby continuing to live their daily lives partly in a more or less traditional community which often where organised around the church. This delay in socialist modernisation is also reflected in the educational attainment of the population, with one of the lowest rates of tertiary education in Europe (Stoica, 1997; Voicu & Vasile, 2010).

Another important reason is the generally less restrictive state policy towards religions in socialist Romania compared to other countries of the Eastern Bloc. Although the churches in Romania also suffered various forms of persecution, especially during the first period of communist rule, the Orthodox Church found ways how to cooperate with the regime relatively quickly (Stan & Turcescu, 2010). Communist leader Ceaușescu's confrontation with the Soviet

¹ In this chapter, we refer to 'Transylvania' as the present-day territory of it, i.e. the 16 counties of Romania that have been part of the Hungarian Kingdom until 1918.

Union led to a further relaxation of the strictness of religious policy. Thus, for example, while the country remained an atheist state in public discourse, the authorities turned a blind eye to the building of new churches and houses of worship. The Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) has even developed an own dogma, which legitimized the subordination of the Church to the communist government (Kiss, 2020; Voicu 2007, 2019).

However, Spohn (1998) argues that it is not clear that the persecution of religion has necessarily weakened religiosity in the former Eastern Bloc. According to him, a weakened role of religion is particularly the case in countries with a longer history of secularisation, which he links to the historically central position of a nation within an empire. In contrast, for nations that were in a peripheral position within an empire, like Romanians in Transylvania, this lead in many cases to a stronger interconnectedness of national and religious identities and an enhancement of the role of religion. This was especially the case when the predominant religion of a peripheral ethnic group differed from the dominant religion within the empire. According to Spohn (1998), the peripheral position itself has not changed much during the decades of communism, only the centre of the empire (Russia) and the predominant religion (Atheism) changed. The implication of this, according to Spohn (1998), is that the religiosity of some Eastern European nations, including the Romanians, did not decline significantly during the communist era.

Pollack (2001, pp. 139-142) also commented on the importance of this link between religion and national identity. His argument is that the closer religion and national identity were in a given Eastern European country, the greater the importance of religion under socialism and the higher the degree of religiosity.

As it is usually the case in Orthodox countries, the link between religion and national identity is particularly strong in Romania. The Romanian Orthodox Church played a prominent role in nation-building in the 19th century. Between the two World Wars, nationalist movements built to a large extent on this connection, increasing its salience (Leustean 2007, Stan & Turcescu, 2007). During the anti-religious ideological campaign of the socialist regime – in the complete absence of external support, thereby relying solely on its own

strength, but nevertheless in line with the Byzantine idea of symphony – it sought to establish a *modus vivendi* with the socialist power to ensure short-term survival (Voicu, 2007, p. 28).

On the one hand, these factors resulted to a position of religion in Romania that was not weakened to the same extent as in some other countries of the Eastern Bloc during the socialist period; on the other hand, these factors have also steadily strengthened religiosity after the change of regime. The growth of religiosity was particularly strong in the 1990s, when the country was experiencing a severe economic crisis and political and social instability (Voicu, 2007). During this period, the levels of religiosity of the comparatively less religious generations that had grown up under socialism, caught up with the religiosity levels of the older generations that had been socialised before socialism, as well as with those of the generations born and raised in the post-socialist era. This catching-up became so pronounced in the course of ten years that the age differential in religiosity largely disappeared, and remained virtually unchanged thereafter, i.e. in the second phase of the period. In the second decade of the period, the pace of religious revitalisation slowed down, but religiosity continued to grow, no longer as a result of the socio-political crisis, but as a result of strengthening national sentiments and massive state investments in religion (Voicu, 2007; Voicu & Constantin, 2012). It was only in the late 2010s that the levels of religiosity of the newer cohorts, born after 1990 and in particular after 2000, proved to be lower as compared to older generations (Voicu, 2020)

To study the religiosity of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, one should take into consideration the above aspects, and further consider the context given by the religious situation in Romania. Miklós Tomka (2001) has interpreted the modernisation effect along an East-West modernisation slope where he positions the Hungarians in Transylvania as in between the Hungarian and Romanian society in terms of modernisation. He shows that for most dimensions of religiosity, the Hungarian minority in Transylvania occupies this intermediate position (Tomka, 2001). Following Tomka's claim, the modernisation argument would imply a lower degree of religiosity among Hungarians in Transylvania than the overall position of religiosity in Romania.

The atheist religious persecution affected the other religious communities more than the Orthodox Church (Spohn, 1998). At the same time, following Spohn's argument presented earlier, Hungarians had a peripheral position within the Romanian state; because of the close link between religious and national identity as well as the denominational difference between Romanians and Hungarians, this may have resulted in a weakened position of religion.

The denominational composition of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania also suggests that the Hungarian population is undergoing a process different from the Romanians. Pollack (2001) argues that, generally, the more hierarchical and centralised a Church is, and the more sharply it demarcates between "insider" and "outsider", the more successful it is in resisting the oppressive regime. According to him, the Catholic Church was the most successful in fending off attacks on religion; the Protestant Churches (especially Lutheran) were the least successful, while for the Orthodox Churches, success varied from country to country (Pollack, 2001). In the case of Hungarians in Transylvania, this suggests both higher (Catholics) and lower (Reformed and other Protestant denominations) levels of religiosity compared to the Orthodox (Pollack 2001).

As can be seen from the above, we can identify several factors that are socio-geographically related to Romania, which could explain a lower or even a higher level of religiosity among the Hungarian national minority in Romania. In addition, however, an external factor must be also considered: the connection with the Hungarian society. Hungary, as we will see from the data too, is much stronger secularised than the Romanian society. There are a number of historical reasons for this, with the relatively weaker link between national and religious identity and the higher degree of modernisation most noteworthy (Tomka, 2010; Rosta, 2012).

The Hungarians in Transylvania have many ties (cultural, political, family, etc.) with Hungary; before 1990, however, it was not easy to maintain these ties. After the fall of communism, these circumstances changed, with one of the consequences being the legalisation of emigration, and consequently the increase in migration to Hungary. As younger, more highly educated groups tend to be more mobile (Chiswick, 1999) but less religious, the migration pro-

cess may indirectly result in an increase in the proportion of religious people among those who remain in Transylvania. In addition, despite the intensification of Hungarian-Romanian relations after 1990, there is still a big question as to what extent religious, or in more general terms cultural processes in Hungary, may have an impact on Hungarians living in Transylvania.

12.3 Data and Methods

Our analysis investigates to what extent the Hungarians in Transylvania can be considered to hold an intermediate position between the Romanian and the Hungarian societies. Religiosity is examined empirically, focussing on the dimensions of belonging, practice and faith, following work by Pollack and Rosta (2017). Our analyses are based on the European Values Study (EVS) 2017.² Both Romania and Hungary have been participating in the survey conducted every nine years since 1990. The data that we analyse is collected in 2018, in both countries, from national representative samples of roughly 1500 respondents. An additional survey was conducted in 2019 in Transylvania on a probabilistic sample of roughly 1100 respondents, representative of the Hungarian minority. The EVS 2017 sample in Romania also included Hungarian respondents from Transylvania. In the comparison with the two other samples, we did not exclude them from the analysis, because we wanted to contrast Romania and Hungary as a whole.

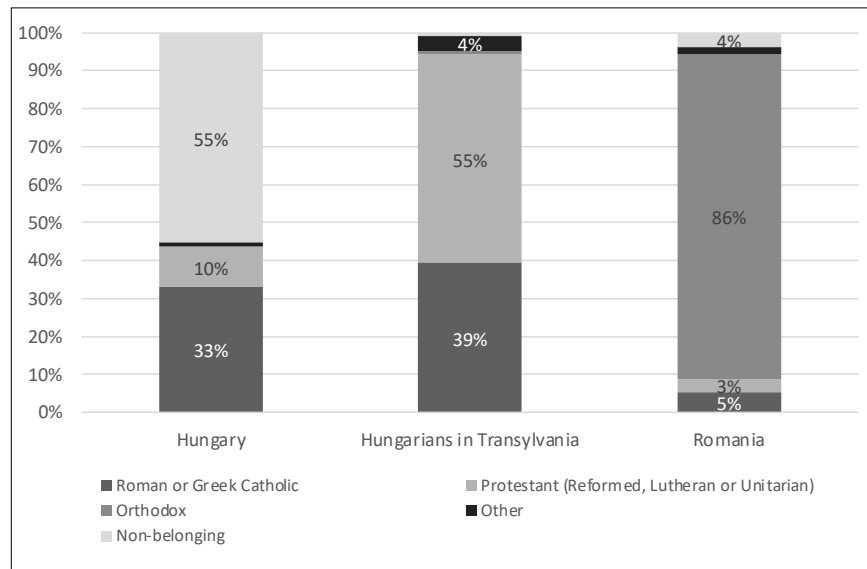
We firstly assess the differences in religiosity between the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and respectively the Hungarians and Romanians in their respective countries; subsequently, we attempt to explain these differences. In this Chapter, we do not aim at explaining, but only to noting the differences at aggregate level, and also showing how these differences are indeed at least partly rooted in processes during the communist era.

² For the data analysis we used the latest versions Integrated Dataset of EVS 2017 (ZA7500_v4-o-o.sav) and the EVS 2017: Romania - Hungarian minority dataset (ZA7550_v1-o-o.sav), using the weighting variables `weight` and `RO_hu_WEIGHT`, respectively. For more details on the methodology of the surveys see <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/methodology/>, <https://search.gesis.org/research.data/ZA7500> and <https://search.gesis.org/research.data/ZA7550>

12.4 Assessing Differences in Dimensions of Religiosity

The largest difference between the three groups is found in terms of denominational membership. In each of the three samples, a different group constitutes the majority: Protestants in the case of the Hungarians in Transylvania, Orthodox in the case of the Romanian sample, and non-members in the case of the Hungarian sample. Hungarians in Transylvania are similar to the Romanian society, as almost 100% of both groups identify themselves as belonging to a religious denomination; but they are also similar to the Hungarians in Hungary, as the majority of those belonging to a denomination are in both cases, in varying proportions, either Protestant or Catholic.

Figure 12.1 Distribution of adult population by religion in Hungary, Romania and Hungarians in Transylvania



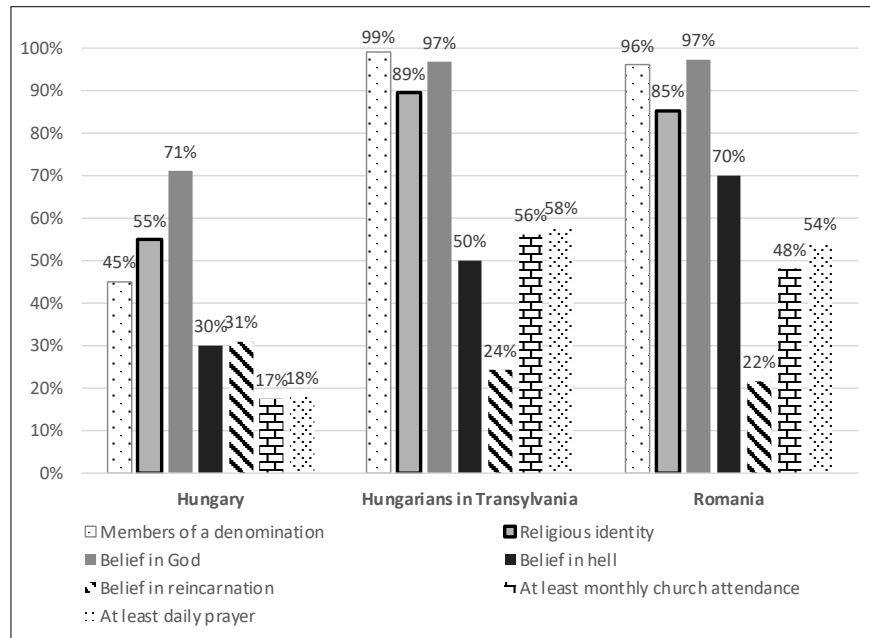
Source: EVS Hungary 2018, EVS Romania 2018, EVS Hungarians in Transylvania 2019.

Another important indicator of religious attachment is religious identity. The majority of all three groups identify themselves as religious, but while in Transylvania and Romania the proportion is close to 90%, in Hungary it is just slightly above 50%. The latter also differs from the former two in that there are more people who identify themselves as religious than those who belong to a denomination. This suggests that individual forms of religiosity – unaffiliated with a religious institution – is more prevalent in Hungary than in Romania or Transylvania. A joint analysis of the two variables supports this assumption: while in Romania and among Hungarians in Transylvania, 98% and 100% of those who consider themselves religious also belong to a denomination, the corresponding proportion in Hungary is only 71%. In other words, not only is the proportion of people in Hungary who consider themselves religious much lower than in the other two samples, but in addition, nearly 30% of them do not belong to a denomination. In this, it is worth noting that based on both indicators of religious affiliation, a slightly larger proportion of Hungarians in Transylvania were religious than Romanians.

Regarding the ritual dimension, both in its institutional form (church attendance) and in its more personal form (prayer, meditation), the frequency of religious practice among Transylvanian Hungarians is similar to that of Romanians, but slightly higher. While both regular church attendance and daily prayer are typical for more than half of Hungarians in Transylvania, the same is true for only about one in six adults in Hungary.

In the dimension of faith, the pattern observed in belonging and religious practice is only partially reflected. Looking at the patterns among Hungarians in Transylvania and in the Romanian society, it seems that practically everyone believes in God, while the share of believers is significantly lower in Hungary. Similar proportions of people in Transylvania and Romania believe in life after death and heaven, but in these cases the proportion of non-believers is also significant (1/3-1/4 of the respective samples), while in Hungary the majority does not believe in either of both.

Figure 12.2 Selected indicators of religiosity in Hungary, Romania and among Hungarians in Transylvania



Source: EVS Hungary 2018, EVS Romania 2018, EVS Hungarians in Transylvania 2019.

However, there are two issues for which this scheme does not apply: beliefs in hell and in reincarnation. While in Romania, roughly as many people believe in this as in the existence of an afterlife or heaven, only one in two Hungarians in Transylvania and barely one in three Hungarians in Hungary believe in hell. The difference between the Hungarian and total sample in Romania is particularly interesting because other research on religiosity in the region has just found that Catholics in Eastern Europe tend to believe in heaven and hell to a greater extent than Orthodox Christians (Pew, 2017). And while there is nothing surprising about more people believing in heaven than hell (Pew, 2017), the 20 percentage point difference in the Transylvanian sample is quite significant and the reason for this needs further investigation.

Reincarnation is the only indicator of religiosity that shows the Hungarian sample to be the most religious, while the Romanian sample has the lowest percentage of believers in reincarnation. However, the difference between the three groups is rather small, ranging from 22% to 31%.

Overall, the belief in religious doctrines seems to be more consistent in the Romanian society than among Hungarians in Transylvania or Hungarians in Hungary. The significant difference between the share of those believing in God on the one hand, and believing in other Christian doctrines on the other hand as well as the relatively widespread belief in reincarnation, together indicate a stronger religious individualisation in the dimension of belief, and a stronger presence of “à la carte”-type belief (Hervieu-Léger, 2010) in Hungary than in the other two samples.

Thus, although the Hungarians in Transylvania share common cultural roots with Hungarians in Hungary, also their denominational background is similar to that of the Hungarian society, but their religiosity is clearly closer to that of the most “religious country” (Tomka, 2005) than to that of the more secularized Hungary. This arrangement of the data is convincing enough to show that the living conditions shared with the population of Romania, and above all the degree of modernisation, override the links with the Hungarian culture and the Hungarian population in terms of religiosity.

12.5 Reasons For the Differences

Some important explanatory factors for the differences between the three groups in terms of religiosity are processes rooted in the past. EVS data offers the possibility to gain some insight into past changes by means of a retrospective question. The analysis of religious practice in childhood by birth cohort shows the role of transmission of religion within the family and how this changed in different periods. Of course, there are several limitations to this analysis: on the one hand, the retrospective account may be distorted both by fading memories and by the interviewees’ present-day attitudes towards religion. On the other hand, the frequency of church attendance as a single indi-

cator of childhood religiosity, is not ideal because of the different expectations of the different denominations regarding religious practice.

A comparison of the three groups reveals several important findings. First, in all three countries, the majority of people born before the Second World War attended church at least monthly. The Hungarians do not differ from Romanians in this respect. On the other hand, the Hungarian population in Transylvania attended church in their childhood to a greater extent than the other two groups, even among the oldest cohort. Thus, even before the communist period, there were factors that led to higher levels of religiosity among Hungarians in Transylvania. The argument of modernisation and/or minority existence³ seemed to be already valid in this period.

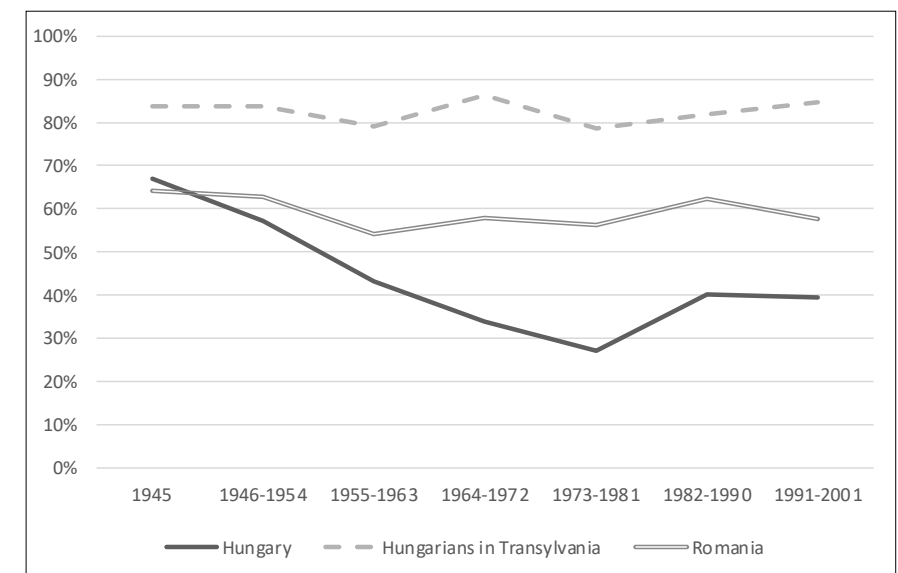
Thirdly, and perhaps the most exciting result of the comparison, in the Romanian and Transylvanian Hungarian sample, childhood religious practice shows a high degree of stability when comparing cohorts, while in the Hungarian sample, the age groups born under socialism – except for the last one – attended church services in decreasing proportions. One could say that in Hungary, a declining proportion of families passed on their religion to the next generation during the decades of socialism. Whether the reason for this is to be found in the persecution of religion, or rather in socialist-style modernisation combined with the relatively higher prosperity of the Kádár⁴ era, or perhaps in both at the same time, is difficult to decide here. Tomka (2005) argues for the combination of both effects. In any case, it seems that the effects that led to a higher degree of stability in Romanian religiosity during the decades of socialism affected the majority Romanian and minority Hungarian populations equally. However, this stability also implies a difference between the two groups that persists up to this day: the proportion of Hungarians in Transylvania who attend church as children is much higher than in Romanian entire society. The minor differences in the religiosity of the two samples in favour of the Hungarians living in Transylvania, as described earlier, are therefore

3 For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that as a result of the second Vienna decision (1940), the northern part of Transylvania became part of Hungary again between 1940 and 1944. But all in all, the socialisation of the pre-1945 generation is also shaped by the experience of belonging to an ethnic minority.

4 János Kádár was the leader of Hungary from the defeat of the 1956 revolution until 1988.

most likely at least partly rooted in differences in religious socialisation that seems to play a greater role among Hungarians than Romanians. However, a comparison of childhood and current religious practice rates also reveals that the difference between the two groups is smaller in adulthood, suggesting that more Hungarians than Romanians abandon their regular childhood religious practice later.

Figure 12.3 Proportion of people attending church at least monthly at the age of 12 by birth cohort



Source: EVS Hungary 2018, EVS Romania 2018, EVS Hungarians in Transylvania 2019.

The slightly higher degree of religiosity of Hungarians in Transylvania compared to Romanians, that was found for several indicators, is probably partly due to differences in social modernization. Although the fact that the Hungarian population in Romania lives in a more modernised region than the national average argues against this. However, the fact that the position of the Hungarian population in the Romanian social structure has become more

disadvantaged in recent decades supports this thesis. For example, Hungarians in Transylvania are less educated, live in rural areas to a greater extent compared to the Romanian average, and are underrepresented in the highest earning strata (Kiss 2018; Csata 2018) – all variables that are known to be closely linked to religiosity.

12.6 Conclusion

Our results clearly show the Hungarian minority in Transylvania to be closer to the Romanian than to the Hungarian society in terms of religiosity. Miklós Tomka's (2005) interpretation that Hungarians in Transylvania are in an intermediate position in terms of both modernisation and religiosity is not confirmed by the latest EVS data.

Of the factors influencing the religiosity of the Hungarians in Transylvania, the most important is probably the impact of modernisation, or the lack of it. However, it is questionable whether the different trends in religious socialisation during the socialist period are solely due to differences in social modernisation processes between Hungary and Romania, or whether the different effects of Church persecution also play a role. When interpreting the differences between the two samples from Romania, we must consider not only socio-structural effects but also differences in the denominational character and, in this context, the identity-strengthening effect of religion for the ethnic minority. Neither the scope of this Chapter, nor the available data are sufficient to allow a systematic separation of the impacts of these aspects. Further research should consider comparison against Romanians in Transylvania, controlling for education, gender, age, urbanization and, more important, denominational affiliation, in multivariate approaches. Exposure to Hungarian cultural traits produced in Hungary should also be considered for being controlled. For the time being, and given the limited space of this Chapter, we end up noting the importance of current days societal context in shaping the religiosity. The conclusion could be easily extended to the cases of other overlapping ethnic structures across the Globe.

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