

# Ethno-cultural identity: Roma from Transylvania and Oltenia and the pride of belonging to the community<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*In this article we tried to illustrate some relevant aspects regarding the ethno-cultural identity of Roma in Romania. First of all we have highlighted different theoretical approaches of the concept of identity and identity strategies. Secondly, we tried to present data collected in the empirical field, using the semi-standardised interview. In this regard, we have analysed data for two indicators we had considered to be relevant for Roma identity: the reasons to be proud of their community and the things they like about the community they live in. We started from the premise that, when individuals identify strongly with the community they belong to, they experience a sense of pride and are easily able to point out reasons for their pride resulting from the idea of belonging. We also wondered whether local pride differs from one region to another, i.e. whether the Roma in Transylvania and the Roma in Oltenia experience the feeling of belonging to the community differently, i.e. the feeling of pride. We also wondered if the motivations are different. But, the empirical data showed us there were differences between Roma in Transylvania and Oltenia, but not many. Most of the Roma have a high sense of belonging, they are proud of their community and their motivations are varied.*

**Keywords:** identity, Roma, community, Transylvania, Oltenia

## Introduction

The ethno-cultural identity of the Roma continues to be of interest to a wide range of specialists in both the humanities and social sciences. While carrying out research activities in the framework of the project entitled “The role of religion and religious actors in the social inclusion of Roma: towards a participatory approach” (NO Grants 2014-2021, under Project contract UEFISCDI no. 38/2021), we realized that the identity construction of Roma ethnic groups is multifaceted and deserves further analysis. In this article we focused mainly on two indicators relevant to Roma identity, namely pride of belonging to the community and the things Roma like about the community or locality they live in. While we do not claim to be exhaustive on Roma identity issues, we believe that these two indicators

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may reflect the level of attachment to the community to which they belong, which translates into the presence or absence of pride in belonging to the community. The sense of belonging, the attachment and the feeling of pride are some main vectors of ethno-cultural identity. Our aim was to illustrate these aspects starting from case studies carried out in four Roma communities in Romania, two in Transylvania<sup>2</sup>, in Sibiu County and two in Oltenia<sup>3</sup>, in Valcea County.

### Theoretical approaches

In terms of identity, a number of researches have considered a specific dynamic of the categorical differentiation process, carried out in cross-categorization situations. These are situations in which, for subjects, part of the members of their own category of belonging and part of the individuals of the category to which they do not belong (according to the first categorisation) are found in another category of belonging, according to a second categorization.<sup>4</sup> For example, when considering nationality, Romanian subjects and Hungarian or German subjects (members of national minorities) will have different categories of belonging. The same subjects could belong to the same category, being, at the same time, Romanian or European citizens, citizens of the planet, members of the human species, etc.<sup>5</sup> We can consider cultural identity as a way of classifying us/them distinction based on cultural differences.<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to remember that every social group is characterised by a certain style or way of life. By way of life we mean the set of learned behaviours and their outcomes, the component elements of which are shared and transmitted by members of a society and which in fact signify a culture or cultural pattern. While Tajfel<sup>7</sup> defines social identity as a consequence of an individual's membership in social groups, for Richard Jenkins social identity, in a narrow sense, refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities distinguish themselves in social relations from other individuals and collectivities.<sup>8</sup> D. Cuhe considers that what separates two ethno-cultural groups is not at first the cultural difference, as culturalists imagine. A collectivity can function perfectly well if it admits a certain cultural plurality. What creates the separation, the “border”, is the strong tendency towards differentiation and the use of certain cultural traits as markers of specific identity. Groups that are culturally very close can be considered

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<sup>2</sup> Transylvania is a geographical, historical and cultural region in Romania, located inside the Carpathian arch.

<sup>3</sup> Oltenia is a historical region in south-western Romania bordered to the east by the Olt River, to the south and west by the Danube, and to the north by the Southern Carpathians.

<sup>4</sup> Willem Doise, Jean-Claude Deschamp & Gabriel Mugny, *Psihologie socială experimentală* (Iași: Polirom, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Maria N. Turliuc, *Imaginar, identitate și reprezentări sociale. Imaginea elementului alogen în mentalul colectiv românesc* (Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Sabina-Adina Luca, *Identitatea socio-culturală a tinerilor* (Iași: Institutul European, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social categories* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996).

as completely alien to each other, even totally hostile, being opposed by a single isolated element of the cultural whole.<sup>9</sup> F. Barth makes an analysis which avoids confusion between “culture” and “identity”: belonging to a particular culture does not automatically imply the possession of a particular identity. Ethno-cultural identity makes use of culture, but rarely of the whole culture. In the case of different identification strategies, the same culture can be instrumentalised in different, even opposite, ways.<sup>10</sup>

Human individuals living in the same social group and in the same natural environment share the same code of behaviour, which is their culture; culture in turn shapes their character and personality, and it is natural that living together should lead to a similarity of mental traits or psychological peculiarities in the individuals making up a social group.

For D. Cuche, the description of identity is based on a certain number of determining criteria, considered as objective, such as common origin (heredity, genealogy), language, culture, religion, collective psychology (basic personality), links with a particular territory, etc.: For objectivists, a group which does not have a language, a culture and a territory, in some cases even its own phenotype, cannot claim to constitute an ethno-cultural group. It cannot claim a genuine cultural identity.<sup>11</sup> According to Fredrik Barth, what matters in defining the identity of a group is not the inventory of all its distinctive cultural features, but the identification within it of those used by the members of the group to affirm and maintain a cultural distinction. In other words, difference in identity is not the direct consequence of cultural diversity. A particular culture does not itself give rise to a differentiated identity: it can only result from the interactions between groups and the procedures of differentiation that they translate into life in their relations.<sup>12</sup>

There are several identity strategies that are situated at the group level, especially of social minorities, and that are put into practice mainly during social crises, during rapid social, economic or political change, or during periods of conflict, characterised by relations of domination or inequality. Any minority ethnic identity, regardless of the criterion on which it is based (territorial, religious, language, race or a criterion relating to how 'minorities' are perceived by the majority group) is largely designated by the majority group. All minority groups are characterised by differential treatment in political discourse, administrative measures and the media, which is based more on social than on ethnic or national criteria.<sup>13</sup> From this point of view, we found interesting to wonder which identity strategies characterize the Roma in the four case studies we made in our research.

<sup>9</sup> Denis Cuche, *Noțiunea de cultură în științele sociale* (Iași: Institutul European, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Fredrik Barth, “Les groupes ethnique et leurs frontieres,” in *Theories de l’ethnicite*, eds. Philippe Poutignat, Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart (Paris: Puf, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Cuche, *Noțiunea de cultura*.

<sup>12</sup> Barth, *Les groupes ethnique et leurs frontieres*.

<sup>13</sup> Turluc, *Imaginar, identitate și reprezentări sociale*.

The intra-group identity strategies presented by I. Taboada-Leonetti can be of acceptance, rejection or negotiation. As acceptance strategies appear: internalization, escalation, avoidance, identity recomposition, semantic inversion, instrumentalization of assigned identity.<sup>14</sup>

Internalisation means that the attributes of ethnic identity are not only accepted but also internalised. Labels such as Gypsy, Hungarian, Jew can become stigmatised, as the most serious is the taking up and internalisation of devaluing traits attributed by the majority to justify the inferior status of the other minority. This strategy could be typical for the “cortorari” of the second Transylvanian locality. They keep their language, port, customs and traditions and live in an area on the edge of the village, being apart from the rest of the residents.

Escalation implies an assumption and reinforcement of stigmas, which are seen as essential (we can take the situation of delinquents, homosexuals, etc. as an example). Evasion arises in the context of vague identity designation and high resources of the minority group. Although a minority is recognised as having a number of positive characteristics (mainly occupational) and may occupy a large part of a territory, the majority may still consider the area to be one inhabited only by the majority.<sup>15</sup> The strategy of negotiating identity (identity recomposition) usually takes the form of collective action. This is necessary when one wishes to change more constraining group memberships (e.g. to become a native-born majority citizen from being a man or a woman or a migrant). The fight against racism, for acceptance of the right to be different, for minority rights or for a change in the gender ratio can only be achieved through collective action. The call for a certain identity means claiming a capacity for action and change.<sup>16</sup>

Semantic inversion occurs when the prescribed minority identity is accepted with all its stigmas, but these are subject to semantic inversion, with negativity being transformed into positivity (e.g. blacks may accept categorisation on the basis of skin colour, given the positive valuation of the attributes of this category: athletic build, long legs, curly hair seen as equivalent to physical beauty). In our opinion, semantic inversion could characterize the third and fourth locality (in Oltenia), where we conducted the case studies. There the Roma are very attached to their identity, they want to be called “rudari” (woodworkers) and take pride in this. They are very skilled craftsmen and market the wooden objects they make.

Another strategy is instrumentalisation of assigned identity: the prescribed identity is accepted because minorities are aware of the unequal balance of power in which they are involved. Moreover, it is evoked in order to obtain various benefits (e.g. positive discrimination in school or to get jobs). Identity reconstruction implies the construction of a new collective identity, stemming from the common treatment

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<sup>14</sup> Isabel Taboada-Leonetti, “Strategies identitaires et minorites: le point de vue du sociologue,” in *Strategies identitaires*, eds. Camilleri, C. et colab. (Paris: PUF, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Taboada-Leonetti, *Strategies identitaires et minorites*.

<sup>16</sup> Turliuc, *Imaginar, identitate și reprezentări sociale*.

of the majority and a certain common destiny of the members of the minority group.<sup>17</sup>

Strategies of rejection include assimilation to the majority and denial. Assimilation to the majority involves renouncing one's inferior minority identity through efforts to penetrate the majority group. It can be achieved through processes such as changing one's name, giving up one's home language, etc. Denial occurs when subjects do not recognise themselves in the identity assigned to them by the majority group. Taboa-Leonetti gives an enlightening example of this, that of a young black man living in France: "Racism does not concern me, I am French". It is as if acquiring citizenship can cancel out other group memberships (racial, ethnic, religious, etc.).<sup>18</sup>

This seems to be the situation of the Roma in some localities in Romania, where the process of their assimilation into the majority Romanian population has taken place. These Roma have given up their traditional dress, Romani language and ethnic customs. A good example here is the first locality from Transylvania, where we conducted the case study. This strategy could also characterise a large part of the Roma from the second locality, in Transylvania.

We believe that the identity strategies presented above could be possible in the case of Roma, although we base our opinion only on a first observation of data from case studies carried out in these communities. A verification of these assumptions may also require quantitative, not just qualitative, research.

C. Dubar dichotomises forms of identity into communal and societal. Communal forms of identity would be the first of their kind, the oldest, even ancestral, and imply a belief in the existence of groupings, called "communities", considered as systems of places and names pre-assigned to individuals and reproduced exactly from generation to generation. Each individual has a membership, considered as primary as a member of his or her community, and a unique position as the occupant of a place within it.<sup>19</sup> Whether cultures or nations, ethnicities or corporations, these groups of belonging are seen as essential sources of identity. The other, societal forms, are more recent, and presuppose the existence of multiple, variable, ephemeral collectives, to which individuals belong for limited periods and which provide them with resources of identification, which they manage in a diverse and provisional manner. Each individual has multiple memberships, which can change over a lifetime. Societal identities can produce identities for the other and identities for the self, depending on the nature of the categories used. Belief in personal identity conditions forms of societal identification with various groups (family, professional, religious, political, etc.), which are seen as outcomes of personal choices rather than inherited attributions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Taboada-Leonetti, *Strategies identitaires et minorites*.

<sup>18</sup> Taboada-Leonetti, *Strategies identitaires et minorites*.

<sup>19</sup> Claude Dubar, *Criza identităților* (București: Știința, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Dubar, *Criza identităților*.

The same author noted that the ways in which individuals identify themselves can be of two types: identifications assigned by others (“identities for the other”) and identifications claimed by oneself (“identities for oneself”); an individual can accept or reject the identities assigned by others, i.e. he can identify himself differently than others do. In this respect, we have to make some observations regarding our study, on Roma people and their identity.<sup>21</sup>

From this perspective, it is necessary to pin point some aspect regarding Roma population in Romania and the way we chose to interpret the Roma data. In the official census in Romania, which also records ethnicity, not all Roma declare themselves as such; probably less than half do so. The reason lies primarily in the discriminatory use of this designation. This phenomenon is addressed both by representatives of the Roma community, as well as in scientific studies. In our empirical research, we would not reach our target, if we considered only those who officially declare themselves to be Roma. We would lose sight precisely of those who tend to be more socially integrated and therefore prefer “Romanian” as a designation of belonging to and participating in Romanian society. That is why we decided to take into account also the observation from the outside (heteroidentification by others) in our case studies. This does not mean in any way that we assign a designation to anyone in an individual case, which the person does not understand as appropriate.

For S. Ting-Toomey, cultural identity is “the emotional significance we attach to a sense of belonging or affiliation to a wider culture”<sup>22</sup> and this is one of the reasons we chose for this study to underline the sense of belonging of Roma to the community and the feeling of pride regarding this belonging.

## Data

Before presenting the data collected in this study, we consider it appropriate to make some methodological clarifications. Semi-structured interview was used to collect empirical/field data, based on an interview guide. Making 4 case studies, the sample included a total of 87 Roma respondents from two small localities in Transylvania, and two small localities in Oltenia. The first locality is a village in Sibiu County with about 1300 residents. The majority is Roma, self-identified or heteroidentified as Roma by others: institutions, local representatives, neighbours etc. The second locality is also a small village in Sibiu, with about 900 residents. About 700 are Roma, including about 100 “cortorari” (Roma with traditional port, language and customs). The third locality is a small town in Vâlcea County, with about 9000 residents, including about 1400 Roma, self-identified themselves as “rudari”/woodworkers. And the fourth locality is a rural municipality also in Vâlcea

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<sup>21</sup> Dubar, *Criza identităților*.

<sup>22</sup> Stella Ting-Toomey, “Communicative resourcefulness: an identity negotiation perspective,” in *Intercultural communication competence*, eds. Richard L. Wiseman, Jolene Koester (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993).

County, with about 5500 residents, including 1800 Roma, also “rudari”. Here there are many Roma descendents of slaves from the monasteries. We took interviews from april to september, 2022.

In order to see whether the Roma population identifies with the community and the locality they come from, and to capture this identification in a more nuanced way, we processed two of the identity indicators from the interview guide, namely the Roma answers to the related questions. The indicators were: the reasons why they are proud to be part of their community, and what they like most about the community and the locality they live in.

### **A. Reasons to be proud of belonging to the community**

The majority of Roma, both from Transylvania and Oltenia, seem to be proud of their belonging to the community. This is despite the fact that they are a discriminated social category in Romania. “Their exclusion by the society on which they live and their manner of obtaining the economic resources necessary for life are characteristics which set them apart as an anti-social ethnic group.”<sup>23</sup> In this study we address the aspects related to similarity with the group of belonging and not those related to differentiation with other groups. And from this perspective, Roma pride in belonging to the community does not seem surprising. Because, as Bănică, M. said, “the Roma have known how to integrate themselves throughout the centuries with difference, managing at the same time the fantastic performance of remaining themselves.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Reasons to be proud of in Locality 1 (in Transylvania)**

In the first Transylvanian locality most of the respondents mentioned various reasons why they are proud of where they live, but there were also a few cases (and they seem to be young people) where it was argued that there is no reason for pride: “There is nothing here or in the village to be proud of” (F<sup>25</sup>, 29<sup>26</sup>). “I tell you honestly, no, I have nothing to be proud of here” (M<sup>27</sup>, 20).

For the majority of respondents in the first Transylvanian locality, the reasons for local pride are: the customs and traditions of the community, the way of being of the people, the places where they shop, the local priest, the neighborhoods or the church:

“I am very proud of everyone, of all the people in the village, we have very nice people, we don't have any problems” (F, 70).

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<sup>23</sup> Silviu Costachie, “Socio-demographic Characteristics of Romania's Gypsy Minority,” in *Anglo-Romanian geographies: proceedings of the second Liverpool - Bucharest Geography Colloquium*, eds. Duncan Light, Daniela Dumbraveanu-Andone (Liverpool: Liverpool Hope Press, 1997), 112.

<sup>24</sup> Mirel Bănică, *Bafta, Devla și Haramul. Studii despre cultura și religia romilor* (Iași: Polirom, 2019), 433.

<sup>25</sup> F is the first letter from female (the gender of the respondent).

<sup>26</sup> The number in the brackets represents the age of the respondent.

<sup>27</sup> M is the first letter from male (the gender of the respondent).

The fact that people are mentioned as a source of pride shows how much the idea of good neighbourhood, solidarity and good understanding with others is valued. When people manage to get along with each other, perhaps this is also due to personal qualities they have and therefore collective self-esteem is likely to increase.

“The church, yes, the church is really nice... Money was raised, it was renovated, it was done... there are 4 cemeteries, we are in the neighborhood” (F, 59).

“There are 3 shops in our village, they have made people. How much more...if you need something urgent like this...” (M, 70).

Apart to the beauty of the church, to mention among the reasons for pride the fact that there are three shops in the village where locals can buy various products may be a sign of the previous precariousness. Considering that in some rural localities in Romania there is no or only one shop with basic products, the existence of three such private shops already shows more community resources, and when community resources increase, this can lead to a positive leap in terms of assuming the identity of the locality.

“We take pride in the priest. Yes. We have a special priest. We are proud of him.” (F, 80)

Mentioning the priest among the reasons for pride, denotes a leaning towards religion and valuing the church, whose representative the priest is, but also maintaining contact with the priest who becomes a model for the community.

“There aren't many customs here anymore, in my time there were folk dances, there was a band of musicians, it was like that but not now. We used to have these celebrations at the dormitory, only, now at school they do, they do carnivals, but we... it was very nice, but now only, I told you.” (F, 64)

This last answer shows some changes that have occurred in the community, so that the older generation regrets customs that are no longer in place today and that they used to be proud of.

### **Reasons to be proud of in Locality 2 (in Transylvania)**

Only one person here said they have nothing to be proud of:

“Frankly, no. Nothing to be proud of. The customs are lost, even on holidays.” (M, 27)

We can understand from this answer that, if preserved, specific customs could be a source of pride. However, as in the first locality, the loss of customs is brought into question, as it is well known that customs and traditions are one of the main elements of the identity picture of a community.

Other respondents stated that they are proud of the community in which they live, and the reasons for this pride include: the beauty of the place and of representative buildings, especially the evangelical church, or the activities for young people. Some of them are proud because the tourists are visiting the village.

“Coaches come, foreigners come, they come... So they wait for autumn and they come and then they put the tents here on the hill after the church, and they stay for a month, they stay longer.” (M, 49)



“Everything is beautiful, the evangelical church is beautiful, the fortress is beautiful, the home has been claimed by the Saxons, they have started renovating it, everything is beautiful.” (F, 60)

The beauty of the places seems to be an important source of pride, validated by the tourists who come to visit the locality. Beyond the beauty of nature, various buildings are mentioned, such as the fortified fortress or the evangelical church, and the contribution of the Saxons in the renovation of the buildings.

“There they have a party for the young people, maybe, and they have a party on Sundays, on Saturdays they get together...it's nice, it's beautiful. It's nice.” (M, 69)

“I like the Saxon church, I like the way it's renovated here, something else has been done in this village, a pavement here. So with everything, it's done so slowly, more slowly.” (M, 49)

### **Reasons to be proud of in Locality 3 (in Oltenia)**

In Oltenia, in the small town with a majority Roma population, more precisely “rudari”, as the locals insisted on being called, there was only one respondent who said he did not know what would give him reasons to be proud.

“I don't really... I don't really know.” (M, 43)

In this locality in Oltenia, the reasons why the Roma feel proud of their belonging to the community seem much more diverse. They are proud of the whole locality where they live, of the fact that the town is beautiful and clean and has a beautifully landscaped park, they are proud of the places where they can shop or do things for their health, they are proud of the monasteries in the area or the beauty of the landscape. In this locality, the idea of pride in traditional dress has emerged. Also, the “rudarii” of this locality claim that they are proud of the people in their community and especially of their families, children and grandchildren.

The pride for family and for children is an element that appears in the Roma community in Valcea and has not been mentioned in any community in Sibiu County.

“I take pride in my family” (F, 25). “I take pride in my children. I am proud of them so for me everything, no matter what I don't know who brings me, if they bring the world to my feet, so children come first. They are the light of my eyes and I am proud of them because I have two beautiful daughters and a wonderful son-in-law” (F, 51). “Children, that's happiness and pride” (F, 75). “I have grandchildren and I'm proud of them” (F, 75). “With my family I take pride” (M, 46).

“There are good people here” (M, 58).

The beauty of nature, of the forest, as well as the beauty of places of worship, such as monasteries, are also reasons for pride in this community.

“Yes. The scenery. Green grass, beautiful woods. Beautiful atmosphere in which people live” (F, 54).

“Beautiful monasteries but they don't know how to take care of it. There are monasteries on the hill but they need a bit more maintenance because if you don't get dust just like a coat, if you don't wash it or iron it you don't maintain it. But it's still beautiful” (F, 51).

The mention of the traditional Roma ethnic dress is, again, an element that appears in Valcea County and was not mentioned in Sibiu County.

“The clothes, it's the port that still keeps traditions, from time to time” (M, 30).

Another reason of pride for the locals is that the locality is clean, has a landscaped park, shops and even pharmacies. The locals consider the locality to be very beautiful.

“The park in Locality 3, the park they have made very beautiful” (M, 56). “I am proud of the park” (M, 56).

“It's a very beautiful town and... compared to other towns it's much more beautiful, arranged” (F) “I like the town. I like where I go, what I buy, I like to go to the pharmacy or I go to get more treatment to be healthy. I like it. I learned with our people here” (F). “The town is clean, it's beautiful. Yes, I find it much cleaner” (M, 24).

“I'm proud of all of Locality 3, what else...I'm proud of everything in Locality 3, because I'm a son of Locality 3” (M, 30).

This last answer in which the idea of “son of Locality” appears, and the pride is exactly due to this identification (“I'm proud of everything in Locality 3, because I'm a son of Locality 3”) shows a very strong sense of belonging and a very clear assumption of one's own identity. In Locality 3, situated in Oltenia and composed of “rudari” (woodworkers), the level of local pride seems to be much higher than in the Transylvanian localities. Respondents in this locality were very keen to be called “rudari” and not Roma or Gypsies. This is also a way of self-definition of identity, through the name of the profession or skill practised by most of the locals. Most locals make wooden objects, such as spoons, plates, baskets or other household utensils, which they then sell.

### **Reasons to be proud of in Locality 4 (in Oltenia)**

In the other Oltenia locality, a commune, only two respondents said they had no reason to be proud, one of them even mentioning things that displeased him, such as the lack of places where the elderly could carry out various activities. Pride in belonging to a community is also influenced by the extent to which the expectations of its members are met.

“We have nothing to be proud of, no, no” (M, 31). “We don't have much... we don't have anywhere to leave the old people, we don't have place for pensioners to play chess with, or remi” (M, 61).

As in the previous locality in Oltenia, one of the main reasons for pride are the monasteries in the area and the fact that they attract tourists. Some inhabitants are proud of their community as a whole and of the fact that they have drinking water in their households, a cultural centre, pharmacy, market/store, asphalted roads, dispensary and renovated school. Many “rudari” are proud of their families, their children, others are proud of their professional achievements. Among the reasons for pride were mentioned the customs and traditions of the community and the love of God.

“Yes, the monasteries that are much sought after” (F, 26). “To pray for the family, for everyone. I always do in the evening, I post on Facebook with

these beautiful prayers” (F, 31). “We have a monastery here, a very beautiful tourist attraction that is very popular” (M, 18).

“We are proud of our community” (F, 58, Locality 4). “We are proud that we got water” (F, 62). “We have something to be proud of, because they made us a cultural house.... We have a pharmacy, we have a market. Roads first of all. The dispensary is renovated, the school is renovated” (M, 46).

Things like drinking water, paved roads, pharmacies, dispensaries, schools and shops are indicators of quality of life. The quality of life here therefore seems to be enhanced, and this, by implication, leads to a boost in local pride. Or, an increased sense of local pride also means a stronger sense of identity.

As in the other locality in Oltenia, also in this one appears, as a reason for pride, the family, the children.

“It's my children I feel proud of. No one else is, but my children, my man, that's all” (F, 67). “With children. Here I feel at ease, here I grew up” (F, 47). “I am proud to have a beautiful family” (F, 51). “I am proud of my family” (M, 61). “I am proud of everything I have achieved so far: family, child, profession” (F, 58).

“We are proud of the gag, a traditional folk game played at Pentecost” (M, 27).

Other types of answers show the importance given to Divinity.

“I take pride in God. I tell you with all my heart, I am proud of God. I am proud of God... I love him and he loves me” (F, 67).

This last type of response, in which God and the love for him or received from him is mentioned as a reason for pride, appeared only in this fourth community. Since religious identity is an integral part of a community's cultural identity model, individuals' relationship to the Divine becomes a valuable identity marker. It looks like it is a locality where (as several indicators in the interview guide showed) the connection between people and the church, especially the Orthodox church, is strong. There are two monasteries and four Orthodox churches in the locality, as well as one Baptist and one Pentecostal place of worship.

## **B. What people like about living in their community**

When asked what they like about the community they live in, the Roma gave very varied answers. There are similarities but also differences in the responses of the Roma in the four localities.

### **What people like about living in their community – Locality 1, in Transylvania**

In the first settlement in Transylvania, many Roma said they like life in the countryside, with peace and fresh air, with friendly people who respect each other, with the possibility to raise animals and to practice agriculture to ensure their daily living. Some said they appreciate it all because it is where they were born and raised, where they have a home, in some cases inherited from previous generations, where they have learned to live and where they feel safe. For some Roma women,

the habit of looking after their own children and spending time with them is the thing they value most.

“I like everything, what can I say, this is where we were born, this is where everything is” (F, 64).

“I learned to live here” (M, 20).

“I tell you I like living at the country” (F, 20). “Here I am, I get up in the morning, I go out back and let the chickens out. I make the coffee I sit here and drink it” (F, 80).

“It’s better in the village, as in the city you buy everything” (F, 41). “I can’t wait for spring to come to start planting seeds in the garden” (F, 80).

Things like raising birds and animals in the household, or growing vegetables in their own garden are mentioned. These are long-established skills in Romanian villages, where people provide their own food. Therefore, securing food through activities such as animal husbandry or land cultivation becomes an important identity marker. Especially since people also like to engage in such activities.

“(…) because it’s quiet… there’s fresh air” (F, 31). “I like the quiet, going and talking to one another, I don’t like the hustle and bustle” (F, 72). “Well… it’s quiet, comfortable … so if you go around the village at night, you see people, you tell stories…” (M, 70).

“You tell stories” is one of the things that happens in rural areas, where communities are small in numbers, people know each other, are close and get to tell each other stories especially in the evenings after the day’s activities are over. Sharing with others life events and experiences seems to be something valued in this Transylvanian community.

Also, it seems that the quietness of the place, the quietness that exists in the countryside as opposed to the urban environment, is one of the things most appreciated.

There were also people who said that life in their community, in the countryside, involves hard work, but other than that, it is a pleasant life.

“It’s hard work, it’s harder, you need wood and you can’t work anymore, you can’t… that’s the hardest, but otherwise it’s not hard, it’s nice” (F, 59).

In this first community a phrase like “Like in your village, there’s nowhere” (F, 29, M, 37) appeared, demonstrating a strong attachment and a deep sense of belonging.

### **What people like about living in their community – Locality 2, in Transylvania**

The Roma in the second largest rural settlement in Transylvania appreciate the beauty of the place and the people, the quiet, peace and security they have. Children have a place to play, there is no traffic and various events are organised in the community. Some people said they like everything about the place they live, and some reason that they grew up there and there is nothing else for them. The very fact that they were born there is a reason to appreciate where they live. For others, as in the first place, what matters most is that the people are friendly and helpful

and that there is a good understanding between them, especially in the neighbourhood.

“Well, to tell you the truth, I like everything, because here I grew up, I was educated here. I like everything... what can I say...” (M, 30). “I like everything, really everything” (M, 49). “Here we are taught, here, we are brought up” (M, 49). “Well if here we are born, here ... we go from here” (F, 51, M, 62), “I like that here I was born and that in your village there is nowhere, that's the thing” (M, 73).

The attachment to the places where they grew up is also evident from the responses of the Roma in the second community in Transylvania. Stating that they like absolutely everything shows a strong identification with the place where they live.

“It's beautiful, it's beautiful in Locality 2. Now during this summer period there are many children on holiday, they come to their grandparents... young families come a lot, the street and the village in general is lively... tomorrow evening they have a ball, there are all kinds of activities” (F, 60). “Here in Locality 2, now, in August, they are going to organize a festival” (M, 30). “I like it very much that we have a neighbourly spirit and enjoy each other and the atmosphere in the village. I like it when I enter the village and see people in the street, children playing” (M, 46).

Apart from the beauty of the place, many locals like the atmosphere of the village, especially in summer, when children come to visit their grandparents with their parents. In summer, the village streets are full of life and children playing. Another popular event is the annual music festival that takes place in the village and is attended by tourists from all over. Sharing experiences with others and enjoying them also demonstrates a strong sense of belonging to the community.

“It's good for us here because there's no commotion, there's no ... it's also good for the children because they can go out and play, there's not much traffic like there is in other villages. But it's good here.” (F, 26). “I like the quietness of this village” (M, 36).

It is appreciated the peace and quiet of the village, the fact that children can play in the streets freely, unhindered, without the danger of traffic.

The respect that people give each other and the fact that everyone knows everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, is also mentioned. Or the appreciation of human relationships created within the community is an important identity marker.

“They can give me a house in Paris, I'm not going... People are very, very, very nice most of the time... People are nice, the village is nice, quiet. I know the whole village, from the youngest to the oldest man. I respect people, people respect me. You go anywhere else, you pass each other by, you don't know each other. And here is where I was born, here is where I want to die” (M, 43).

Two elements appear differently in this second Transylvanian locality compared to the first: the first is the presence of Saxon culture in the village and the appreciation of the Saxons, who have a more advanced degree of civilization, and the second is the ethnic diversity, not only due to the fact that both Roma and Romanians live in the village, but also because the Roma ethnics are of two

categories, sedentary gypsies<sup>28</sup> and cortorarii<sup>29</sup> who still keep the traditional dress, language and have their own customs.

“I like that the Saxons are here, and they have that, I don't know, common sense, they respect you, with their old tradition not to make a mess on the ground, not to shout in the village” (F, 60).

“People in Locality 2 like the village they live in, the place where they work, and I can say that they are great people and considering that in Locality 2 there are Romanians and Roma, the Roma being of 2 categories, i.e. of 2 races, sedentary gypsies (who have lost their traditions and have integrated into society) and the cortorarii or the caldarari<sup>30</sup>, who still respect their customs and traditions, i.e. they have a port, they have some customs that they respect and many other traditions of their own” (M, 44).

One person in this locality said she do not like anything in her village and it is about a young person, but this person did not have any justification for her answer: “I don't like anything here” (F, 29).

### **What people like about living in their community - Locality 3, in Oltenia**

In the third locality in Oltenia, there seems to be many things that locals appreciate, and statements such as living there is the best thing have appeared. Many of Roma appreciate everything about their locality and community, and the very fact that they were born there increases their level of appreciation. Life in the country, with all its advantages, such as a yard and garden at home, raising animals in the household, the silence, all of these are, in themselves, appreciated. Good relations with neighbours or having family nearby are other reasons why Roma like living in their community. The idea that in the midst of this community they have come closer to God and thus have become more understanding towards others has also emerged.

“I like everything. Everything! The people. And the life and the childhood I had, everything, everything. So I can't say: well I regret being in this village or in this town and I can't do or I can't do anything. So this is where I grew up, this is where I can give... what I need” (M, 30).

“Here I was born, here I am used to it. What can I say, I like... everything” (F, 54). “I like it here because we are, here we are educated, here we are brought up and secondly, we have the shops very close, the minibuses” (F, 58). “... I like it, it's my home here.... This is where my mother made me, where I have a life” (F, 74). “We have the shops very close, the minibus is very close, the train” (F, 58).

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<sup>28</sup> Roma who have lost their traditions and no longer respect the traditional dress, being integrated into society.

<sup>29</sup> Roma who lived in tents in the past and today they are keeping their traditions, language, and the Roma port.

<sup>30</sup> The Caldararii are Roma who keep their traditional dress and are skilled in making metal objects such as buckets, cauldrons, etc.

Here the locals appreciate various facilities that make their lives easier, such as shops, minibuses or train. Many locals have said that they feel comfortable where they live and would not move elsewhere. There was frequently expressed a strong appreciation and respect for the place where they were born and raised.

“I like...I like everything that here I was born, I was brought up and I like it, so I like what else...in this town I like that here I was born. I feel I couldn't go anywhere else to live, because I was brought up here” (M, 58).

“No matter where I go it's still home to me. This is where I feel best. In my nest. Exactly as the elders say in your nest you feel best” (F, 51). “I only like the fact that I am at home here” (F, 53). “At home here is the best” (F, 78). “I like it here, I like it here. Here I stay... here we feel good” (F, 85). “I like it, it's my home here... This is where my mother made me, where I have a life” (F, 74).

As in Transylvanian villages, in Oltenia too, things such as the possibility to keep animals or birds in the household for food, or the existence of a courtyard or garden where you can do outdoor activities are appreciated. Some of the locals are glad that they don't live in a block, but can enjoy living in a house with yard or garden.

“In the yard, you can sit, gather, talk, play, laugh, have a barbecue or play music or you can do a lot of things that you can't do in a block. You can't... we have a pig and we wanted to get birds” (F, 30).

There were also religious markers of identity. Some people said that in their community they had come closer to God by joining the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>31</sup> And this has had positive effects on the personality level, by increasing empathy towards others.

“Now that I started to study another proof here of Jehovah's Witnesses, with God... I told you, first of all he makes me feel good, it's like I have another life, so to speak... another life, another life, he made me feel warmer, more understanding” (M, 42).

What stands out in this first small urban locality in Oltenia is the mention of employment opportunities on the labour market, the possibility to work to earn a daily living and also the facilities they have in terms of mobility or travel within and outside the locality.

"I wouldn't like to live somewhere else, but to have here to be able to work here" (F, 54). "What do you like to do? I teach both my boy and girl to work because nothing falls from above. They don't have to be given to someone else. Working does the job." (M, 46). "In the country I can still find something if you put your hand to it and work, in the city I have to look out the window and I can't look out the window" (M, 64).

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<sup>31</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses is an international religious cult, which has existed in Romania for about 100 years.

The idea that in that community you have managed to make a living, to earn some money, and that living among strangers would be a tormented one, also arose. Disengagement from the community is seen as something negative.

“This is where I made a living, where I saved up... Among strangers you stay tormented” (M, 56).

There were also two Roma people who said that they don't like anything where they live, and more than that, they don't like anything about Romania, even wishing to go abroad.

“I don't like anything! I want to go abroad” (F, 28). “To tell you the truth, I don't like anything in Romania” (F, 54).

### **What people like about living in their community - Locality 4, in Oltenia**

In the fourth (rural) community, in Oltenia, many of the things the Roma value are similar to those valued in the third community, also in Oltenia. Here, things such as freedom and the specificity of life in the countryside, traditions, the connection with nature, the family and its existence in the middle of the community, the respect and appreciation that people show each other appear. For some people, the fact that they were born in the community is in itself something to be appreciated, and especially the fact that their parents were also born and lived in the same place.

“I have never liked living anywhere but here. Here I was born, here I grew up” (F, 32). “As the saying goes: may the bread be as bad as possible in my country and I wouldn't leave...” (F, 42). “Well, if we were born here in this commune, we say it's nowhere near us, so we like everything here” (F, 58).

“I have my daughter here, the boy across the street, I live with someone in the house. And what could I like more? What? In my community is my family, my community” (F, 62).

The fact that the whole family lives in the same place seems to increase the attachment to the community. And being born and raised in a particular geographical area seems to be enhanced by the value of having both children and parents in the same place. Preserving traditions is one of the things valued in the fourth community. And the idea of good neighbourliness appears in this community in Oltenia, as well as in Transylvania. People like to talk with their neighbours, and this could enhance the sense of belonging.

“In village life in the countryside, traditions are still kept, I like simple people, I miss my childhood in the sense of the people I had in my childhood, although life is unforgiving, it takes us by turns or on the hop, or on the hop I think faster, I like life in the countryside, it's nice, it's nice, I like to stay with the neighbors to talk” (F, 51).

One of the things appreciated by many locals is the quietness. They also value the clean country air, where there is no pollution, and the freedom of living in a house rather than an apartment.

“Where I live is quiet... I learned here... It's quiet, especially here where I live, as there are not many houses, it's really quiet” (F, 31). “The quiet...” (M,



61). "What's to like... I'm quiet, well I was quiet there too, but I'm quiet, I mind my own business, people mind their own business" (M, 66).

"I wouldn't see...left here ... Everything seems freer, I couldn't see myself living in a closed apartment like that. Much cleaner air...it's different" (M, 18).

The instrumental aspect of life in the countryside appears again: beyond the possibility to breathe fresh air, for many locals it matters a lot that they can raise animals or birds in the household, as a source of food, or that they can grow various vegetables in the garden. So, beyond the benefits of a pollution and traffic-free environment, living in the fourth largest community in Oltenia is itself a source of livelihood security.

"I don't like to live in the city because you can't sit outside and breathe a breath of air. For example, as I go out in the morning, I feel ok, because I go out in my yard and sit and breathe and look up at the forest, down at the water and so on with a chicken in the yard. With a garden, that's the life of an old man, in old age" (F, 62). "Anything. Here in the village it's much more like the city. It's good, it's bad, in the garden, one tomato, another. Anything" (M, 60).

In their appreciation of where they live, the Roma place great importance on their relationships with each other. They like very much the fact that the locals live together in good relations, that they help, respect and appreciate each other and share life experiences with their neighbours. The word "respect" was one of the most frequently used words by locals in this fourth community.

"To be honest I still sit with these old people talking, like the neighbors, and say their prayers. I like to sit with them and talk" (M, 52). "I like the harmony, the peace, the love of these people, that's what I like very much, the communication, the collaboration" (M, 60). "I am respected. If I respect them, they respect me" (M, 66).

God is also mentioned in this community and it seems that people like to have a leaning towards God in the middle of the community they live in. Somehow this amplifies the sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the community. When more people believe in God, feel and behave the same way, the bonds between them become stronger, they feel included and accepted.

"This is where I was born, this is where I grew up, this is where I gather from, this is where I gather from - I love the Lord from here, from this community, from here, from this land. I tell you the truth, I don't even love my children like I love God. Because he is, he is our strong one, he is our truth and our master who gave us on Earth" (M, 60).

Despite of all these things appreciated by the Roma in the number four locality in Oltenia, there was one person who claimed that he does not like anything in the place where he lives, and this is due to poverty, which is at high levels:

"I don't like anything. I don't like it, why don't I like it so to speak, there is too much poverty like this and that's why I don't like it. It's too much poverty, as I told you. Someone else has it, someone else doesn't. Maybe another has money to buy a loaf of bread, maybe another doesn't. And that's what I don't like.

Maybe if I had and worked and had an income like that, maybe I would like it too. I'd like to take my children for walks, go out into the world..." (F, 42).

### **Conclusions**

Considering the things mentioned by the Roma from the four communities, two from Transylvania, Sibiu County, and two from Oltenia, Valcea County, we can conclude that the feeling of belonging to the community is strong. Most of the Roma identify themselves with the place where they live and have a clear sense of pride. However, as our empirical research was qualitative and not quantitative, we cannot claim that the conclusions can be extrapolated to the entire Roma population in the localities where we conducted the case studies.

Some things seem quite obvious and we refer here to the differences between localities, especially the differences between the Roma in Transylvania and those in Oltenia. It seems that the level of pride of the Roma in Oltenia about belonging to the community is higher than that of the Roma in Transylvania. In Transylvania, the main reasons for local pride were the customs and traditions of the community, people's way of being, shopping places, the local priest, neighbourhoods or church, tourists, the beauty of the place, the evangelical church, youth activities, while in Oltenia, the list of reasons was much longer: they are proud of the whole locality, of the fact that the town is beautiful and clean and has a nice park, they are proud of the places where they can do shopping or health things, they are proud of the monasteries in the area or of the beauty of the landscape. In Oltenia, the idea of pride in traditional clothing has emerged. The "rudarii" of Valcea County said they are proud of the people in their community and especially their families, children and grandchildren. Another source of pride in Oltenia is the area's monasteries and the fact that they attract tourists. Some inhabitants are proud because they have drinking water in their homes, a cultural home, a pharmacy, a market/store, paved roads, a dispensary and a renovated school, and beautiful traditions.

And in terms of the things that Roma appreciate in their community and where they live, there seems to be a difference between Roma from Transylvania and Roma from Oltenia, in the sense that the latter seem to appreciate many more things compared to those from Transylvania. However, as our study is qualitative and not quantitative, we cannot be certain of such a conclusion. In Transylvania, the specificity of life in the country, with the related activities, the good neighbourly relations, the influence of the Saxon culture, or the good understanding between the locals, despite the ethnic diversity, seem to be appreciated the most. In Oltenia, in addition to the specifics of living in the countryside and good relations with others, things such as employment opportunities on the labour market, the development of public transport, the respect that people give to each other, the faith in God of the people in the community are listed.

As for the second indicator of our analysis, i.e. the things that the Roma like in the community where they live, the idea of God, the idea of similarity with others due to the love for God and the love offered to people by God, thus, implicitly, the idea of acceptance and social inclusion, appears among the Roma of Oltenia.

Through religion, through closeness to God comes greater empathy, greater gentleness and trying to understand others. From this point of view, religion can also be an important vector of the sense of belonging, together with the other elements mentioned above, which reflect the pride of belonging to the community and identification with it.

It seems that the reasons why the Roma, both from Transylvania and Oltenia, are proud of their community or like the place where they live can be grouped into two categories: *instrumental* and *affective*. The instrumental ones refer to the fact that they can have various facilities or opportunities that help them in their daily life. Examples include the availability of drinking water, public transport, workplaces, the possibility to raise animals or to cultivate land. The affective ones refer to the attachment developed either because of family roots in the place, or because of good relations with the community, neighbourhood or family, or because of admiration for the natural landscape or buildings (e.g. monasteries). Regardless of the type of motivation, instrumental or affective, in the ethno-cultural model of the Roma, the pride of belonging to the community seems to belong to the majority of members. Since the concept of identity has a sense of similarity with the group of belonging and a sense of differentiation from other out-groups, it is necessary to mention that we have dealt in this study strictly with the group of belonging, the in-group, not with the relations of Roma to out-groups, such as other ethnic groups. This is particularly important because of the existence of social discrimination against Roma. It seems that, in spite of discrimination, within the community they belong to, Roma manage to keep the pride of belonging to it. And this is a marker of identification with and attachment to the community.

Certainly, the identity picture of the Roma both in Transylvania and Oltenia needs to be completed with other elements, especially in the context of the transfer of values from one ethno-cultural model to another, in multicultural communities, on which we will build the following studies.