

Pázmány Péter Catholic University

Doctoral School of Historical Sciences

Economical, Regional and Political History Workshop

HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS
OF RELIGIOSITY
IN CSÍK REGION

Arguments of the PhD Dissertation

Author: Fejes Ildikó

Supervisor: Dr. Gereben Ferenc CSc

2014

1. Antecedents of the investigation, problematic

My PhD thesis is focusing on the socio-religious description of Csík region: an ethnically, religiously and ethnographically well defined geographic area in Transylvania, Romania; analyzing its population's religiosity in a historical dimension. More than 86% of the population numbering approximately 115 000 in the 61 localities of the region are ethnic Hungarians, and 84% are Roman Catholics. Beyond its ethnic and denominational homogeneity, Csík region is characterized by a strong religiosity deeply permeating the history, the culture, the customs of the inhabitants. Religion still visibly plays an essential role in the personal and communal lifestyle of the people living here, and at the same time, the church today is still one of the most important social institutions in the region. This observation is supported by the fact that the explicitly socio-religious investigations, or other sociological surveys involving the religiosity aspect conducted after the change of regime, all place Romania in Europe's front-line as regards the various values of religiosity that have been measured. The analyses also strengthen this picture: in the two decades of post-communist Romania a process of religious revitalization has been going on, the indicators measuring religiosity point to an increasing religiousness. It is highly presumable that Csík region can neither be excepted from this process.

In my thesis I am looking for the factors that historically have been determinant in the formation of Csík region's specific unique character, of which impacts can still be felt and empirically verified.

I will draw an outline of the religious image of Csík region's recent past on the basis of a complex sociology of religion survey performed in 2010, representative for the region. This research, beyond measuring different dimensions of religiosity, makes possible the analysis of specific factors characteristic for the region and its history, which can be related to religiousness. In Csík region such factors are the national, ethnic, minority identity; the historical participation and social status of the church and within it the Franciscan friars; the mentality of the region's inhabitants; as well as the economical underdevelopment, and in consequence the overwhelmingly pre-modern character of the region. In the first part of my study, presenting the history of Szeklerland, and more specifically that of Csík region, I will try to bring to surface the historical traces of these factors; while in the second part, containing the results of the empirical research, I present the data measured in 2010 in Csík region also along these indicators. In the following hypotheses of my investigation I explain in detail, what train of thought has led me in relating these factors and indicators to the religiosity of Csík's population.

I have built my study on the following hypotheses:

1. hypothesis: Strong religiosity

Based on my preliminary personal experience on the field, and on the general religious “public morale” of the region, I formulated the research presumption that in comparison with Transylvanian, Hungarian, Romanian data Csík's population is characterized by higher values of religiousness along various dimensions of religiosity. In this region, we find more intensive communal and individual religious practice, which shows strong correlations to such “classical” socio-demographical indicators as gender, age, type of locality, schooling, and income.

2. hypothesis: Religiosity is organic part of community identity

Religiosity has always been an organic part of Szekler communal identity in the past and it still plays an important role today. The specific sense of Szekler ethnic identity is deeply rooted in history, but today's processes are also strongly defined by the construction of Szekler identity. In this identity construction we may also find certain ethnocentric aspects. The eventual ethnocentric attitudes highlighting Szekler identity are correlated with various aspects of religiosity.

3. hypothesis: The institutional church is organic part of the region's institutional system, and this increases the social legitimacy of religiousness

Traditional Szekler society, and within it the Csík region, is decisively characterized by the organic cohesion, the mutual interdependence and interference of the politics – society – church triad. Thanks to this, in the traditional society not only the religious behavior becomes a constituent of everyday lifestyle, but the institutional church is also inherently organic part of functioning society. Church and related religious events work not only as part of a closed system separately from the sphere of general public social events, but they also intertwine practically with every other political, cultural and social events. This centuries long practice could not be ultimately eradicated by the Communist era, and beginning from the nineties church has become again an essential factor of the social institutional system, and concomitantly an important actor of any social-cultural events. We cannot thus speak of any separation of local “state”, politics and church, which strengthens religiosity not only by assuring social legitimacy for the church, but also by integrating organically and naturally the church as institution into the lifestyle of the local population. At the same time, the institutional church and the clergy representing the official church both hold a significant symbolic capital.

4. hypothesis: Franciscan monks had and still have got a significant impact on the religious life of the regional population.

The settlement and activity of the Franciscan order plays an outstanding role in the religiosity of Csík region's population. The fervent activity of the Franciscans has greatly contributed to the Catholic integrity of the region, in setting culture and education onto religious foundations. The Shrine Church of Csíksomlyó, the Pentecost pilgrimage, the Marian cult of Csíksomlyó, the Saint Anthony novena, all linked for centuries to the activity of the Franciscan friars still occupy a highlighted and exquisite place in the religious practice of the local population.

5. hypothesis: Religiosity is strongly correlated to the conservative, traditionalist mentality of the region

Conservatism, the attachment to traditions is a factor strongly influencing religiosity. This mentality and this attitude are deeply rooted in the past; seclusion from the novelties, sacralization – and consequently unchangeability – of the “ancestral rules” are centuries-old traditions. Today respect for tradition is still characteristic among the locals, not only on a narrative level, but the actual bequeathing of the inherited behavioral models is part of the lifestyle in Csík region. I presume that the more important one holds the care for traditions, and the more conservative mentality one has got, the more religious he or she is.

6. hypothesis: Csík region is characterized in many aspects by the specific properties of traditional, pre-modern societies, and this is strongly correlated with the religiousness of the local population.

Szeklerland always counted as the periphery of Hungary, and of the Western culture in general. Due to its economical underdevelopment the local society is still characterized in many aspects by the peculiarities of traditional or pre-modern societies. The forced modernization which the region underwent during the

Socialist era was followed by an attempt to return to the traditional lifestyle. The traditional or pre-modern type of the society definitely contributes to the religiousness of the locals, strengthening and consolidating the traditional type of religiosity. Concordantly we may find numerous particularities of pre-modern religiosity in the religious practice of the local population.

The study is built up from nine chapters, from which six contain historical and empirical data relating to the topic. The third chapter, following the introductory chapters presents Szeklerland, its history, its particularities, the imagology of its population, respectively Csík region and its church history. The fourth chapter contains the research questions and hypotheses, the fifth one describes the methodology of the investigation. The sixth chapter presents the results of the empirical research, and the seventh is a summary of the conclusions and empirical observations of the investigation. Finally, after the eighth chapter comprising the bibliography, the annexes contain the questionnaire used for the empirical survey, as well as the detailed presentation of the more important statistical analyses.

2. Research Methodology

In the historical and theoretical part of my thesis I present the history of Szeklerland and more specifically of Csík region as part of it, and the socio-historical facts concerning the religiosity of the local population. I analyze the religiosity of the contemporary Csík population on the basis of a survey research. I performed in Spring 2010 in Csík region a sociology of religion survey on 613 individuals with the help of questionnaires, under the professional guidance of Prof. Dr. Miklós Tomka (†2010 November), and with the financial help of the Wiener Pastorales Forum led by Prof. Dr. Dr. Paul M. Zulehner. There have been two parallel research objectives formulated in the project proposal: on the one hand to compare the religiosity indicators of Csík region's society with the similar indicators of Central-Eastern Europe (and within it more specifically those of Romania and Hungary); and on the other hand to find a reason for Csík region's high religiosity – which was already presumable from previous surveys and from the observation of the “public morale” in the local society. For a more accurate comparability of data, during my investigations I used as model the questionnaire of the Aufbruch 2007 Research Survey. In order to be able to bring to light Csík region's specific characteristics I have formulated in hypotheses those peculiarities of the local society that could and still can have an impact to religiosity. In setting up my hypotheses I have leaned on the historiography literature of the region, as well as on the results of my previous socio-religious deep interview investigations.

The subjects of my previous investigation were Roman Catholic individuals, older than 18 years. During the sampling I have used type of locality – stratification and probability types of sampling. Following the data input there was need for weighing the data according to gender and age. Data processing was performed with the help of SPSS 19 statistical program.

3. New Results

3.1. Religious practice

During my empirical investigation I begot a detailed description of the frequency of individual and communal religious practice in Csík region. After the statistical processing of the data I found the following results:

- In comparison with Transylvanian, Hungarian and Romanian data, Csík region's population is characterized by higher values along the various dimensions of religiosity. The people of Csík region go to church more frequently and pray more frequently than those from Romania, from Hungary, and from Central-Eastern Europe. We may assert that the entire population of Csík region is characterized by frequent religious practice.
- Religious practice is correlated with gender, size of locality, schooling, partially with age and income, and is extremely influenced by the childhood socialization. The highest probability of weekly churchgoing is found among women from small rural localities and/or with low education, from the older generation. The factors most “reducing” religious practice are: male gender, domicile in Csíkszereda town, and/or higher level of education, and/or young adult age, significantly higher income, and/or the lack of childhood religious socialization.
- Although the individual and communal forms of religious practice are strongly correlated, and for the majority of the believers both are organic parts of their lifestyle, I could identify certain factors that influenced differently the two types of religious practice. There are common influencing factors for both aspects: such as gender and religious socialization; while other factors impact one type rather than the other:

education influences church going, type of locality and age influences frequency of praying.

- The faith of Csík's population is definitely strong in terms of Catholic dogmas; while at the same time – contrary to my expectations – it is characterized in minor extent by “mixed” and “a la carte” elements.
- From the aspect of faith content the main component analysis – besides the obviously strong Roman Catholic dogmatic – reveals both its multilevel structure, as well as the hardly describable and generalizable presence of teachings divergent from Catholic dogmas. The inner structure of faith elements may be interpreted along such categories as: “magical”, “catholic”, “otherworldly”, “esoteric”, and “one has to believe in something”.
- Part of the specific data for Csík region's population stands close to the values characteristic for Romania, while other indicators are closer to the general values characterizing Central-Eastern European Catholics. In Csík region however, we find the highest values along the majority of the dimensions, thus the “Romanian Catholicism” is a necessary though not satisfactory explanation of the outstanding religiosity of the local population.

3.2. Religiosity and Szekler identity

- The strong regional identity in Csík region on the one hand is deeply rooted in history, and on the other hand is due the contemporary identity construction processes.
- Csík's population is characterized by an extraordinarily strong local identity and local patriotism.

- Although in the process of contemporary identity construction emphasizing the Catholicism of the region is an important element, in contrast to my expectations, the identity of the local population is characterized rather by the love of one's living place, the sense of familiarity, the confidence in self-government, and in significantly less extent by an ethnocentric attitude.
- Religiosity shows correlation with the attachment to the local space and not with a biased attitude towards Szekler identity. The sense of “familiarity” stands in strong correlation with religious practice and Christian faith, with the religious self-categorization and partly with the satisfaction with the church.
- The presence, or lack, or “normal level” of “ethnocentrism” is in no correlation whatsoever with how frequently one goes to church, if considers him/herself religious or not; it shows a weak correlation with Christian faith; and it shows strong correlation with a critical stance towards the church.
- I have to revise my initial hypothesis, according to which there are correlations between the eventual ethnocentric attitudes, emphasizing Szekler identity and the various dimensions of religiosity: the religious indicators are in correlation with a strong regional identity, local patriotism, and not with the presence or lack of ethnocentric attitudes.

3.3. Judging and social legitimation of the church

- The historical documents witness that in Csík region the church had always taken an active role not only in the field of education and culture but also in the domain of political life and later in minority protection as well.

- Today the church possesses in the region an established educational, social institution system, and the presence of Catholic media is also significant.
- In Csík region, the impact of the church on its believers in the fields of culture, faith and moral system is undoubted.
- The local population strongly favor that the church should activate and form opinion in such fields of their life, which are not directly related to pastoralization. This favoring attitude is determined primarily by the living relations with the church, the frequency of churchgoing – we may say, that the more closely one knows the activity of the church, the more intensive his/her relation is with the institution, the more positive image he/she has of it, or the more attempted he/she is to express good opinion on the church.
- According to the empirical results, in Csík the priests dispose of the highest symbolic capital from among the more important public personalities. Clergy has got an important role in public life in the region, in many aspects and in many localities priests are the most recognized and the most valued personalities.
- In Csík region the church is on the top of the public institutions in terms of relative confidence, very many people expect from the church the institutional solution to the “profane” problems of their lives, and in accordance many of them feel that there are not enough Catholic institutions in the region.
- Among the communal and spiritual movements belonging to the church the most popular are those communities that have got long historical tradition, and stand closer to popular religiosity.

- We can definitely assert that in Csík region the church is one of the most important and most influential institutions for the local population. At the same time, there are signs showing that the positive judgment of the church has somewhat diminished in the later years; the symbolic capital accumulated by the church during the Communism and in the socially extremely critical period after the change of regime may lose from its power in the period of social consolidation, and in the field of reality beyond the “sacral” narratives.

3.4. Csíksomlyó and the Marian cult

- We may consider it a historical evidence, that the Franciscan Monastery of Csíksomlyó had been the leading cultural, educational and economical institute of Csík region for centuries, which decisively contributed to the preservation of the region's Catholicism.
- Beside this, the results of the empirical investigation also demonstrate that the Franciscans today are still extremely important actors in preserving and perpetuating the religious culture.
- Based on the questionnaire survey we may confidently assert that the activity of the Franciscans, and such strongly related elements as Csíksomlyó, the cultic Marian statue, the Saint Anthony cult not only in the past have been important forces in shaping Csík region's religiosity, culture and society, but also today are still the most significant factors of the contemporary local society and the population's religiosity.
- As Csíksomlyó stands geographically in the center of the region, so the Holy Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó is the central figure of the faith, of the religious practice of Csík region's population.

3.5. System of values, tradition, customs and religiosity

- In the view of the historians the conservative mentality, the sacralization of the rules and customs have always been attitudes strongly shaping the history of this region in the course of historical times.
- During the questionnaire survey I have investigated this phenomenon by creating a group of variables that contained the local patriotism of Csík population, their attachment to customs and traditions, the effect of social control, and their opinion about regional self-governance.
- The cluster analysis applied divided the respondents into two groups. The first group includes more than two thirds of the respondents, they may be characterized along every involved variable by higher values than those belonging to the second group, and at the same time they turned out to be the more intensively religious as well.
- During the analysis it has become a differentiating factor, whether Csík region existed as the center of the sentimental, mental and active vital space in the life of the individuals, or the local attachment was lower and the individual interpreted his/her own life on wider horizons. Those more intensively religious are also more attached to their natal place, they consider social control as more important, they are more strongly devoted to the customs and traditions of their ancestors, and they think that self government would be beneficial to the region. The less religious ones present lower values along each of these factors.
- We do not have however founded reasons for supposing causal relation between the “community-rootedness” and the intensity of religiousness. It seems a more plausible assertion that the two phenomena act together, and they both may be traced back to further background factors. We may still conclude anyway that the majority of Csík's population considers

traditional values more important, and religiousness is associated to these or is part of them.

3.6. Traditional society and religiousness

- This region could be considered all along its history as peripheral, mainly because the economic aspect has always significantly determined and still determines the society and lifestyle of the locals.
- Modernization efforts have been interrupted, and (partially also) in consequence of this fact the majority of the region's population are still living in rural environment, they have relatively low education and low incomes, and after the change of regime the return to traditional lifestyle has generalized.
- Besides the lack of metropolitan lifestyle, the traditionalist character of the region is strengthened also by those processes going on in the “mental space” (too), which aim the revitalization and rehabilitation of traditions, folk customs, holidays, and which – opposed to, or counterbalancing the globalised consumerist lifestyle – emphasize the positive aspects of traditional lifestyle, in a “post-modern” way we may say.
- The results of the survey do not show significant religious individualization process in the region; almost three quarters of the Roman Catholics of Csík region belong to the sphere of the “churchly religious”, the rest of the respondents are divided among the multicolored categories built up from the various types of individual and communal religious practice.
- Based on the results of the investigation, we can see that according to the available indicators on the bipolar scale of traditional and post-traditional religiosity most of the locals tend towards traditional religiousness due to

their religious environment, their religious behavior, their religious feelings and mentality.

- The generally frequent and strong religious socialization, the constance in faith, the strong interconnection between confession and sacral communion – restricted in the case of the majority for the more important holidays, the signs pointing to a less personalized view of God, the preference for practicing formal prayer formulas and the unpopularity of other forms of prayer in the case of the majority, all increase the statistical probability that Csík region's population is leaning rather towards the traditional communal type of religiosity than towards the modern, more individualistic religiosity based on personal experience.

Conclusions:

In this study I have drawn those factors that I have considered contributing to the religiosity of Csík region's population. I placed these factors into historical framework, and I aimed to map all the impacts – rooted in the past, in the social history of the locals – that still can be felt today. Next – on the basis of the empirical data – I presented in detail those dimensions of the contemporary religiosity that could be related to the historical tradition.

I trust that my work can offer help for the regional cultural, economical and political leaders in better harmonizing their work with the values and customs that ultimately define the lives of the people living in Csík region. I also hope that I showed relevant starting points for the church leaders and serving clergy that could help in elaborating pastoralization projects and strategies. I expect that the post-modern times leaking through the loosening walls of the “Christian society”

still extant in Csík region will not lead to human, moral and religious anomie, but the changes will find a prepared local society which – thanks to its accumulated cultural and religious traditions – at this moment is still definitely in an advantageous situation.

4. Publications in the thesis topic

- Fejes Ildikó: Vallásgyakorlat és hit. Vizsgálódások csíki katolikusok körében. [Religious Practice and Faith. Investigations Among Roman Catholics of Csík Region] In. Szerk. Bíró A. Zoltán – Kiss Adél: *Térség – Fejlesztés – Tudomány*. A KAB Alkalmazott Társadalomtudományi Szakbizottságának konferenciája, Csíkszereda, 2010. november 12. Státus Kiadó 2011, pp. 40-50, ISBN 978-606-8052-38-0.
- Fejes Ildikó: Csík vallásosságának társadalmi és történelmi gyökerei. Egy térségi vallásszociológiai kutatás kiindulópontjai. [Historical and Social Roots of Religiosity in Csík Region. Starting Points For a Regional Sociology of Religion Research] In. Szerk. dr. Szép Sándor: *Doktorandusz fórum 2010*. Ed. Cermi, 2010, pp. 47-55, ISBN 978-973-667-387-0.
- Fejes Ildikó – recenzió: (szerk.) Gereben Ferenc: *Vallásosság és kultúra*. [Review: Gereben, Ferenc (ed.): *Religiosity and Culture*] In. *Keresztény Szó*, 2010/2, pp. 23-24, ISSN: 1220-630X
- Fejes Ildikó: Vallási individualizáció a csíkszeredai katolikusok körében. [Religious Individualization Among Roman Catholics of Csíkszereda] In. *Erdélyi Társadalom*, 2007/1, pp. 73-103, ISSN: 1583-6342
- Fejes Ildikó: A premodern vallásgyakorlók. [Pre-Modern Religious Practitioners] In. Szerk. Bíró A. Zoltán: *Állapotok és változások*. Ed. Alutus Kiadó Csíkszereda, 2006, pp. 193-210, ISBN : 973-7875-26-5
- Fejes Ildikó – Jakab Judit: Korlátozások a fogyasztásban. A böjt. [Restrictions in Consumption. Fasting.] In. *Székelyszó* – kulturális folyóirat, 2004/4 . pp: 91-112, ISSN: 1453-3871

Other research activities in the topic:

- Professional synthesis based on the results of the research projects and publications related to churches and religiosity in Szeklerland region – Junior Scholarship with the financial support of the Board of the Scientific Scholarship Program for Hungarians Outside Hungary of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2006.