

THE NEOINTERPRETATIVE METHODOLOGY.
THE LEVELS OF FIELD ANALYSIS.
RESEARCH REPORT ON THE LIPPOVAN COMMUNITY
IN DOBRUJA (II)¹

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The Lippovans are a Russophone community with a history that still raises questions, yet mainly linked to the moment of the Reform of Patriarch Nikon, at the end of the 17th century. Taking into account the religious point of view, they are an archaic community ("old rite followers"), whose internal coherence is ensured primarily by their language (old Slavonic permeated with Romanian words) and traditions, and less by the Church or by local elites' capacity to knit together and develop the community's symbolic order. On the other hand, the "objective" order reveals the community's potential for development, where their economic infrastructure is centered outwards, most of the property being owned by people who are strangers to the place, while the resource derives from money earned working abroad or in other parts of Romania. Nevertheless, the Lippovans proved to be fully integrated in the Romanian territory, at least in Dobruja.

Keywords: Lippovans, ethnicity, symbolic infrastructure, local symbolistic, "povestariu".

V. HEALTH

Health is one of the most important dimensions of the local potential for development a community possesses. Together with the economic and cultural dimensions, health has a crucial value for the understanding of how communities

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evolve. The state of “being healthy” can be a good indicator of the “success of a community”, the conclusive expression of the quality of social life. In other words, health is relevant both to the individual and to the community in its entirety. Thus the dimension of health embodies the chances of a subsequent evolution in terms of bio-psychological validity of the human factor in a social context.

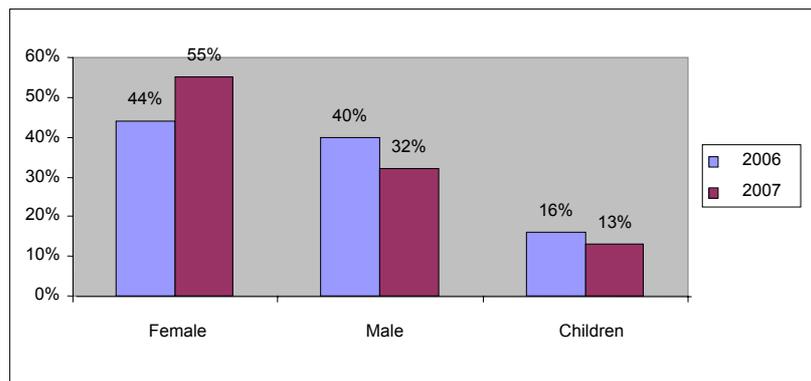
There are two relevant aspects we will take into account in this case: the general health condition of the population and the access to medical services.

The first relevant aspect we will discuss is **the Lippovans’ general health condition**. This analysis is based on: medical records regarding chronic patients registered during the last trimester of the years 2007 and 2008, the number of consultations and treatments for 2006 and 2007, discussions had with nurses, community assistants and family doctors. In order to establish the Lippovans’ general health condition we took into account a number of indicators: the addressability, the incidence of diseases and their determinant factors, the level of personal hygiene, etc.

Addressability is a prime indicator of concern for personal health. Through it we understand the frequency with which the patients visit the doctor. It reflects the number of consults offered and the number of treatments prescribed by the family doctor who activates within the investigated communities.

In the case of Slava Cercheză², in the year 2007, compared to the year 2006, a rise in women’s attendance for consults can be observed, from 44% to 55%, concomitantly with a decrease in male attendance, from 40% to 32% (see *Evolution of medical consults* graphic). We can therefore observe that women are more concerned with their personal health, turning to the doctor far more often than men do.

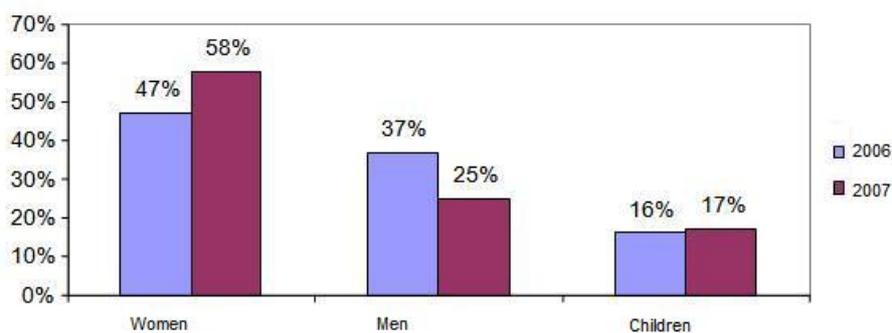
Graphic 1 – Evolution of medical consults



² In what regards the other villages we could not obtain data or information which could allow us to formulate observations regarding the local people’s degree of addressability.

Regarding the number of treatments prescribed, there is an important increase, of approximately 300 treatments in 2007, as opposed to 2006. Distributed by sex, the increase in treatments prescribed to women seems to be greater (from 47% to 58%) while treatments prescribed to men have decreased from 37% to 25% (see *Evolution of treatment prescription* graphic).

Graphic 2 – Evolution of treatment prescription

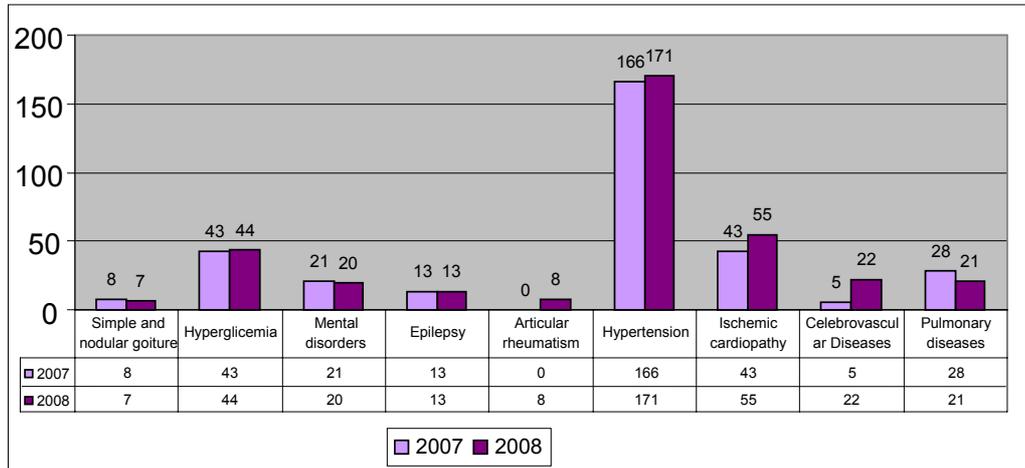


Despite the high degree of addressability, doctors are concerned over the fact that patients show up for consults when their disease is in its final stages, ignoring the symptoms in the early stages. A significant percent of the total patients ignore the incipient symptoms of diseases, believing them to be only the effect of aging or day to day problems.

In regards to the disease incidence, from the data we obtained in Slava Cercheză and from the discussion we had with the medical staff of the other two villages, we observed that, out of all chronic illnesses, the highest incidence of illnesses represent cardio-vascular diseases, followed by nutrition diseases – sugar diabetes, lung diseases, ulcer related diseases, cirrhosis and other chronic hepatitides: “the main chronic diseases people suffer from are cardiac diseases: hypertension, ischemic cardiomyopathy... many have begun to show signs of diabetes, because they are not eating right”. Cancer incidence is very low (below 1%). Compared to the year 2008 there are no significant increases in the number of diseases which affect the Lippovans (see *Evolution of chronic diseases* graphic³).

³ The chart reproduces the number of chronic diseases for the years 2007 and 2008. Diseases which only had one or two cases of incidence were excluded.

Graphic 3 – Evolution of Chronic diseases



Cardiovascular diseases, along with the aging process, are some of the most important causes of morbidity amongst Lippovans. Life expectancy is around 80 to 90 years, women having a greater life expectancy compared to men (approximately 10 years longer).

The high incidence of cardiovascular and nutritional diseases reveals the fact that a series of transformations have taken place in the social nature of diseases. The gradual *adoption of nutritional behaviors once specifically tied to the urban area* has generated a mutation in what regards the illnesses the people suffer from. The approaching of the village to the city has been achieved through the general deliverances from the city towards the village. If until not long ago the main food resource was fish, nowadays people eat pork meat and other foods rich in fat. *“Today not everyone can afford to eat fish, because it’s expensive”* told us one of our collocutors.

Concern for personal health is reflected on the level of personal hygiene. On a declarative level, the Lippovans appear to be quite concerned with their own personal hygiene. *“There is no household without a Lippovan bathroom (sauna)”* – our interlocutors repeatedly declared. As the community assistant from Slava Cercheză told us, *wealthy people have renovated their houses, have modernized them, have built bathrooms within the house with sandstone and faience*, but have remained faithful to the Lippovan baths, which also have the function of *purifying one’s body*.

The problem of alcohol consumption represents a relatively difficult subject to approach because it is a delicate social problem, with profound implications on a community level. According to the persons interviewed, alcoholics are *the shame*

of the community. From the discussions we've had we can conclude that the spread of alcoholism is determined by the socio-economic context. In what regards gender division, there seems to be no significant difference between the proportion of women and men. Still, one of the variables that influence the amplitude of this phenomenon is *the season*. During winter, this phenomenon is amplified by the lack of paid activities. There are communities where, because of the unfavorable economic context, *a significant number* of persons irresponsibly consume alcohol any time of day ("over here, where we live, there are a lot of people who drink or are drunk all day long" – representative of the Jurilovcan authorities). This behavior was present even during the communist regime, even in the same proportions. Relating this with the birth, death and marital status registry it can be observed that most persons suffering from alcoholism are predominantly widowers, persons who have remained home alone after the departure of their children to work abroad and those who have no occupation.

Analyzing at *the access to medical services* we have noticed the presence of a medical center and a pharmacy in each commune, while in some localities we have found a dentist's office (Slava Cercheză) and an ambulance station (Jurilovca). But, on the level of technical facilities there are significant discrepancies between the three villages. In Jurilovca there is a medical centre equipped with cutting-edge technology, which offers the villagers a series of medical services comparable to ones received in private medical offices in Bucharest (ambulance station, an echogram machine) while in Slava Cercheză and Sarichioi barely the minimum facilities are supplied for the center to work with. From this point of view we take into note the disproportionate distribution of "medical resources", to which we add the unequal access to health care services. More so, accessing hospital medical care is conditioned by the relatively big distance between the villages and the first hospital (depending on the locality, 10 to 40 km).

In light of the discussions we have had, the medical staff has shown dissatisfaction towards the lack of pragmatism of "the people working in the Ministry" who organize the health care system in inefficient ways, ignoring the importance of preventive medicine, a practice which could maintain the society on a level of health far superior to the one in the present.

Not all investigated villages dispose of sufficient medical staff. For example, in Slava Cercheză, because of the migration of the work force, there is an acute lack of qualified medical personnel.

Generally speaking, the collocutors' perception is that "the Lippovan village is dying" because of the massive immigration abroad, "even though, recently, more young adults are returning to the village". Mortality surpasses birth rate, although not necessarily because of medical reasons. It is simply because no more children are being born into the village. This year, in Slava Cercheză, for example, only one child was born, and only in Babadag village.

VI. THE ECOLOGY OF LIVING

Lippovans present their village as being laid out in straight, perpendicular streets, with their houses “aligned streetwise, as opposed to everyone else’s”. Beyond this perception, the houses are well cared for, have clean yards and are relatively streetwise aligned. Almost all have a visible shade of blue, likewise to their churches, and all of them “should have a sauna” – an element of comfort “which differentiates them from the others”. Most Lippovan villages are not engaged in any conflicts with nature, with the exception of the fishermen’s villages, which do not have fish anymore because of poaching, mishandling of their canals and not populating their pools of water with young fish for the past five years.

Concerning their *positioning within tradition and history* – Lippovan villages *are on the verge of giving up their ubiquitous blue coloring* – already there are houses, churches which are painted in different colors. About the meaning of this color our interlocutors could not give us many details, but we surmise that it is part of a tradition which has been powerfully internalized on the level of the collective mentality, at least through its extension. The newer houses are most often built *outside of tradition*, in the sense that they “have PVC windows” and colors which do not respect the Lippovan style anymore, especially in what regards the homes of the persons “who have worked abroad”.

VII. CRIME RATE

In the investigated communities, the most often occurring transgressions are usually related to poaching, robbery, juvenile delinquency. With the decline of the economic climate there has been an increase of infractions, a phenomenon directly linked to the lack of jobs, largely associated with alcohol consumption⁴. For example, in Jurilovca, the local police force has to deal with an estimated 300 or 400 cases of law infringement per year, out of which 150 can be considered serious offences.

Police agents consider cases of juvenile delinquency as a direct consequence of the workforce’s first wave of migration abroad. As a result of these cases, some disorganized families have surfaced.

One of the most important problems of the community is poaching. This fact is acknowledged both by fishermen, and by some local authorities. Even though presently there are quite a few criminal case files opened for poaching, justice is inefficiently applied and as a result, none of the cases have been punished

⁴ In Sarichioi alone there are 10 bars, rarely lacking clients (the phenomenon is greatly increased during the winter time).

according to the law. Moreover, the inefficiency of the justice system generates the weakening of authorities' supervision on the matter, which further amplifies the proportions of the phenomenon in case.

Poaching affects the economic stability of the area, through the negative impact on the *community's infrastructure*: social success is conditioned by economic activities situated on the edge of the law or outside of it, behaviors related to corrupting authorities gain more ground, and authorities, in turn, have the tendency to modify their attitude towards the inhabitants based on the latter's informal "contributions". Gradually, the social norm becomes deeply permeated with such "parasite behaviors", a fact which could unbalance the delicate and undercurrent mechanisms of social unity. The community enters within the semi-darkness of the "poverty culture": material misery associates with fatalism and lack of perspective for days to come, families lose their ability to organize themselves (they become disorganized), the decline of local authority further encourages the weakening of the community's formal cohesion (neglecting infrastructure, school, the environment's "health" etc.).

VIII. SCHOOL – EDUCATION

School is an important agent of socialization for children within the community, as it is the institution which creates the connection between history, identity and the youth's consciousness.

Generally speaking, on the level of the schools in the three communes, the opinion of professors and principals is that their schools are sufficiently equipped, offering details such as the number of books in their libraries, the state of the informational system or their didactic material (for example, in Sarichioi alone the library owns over 11 000 books, computers which have internet access, video projectors and cable T.V., while in Jurilovca there are 4–5 school laboratories – a phonetics lab, an A.E.L.⁵, a maternal language laboratory, and laboratories for biology, physics and chemistry).

The school of Sarichioi managed to attract a lot of European funding and has even participated in regional projects and cultural exchange programs. The Informatics Center was realized through a CDI project (Center for Documentation and Information), in collaboration with the French embassy. As a result of attracting funds from the Rural School Program they have printed a magazine issued by the school members and coordinated by its principal. On top of that, the school has been running a step-by-step program for almost 10 years, and the phenomenon of dropping out of school is practically inexistent, with the few cases

⁵ **Advanced eLearning**, a modern studying platform with which pupils may study for various subjects both at school and at home.

occurring because the children come from disorganized or poor families. In order to keep the commune's pupils within the community and maintain the local rate of schooling, the principal admits that the entire staff of teachers, entirely qualified⁶, is forced to work with numerically larger classes than the law allows. A turning point came in the early 90's when a large number of professors left to work abroad. Regarding schooling, compared to past years, the drop in birth rate and the rise in the population's natural movement have resulted in the decrease of the number of pupils in the investigated villages⁷. Following this trend, the number of parallel classes has decreased, from four-five parallel classes to only one, which is working with more pupils than the pedagogic norms established by the Ministry of Education.

After a short period (1953–1957) which featured teaching in Russian alone, the Sarichioi school reverted, by request of the parents, to teaching primarily in Romanian. The parents' option persisted even after 1990, when the Russian Lippovans' community was granted by law the right to receive education in their maternal language. Although we speak about schools that teach in Romanian, the pupils have the possibility to opt for studying their maternal language and religion during optional classes (which are organized in collaboration with the local old rite church).

In regard to the Olympic students, there are signs of hope: cultural and sports performances are encouraged, and in the matter of the Russian language, there are two international Olympic pupils who have undergone their studies at the same school (Sarichioi).

IV. THE LEVEL OF LOCAL PROJECTIONS ON THE GENERAL (2)

Local projections on the general encompass the identity dimension. Its components are: language, traditions, "povestariu" and religion.

IV. 1. THE LANGUAGE

Language is the main keeper of the most relevant meanings, symbols of identity and the particularities of a people. It represents one of the most important

⁶ The statements of one of the interviewed principals referred to the strict rules in what regards his teachers' level of professional training, the only (declared) exception being the French teacher, who is a stand-in ("The madam teaches in this school ever since the communist regime and has taken her teaching tenure exam once or twice... you must achieve a 7 minimum, she failed with 5 and a few points").

⁷ The differences between the main localities and the rest of the components of the communes studied can be quite explanatory. For an example, in Vişina there are approximately 35 pupils registered for school, while in Jurilovca their number surpasses 200.

factors because of the fact that it directly influences both the collective behavioral pattern and the collective mental map.

The mother tongue spoken⁸ by the Lippovans is an archaic version of the Russian language. This is considered by most of the community's intellectuals as the main component of the Lippovan identity. Despite this, as a result of our field research, we have observed a *weakening of the unity of language*. As a result of cutting off all connections to Russia and the hermetic essence of the community, the evolution of the Russian language spoken by the Lippovans has limited itself to borrowing words from the Romanian language and the Turkophone populations of the area. In other words, Lippovans have basically remained at a level of grammar, syntax or complexity of words similar to the one they have had since the 18th century.

Along with the community opening towards the Romanian society and the West, the language they traditionally spoke is being gradually replaced by the Romanian language. The positive attitude towards this *first spoken language* is built in time⁹, and amongst the most significant factors lays Nicolae Ceaușescu's decision to grant Lippovan children the chance to undergo free schooling in the Romanian language. With time, however, Russian language became optional. Our field investigations have confirmed that Russian is studied in the majority of the schools as an optional subject from the second grade up, despite the fact that, after 1989, the Lippovan community has been granted the right to study in their maternal language. We therefore ascertain that there is a decreasing interest for studying the Russian language, which, on top of that, has become unattractive as an optional subject. We can observe the same type of attitude manifesting in the pupils' refusal to accept scholarships offered by the Russian state in order to study in their high schools or universities, because of the significant linguistic and cultural differences between the two cultures¹⁰.

On sight we could identify a linguistic amalgam made up of three levels, each specific to a certain generation: *archaic Russian*, spoken especially by the village elders – the same elders who encourage the young to use the Romanian language, “because it's best this way”¹¹, Russmanian¹² – the active population, while

⁸ “But we have always spoken Russian, yes sir. It's ours for ages”. (the president of the Russian Lippovan community in Jurilovca)

⁹ “We adapt very easy and have always got along with all peoples” (the president of the Russian Lippovan community in Jurilovca)

¹⁰ Law, the administrative system, legislation etc. are just some of the domains where there are significant differences.

¹¹ One of the frequent moments when it was revealed how the locals relate to the adopted language was when a boy, possibly an elementary school pupil, was pretending to be an airplane and was running around reproducing the noises an airplane makes when dropping to the ground, all the while speaking to everyone around him in Romanian. His mother scolded him in Russmanian that he should behave and be quiet. As a reply to the mother's scold, an elder nearby stood out from the crowd by stating that “you should let him speak Romanian, it's best for him that way”.

¹² A term we forwarded, an intelligible and functional combination between the Russian and Romanian languages.

Romanian is spoken by the young generation (0–18). The process of weakening the language's unity is one that continues to unfold, and the “rupture” has its origin somewhere between the second and the third generations alive.

Despite this, the power of the community seems to restore itself during encounters brought about by important moments in the life of the community (weddings, religious ceremonies, charity events etc.) People rejoice in meeting one another, even though communicating takes place through a linguistic amalgam, individuals are unsure about their own traditions¹³, which thus lose elements with important significations.

IV. 2. TRADITIONS

Amongst the local elite, the idea that Lippovans are the true keepers of the Russian language and traditions is deeply rooted. Moreover, amongst some Lippovan intellectuals' speech there is the conviction that the Russian civilization can “save itself” only by returning to the traditions stored *by* and *within* the Lippovan communities.

Sadly, a great portion of the traditions have lost their meaning, a phenomenon which can be tied to the decrease in number of the people who know what these traditions actually mean. The vitality of their customs and traditions is at a critical point. We were able to notice, however, that a few customs are still preserved, such as those related to the fact that “it is not good for two brides to get married at the same time because it brings them bad luck, a custom which is no longer respected by the youth who return from abroad”¹⁴. Another custom of religious origin, for example, is the habit to cross one's self before eating or drinking anything or the interdiction to eat before or during religious mass.

One of the constant points along the years in the Lippovan community has been *the Sunday fair*, nowadays reduced to a *simple economic activity*. The Sunday fair has confirmed that agriculture, in Sarichioi for example, has lost its traditional role: *peasants stand in an impressive line* in front of an ambulatory butchery, buying pork, chicken or veal meat¹⁵. But even the cereals and the vegetables (a part of them were brought in from other villages across the country), the cheese and eggs came “from the city”, not just the *processed* meat.

¹³ This leads to the irrecoverable loss of significant elements regarding their identity, their ethnic or religious dimension. This phenomenon has been identified either in the dominant modern architecture or in the lack of their folk costume, and in what regards their behavior during religious ceremonies or their linguistic amalgam.

¹⁴ Informer from Slava Cercheză.

¹⁵ The data obtained from the mayoralty has also confirmed that, in the past few years, there has been a drastic decrease – close to dramatic – of the number of animals present in a household per one thousand inhabitants.

Up to this day Lippovans have kept a ritual relating to funerals: Lippovans bury their dead with their feet towards the cross¹⁶. Thus, “when the moment to arise on Judgement day comes, the first things [the deceased] see is the cross bearing their name, to remind them of who they are and what their faith is”¹⁷.

Their churches are generally lime washed blue (alternating darker shades with lighter ones), and their sacred images are painted in vivid colors, with many warm earthly hues. One of the most surprising exceptions, that has not sparked any collective unrest yet, is the church in Jurilovca, which, for the first time since it was founded (in the 19th century) has undergone a chromatic change, replacing the traditional blue with shades of brown and beige.

The traditional Lippovan costume has become a *rare sight*. It has turned into a *costume to be worn only during feasts* – “The costume, it actually pertains to the religious life, and the folk costume, as much of it as it has survived, can be seen during the holidays, worn by people who go to church. They wear it. Actually, it’s not necessarily a costume... there are some certain confessional rules how you dress to church”¹⁸. Furthermore, from the reactions of the elders who have talked to us, we were able to find out that “women no longer have pride in wearing the folk costume... it’s as if they’re ashamed to wear the clothes of our forefathers”¹⁹. Therefore, we presumed that even the way they relate to their own traditions has been significantly altered along the generations, from taking pride in their Cossack origins to being ashamed of them. Summarizing the evolution of the Lippovan folk costume, we can state that it has gone from being worn on a day-to-day basis ever since the times of “the forefathers” to being worn only during the holidays and furthermore, close to present days, being worn as a *vestimentary compromise*.

IV. 3. “POVESTARIU”

As a result of the discussions we’ve had with the members of the Lippovan communities (regardless of their material or social condition) we have been told that there is a *lack of a local “povestariu”*²⁰. Seemingly people do not know the legends, stories, fairytales, teachings etc. usually passed on from generation to generation within a traditional community. In other words, *there are no more symbolic keepers of the place, and people do not miss the lack of the “povestariu”*.

¹⁶ One of the differences in traditions between the new rite and the old rite orthodox believers is that the latter’s cross has six ends instead of four.

¹⁷ Informer from Sarichioi

¹⁸ History teacher speaking about the folk costume in Jurilovca

¹⁹ Elder Lippovan, participant to the religious mass held at Uspenia Monastery, on a holiday (The Dormition of the Theotokos, 29th August 2009)

²⁰ As it was aforementioned, the word “povestariu” refers to the shared common law of the local order, with symbolic power, which especially refers to the founding myths of the community.

In this way, the link between the new members of the community (the children) and the social structure as a whole is insufficiently coagulated.

Despite the fact that the matrix of local social solidarity is affected, the way they relate to the world remains somewhat unchanged. It is because there are far too few frame-elements of identity conscience remaining, that during fieldwork it became easy to observe how the *superiority complex* worked when addressing the way they relate to the *Other/Foreigner*.

The intermixing of memory levels results in the birth of an *identity confusion on the level of the collective mental* – for example the lady who would “give her life during times of war” for Romania, but who is of a Russian nationality; the representatives of the local administration who take pride in the EU flag, but at the same time claim their Russian origins; they apply for European funds as well as for Russian support; the architectural style profoundly modified; the *Russmanian* language; the lack of use of a local folklore; children who no longer have Russian names, but Romanian, Spanish or Italian ones etc.; the problematic of the weakening church authority.

IV. 4. RELIGION

Religion is an important part of the identity dimension. Lippovans are orthodox Christians who consider themselves part of “the old rite”, also being known as *Starovers*. The old rite is different from the established orthodoxy firstly through the yet unclear role the priest fulfills within the community. For some Lippovans, the priest is something quite new, because up until recent times a part of the churches functioned “priestless”. Regardless of this aspect, the priest is a person whose theological education suffers because of the *principled* lack of the theological college/seminary. On the other hand, there are some differences regarding the religious practice: the sign of the cross is done using two fingers (the index and the middle finger), the cross has eight extremities, the name of the Lord is written with only one “i” – Isus (Jesus), during the processions encircling the church is done from right to left or “according to the sun’s movement”, the liturgy is officiated with seven communion breads, the Gregorian calendar was replaced with the Julian calendar, and so on.

According to the information posted on the Ministry of Culture and Cults²¹, the “Old Rite Christian Cult of Romania is organized in a metropolitan church in Brăila led by a metropolitan and three vicar bishops”. In Romania there are almost 38 000 registered Starover believers who are organized in 37 parishes and 57 churches. The old rite church has no formal theological schooling system, the process of priest selection being carried out using simple criteria: knowledge of Slavonic is required, ability to officiate religious services and so on.

²¹ <http://www.culte.ro/DocumenteHtml.aspx?id=1737>

Within the old rite religion there are two confessional trends: with priest (Popovți) and without priest (Beglopopovți²²). The appearance of this disjunction is due to the “problem regarding the validity of being ordained in the official Church” (Varona, 2002, p. 153). The Popovți are those Starovers which have accepted priests who had left the traditional Orthodox Church, while the Bezpopovți are those who “considered that the sacraments done in these Churches are not valid and that their priests are not true priests of Christ, and for this reason they cannot be received in the Starover church” (*ibidem*). The Popovți have founded their first religious centre at Irghiz, with permission from Tsarina Ekaterina the IInd. On the 6th of September 1844, the Austrian emperor Ferdinand gave his permission to found the metropolitan church of Fântâna Albă (Northern Bukovine) headed by the Bosnian metropolitan of Sarajevo, Ambrosias (Ipatiov, 2001). In 1940, the religious centre was moved to Brăila because of Romania’s territorial losses, and its official recognition came in 1946.

We present below a few of the elements of the cult, that are still followed today, through excerpts from the “observation sheet regarding the holiday of the Saint Mary’s Dormition (28th August) at Uspenia Monastery” – the only Lippovan Monastery in the world.

The church is perceived by most of our interlocutors in an *ideal* way a frame for communitarian coherence, but the same people consider that it is *an archaic institution* which is *of little use to the community*. The important holidays represent a perfect opportunity and also the proper moment for the restoration of the communitarian link between ordinary people. Barely entering within *the monastery’s grounds* we could notice a great number of people, dressed completely or partially (only wearing the “pois”²³ around their waist) in folk costume. The church, at least during the holiday, is *the spiritual center of the community*. It acts in the same time as a *playground* for children, *a ground for (re)encountering* for youths or as a *matchmaking territory* for girls and boys, *a place of prayer*, of *socialization and reintegration* of the “prodigal sons” within the community, or a

²² “Yes, we don’t have a priest [...] We Bezpopovți! We have church, we go there and we pray alone to God. (And Chiprian amply crossed himself, from the tip of his head down and then lifted his watery eyes to the sacred images) We do not need a priest!” ... “We have the old law. Our liturgy, as it was once officiated, in the old monasteries. Ours – like the old, true Christians. Our law, taken after the books written at the dawn of time!”... “Then, when he extended his hand to drink his wine, he paused, and with deep piety, rose to his feet and crossed himself, bending from the waist down and dropping one hand to touch the ground, before the sacred images” (Sadoveanu, 1914, pp. 31–38).

²³ The pois is a knitted or sown at a weaving loom, vividly colored or monochrome, presenting on each of its ends terminations in the form of rich knots, which is tied to the waist and is left to hang, worn by both men and women, as well as children of all ages; the equivalent of girdles. Alongside this they also carry a *lestîvca*, an accessory which symbolizes public recognition of past sins, but also serving the penitence by atonement.

space to *recollect one's self*, as well as one of *indignation*²⁴ and *expostulation*²⁵ on the part of the few elders who were present, or for *receiving food* for the needy (although it was known that the religious service would end in a repast where holy food was served, our observers have remarked the *absence of beggars*). One of the first things we observed since our arrival was *the state of tranquility* that seemed to reign around the church. The persons present were very serene, calm, polite, and careful to one another, suffused with the importance of the moment. *Although there was no great physical distance (space) between the people, they appeared to not feel invaded by the overlapping of their "personal space" with another's, behaving as if each of them was part of a whole – "I am here because everything that relates to my identity can find common ground with any other person, who is standing next to me"*. Even after hours of standing, the atmosphere seemed unaltered, and the people, just as patient as before, awaited the end of service, crossing themselves in unison. The same serenity seemed to be a part of their children, as well. The older children looked after the younger ones, and they would hold them in their arms or hold their hands, straighten out their wrinkled costumes; the children played "nice" with one another, were obedient to their parents and rarely made their presence felt by crying or screaming.

The presence of families with children of all ages and the constant migration of the youth from their established place towards where the elders of the village were, who told stories of times past, seem to be indicators that would contradict the so-called myth of the "generation gap", at least at first sight. Still, the constant frustration and reprimand coming from the elders, the clear behavioral differences between the young ones and the adults or between the people of the land and those who had emigrated suggest that there are more complex relationships between different generations in the Lippovan community.

The large number of participants to the service held at the monastery may constitute itself as an *indicator for the high level of religiosity* in the case of the Lippovan community. Still, the community's considerably *low church attendance* during the rest of the year, along with the tendency to reject priestly authority – an attitude which was recorded as such during our study²⁶ – indicates a *paradox*. The incomprehensibility of the Slavonic language and the lack of the ending sermon are some of the main causes of the *rupture* between the religious information and the

²⁴ Elders present at liturgy: "the youth no longer see the right tradition of their forefathers" and do not internalize it accordingly, "women no longer take pride in wearing their folk costume", "people no longer know how to dress", "these youths are not at all how we once were, not anymore" etc.

²⁵ Lines: "tie your girdle, you're not in the wilderness here!", "sit still, don't embarrass us", "how could you enter inside the Church looking like that?!", "Get! and lift that table, might wash a few of your sins" etc.

²⁶ "Our priests? They're bigots. They haven't evolved at all, it's like they live in the past, not here and now, with the rest of us" – local of Jurilovca

actual influence it has on the day to day life of parishioners. The link between language –identity – religion: one of the causes, at least one of the apparent ones, of the parishioners’ estrangement from the church can be found in the hundred years old decision to preach the liturgy in old Slavonic, a language which fewer persons understand nowadays, and most likely, fewer priests still understand – seeing as they *don’t have theological studies*.

The process of selecting priests encourages promoting deacons who have a low schooling level: they select children who come from poor families, who usually do not attend school (priests usually have undergone no more than 7 years of formal education); acquiring religious knowledge and practice is usually done through *participant observation* and their gradual inclusion within the Church’s structures. The absence of religious studies²⁷ could compromise their chances to become a long term part of the community (through useful answers to social problems).

The Old Rite Orthodox Church is involved in social assistance activities. For example, in the courtyards of the churches in Jurilovca and Slava Cercheză there are shelter homes. In Jurilovca the shelter is for elderly ladies (also named “The covenant” by the locals), which does not, however, possess qualified personnel to assist them; the old ladies live and manage by themselves, the Church only granting them accommodation. It would appear that in Lippovan communities the “village council of elders” has an important role in administering the community. The council is in connection with the priests and acts as the only bond between the community and the religious institution. They make joint decisions regarding the community and the church’s problems with the priests.

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²⁷ There are no specialized institutions, as theological seminars, to educate future priests.

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