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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**ROMANIA - THE ROLE OF FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS:  
A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF VALUES AND ECONOMICS ON  
THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES IN POST-  
COMMUNIST ROMANIA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF  
FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS**

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**Abstract**

*This qualitative research explores the impact of values and economics on the delivery of faith-based services in Romania. After the fall of Communism in 1989, Romania is still struggling to adjust economically, socially, and spiritually after enduring repressive measures for half a century, most recently under the cruel leadership of Nicolae Ceausescu. Nineteen participants involved with social welfare agencies were interviewed to determine the degree of sustainability, human rights provision, social development, cultural competence, social inclusion, and security existing in the provision of services. Results obtained indicate that although affiliation with religious organizations may have negative implications in this country, the staff and leadership of these organizations were sustained by their personal spiritual beliefs in the face of poverty and corruption.*

## **Introduction**

Working in Romania changed my ideas about many things, not the least of which was the nature of social work. Researching the agencies that provide social services in different parts of Romania, has given me an appreciation for the structure of the U.S. welfare system, which I had previously assumed was the “norm” for services, yet I also have a much better sense of being the “other” and avoiding the assumptions that what works for the United States can work anywhere.

My experience in Romania left me with the belief that social workers have the ability to bridge gaps and model tolerance and acceptance internationally because of a code of ethics that surpasses the barriers presented by language, culture, customs, or religion. More specifically, I believe that faith-based non-governmental organizations have the potential to promote justice and economic equality for marginalized groups within a country that has long been marginalized by the rest of the world community.

The role of faith-based agencies in social welfare delivery is an issue that has gained prominence in the United States with President Bush’s support for the funding and proliferation of this type of privatized social services. Since the fall of communism in Romania, a number of faith-based organizations from the U.S. have stepped in to fill the gap in social services in that country as well. In light of this opportunity for American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to become involved in Romania, the role faith-based organizations play in the Romanian context deserves attention.

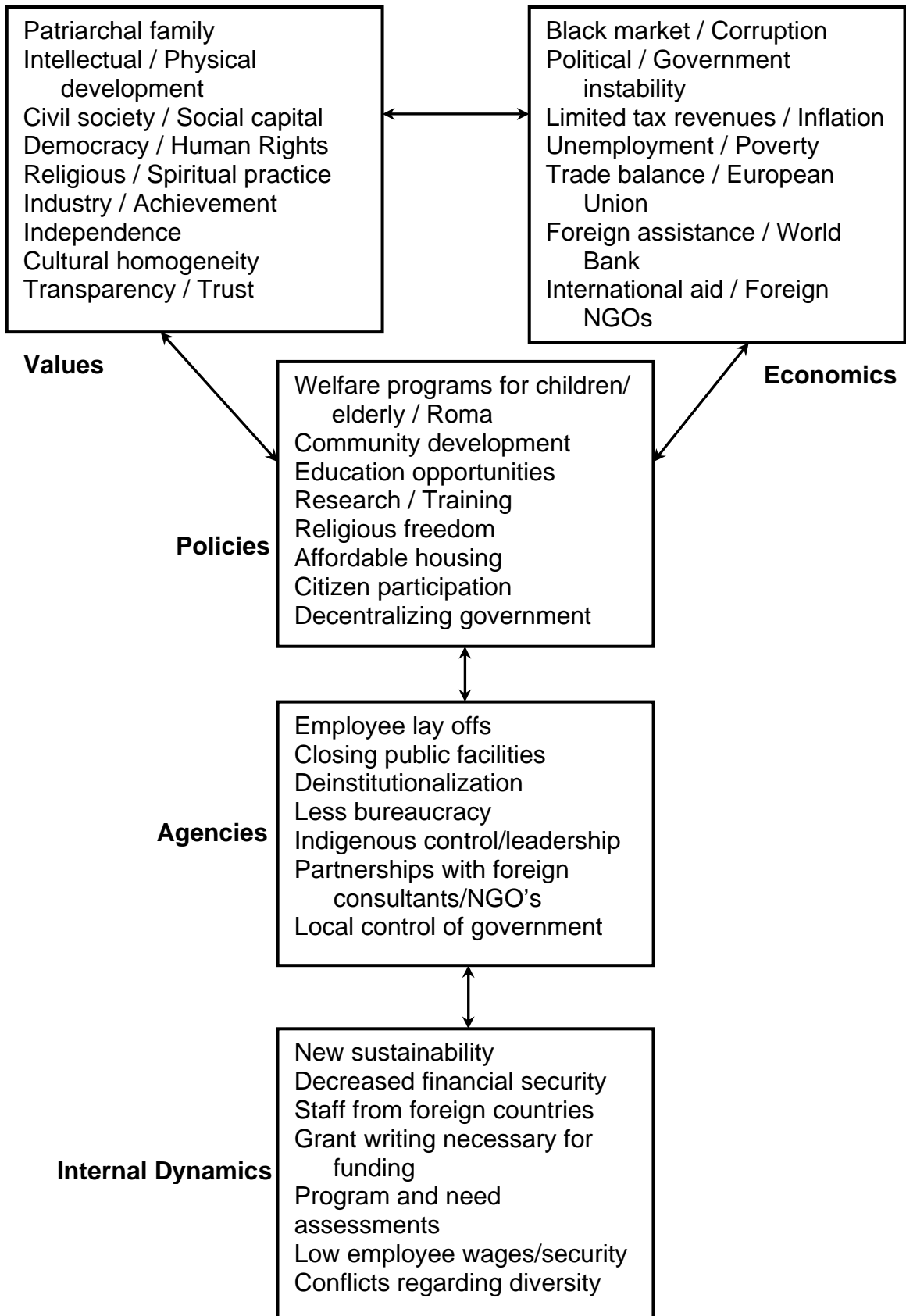
Challenging American assumptions can start with broadening the “person in the environment” focus to a “country in the world” perspective. Just as a human being can be understood both as an individual and as a product of her or his environment, Romania can be understood both by surveying its current cultural and political landscape and by taking into account the effects of its history and its relationships with other members of the global community.

## **Context of the Study**

Romania’s social welfare services are developed and delivered against a complex historical backdrop, shaped by the reciprocal influences of values and economics. As

Katherine Van Wormer (1997) states, the social welfare, poverty, disability, disease, and care of the young and old have been basic concerns of society the world over. However, in the magnitude of the problems and the chosen response to them, there are “vast international differences,” created primarily by the social values of the people involved (VanWormer, 1997, p. 3). Van Wormer illustrates this hypothesis with a figure that indicates the flow and direction of influence and examples of each factor. As indicated in Figure 1, social welfare programs are products of their time. This model has been adapted to reflect the Romanian profile.

Figure 1 Contemporary Value– Policy Configuration (VanWormer, 1997),



## **Review of Historical Economic and Cultural Influences**

### **Romania Under Communism**

#### **Duplicity**

At the end of WWII, Romania was, to a large extent, materially and structurally destroyed. On September 12, 1944, the Soviet Union negotiated an armistice with a weakened Romania that gave the Soviets practically complete political and economic control over Romania (Klepper, 2002). Gheorgiou-Dej, the first Communist ruler (1948-1965) was more or less a Soviet puppet, but when Nicolae Ceausescu took power in 1965, he instituted policies of secrecy and denial that extended to its treatment of social problems. The government used propaganda to maintain the fiction of socialist progress and to avoid the necessity of providing welfare services. To maintain a positive ideological agenda, the government made it clear that alcoholism, crime, prostitution, drug abuse, unemployment, and poverty were forbidden topics and off-limits for academic research (Pestoff, 2000, edit. Iatridis).

Lacking the capital base of market economies, the Romanian socialist economy depended on the availability of labor, which Ceausescu secured by prioritizing and controlling the development of the labor force (Kligman, 1998). Abortion was banned in 1966, and the state demanded that each family produce four or five children as a way of forcing population growth. The marriage age for women was legally reduced to fifteen, and monthly medical examinations of women of childbearing age were made compulsory (Kligman).

The effects of the government's practices of repression and surveillance have had a profound psychological effect on the Romanian people. As one Romanian reflected, "If I had to define my life before 1989 with one word, it would be "duplicity". Lying served as an important way for the people to protect the official version of socialist reality and at the same time protect the reality that they actually lived. They lied to maintain their positions, keep their jobs, and ensure that children would be enrolled in school. They spent large amounts of money "greasing the good will of persons with redistributive power" in the attempt to care for their extended families or to arrange an illegal abortion

(Kligman, 1998, p.240). These practices did not die with the fall of communism; even today, Romanians commonly lie, cheat, and steal to preserve what is theirs.

### **Threats to Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion: Systematization**

To further control the population, the communist government adopted a policy of “systematization” in the early 1970s as a way to create new culture. Historic rural villages and city centers were replaced with apartment buildings and high-rise commercial complexes. Ostensibly to gain farmland by destroying “non-viable” villages, the Ceausescu government demolished half of the country’s 13,000 villages (US Library of Congress Federal Research Division, 1990, p.13). It dismantled neighborhoods and broke up extended family networks by forcing people to relocate to large block complexes and live among strangers. Ceausescu found control easier to maintain when people did not know or trust each other and were concentrated in a few locations rather than spread throughout the countryside.

The effect of systematization on Romanian values can be seen today in Romanians’ avoidance of contact with, or rejection of, anything that can be considered “deviant”, such as infants abandoned at birth, or those with physical or emotional impairments. Suspicion and distrust of the Gypsy population and their cultural differences persists. Philosophically, there is still a sense that as citizens, they are powerless, and compliance to rules and bureaucracy is tolerated and expected.

### **Religious Repression**

Although officially atheistic, as of 1989, the communist state recognized and financially supported 15 religious groups. These officially recognized religious groups and the scope of their activity were controlled by the Department of Cults and were subject to strict regulations. This restriction prohibited open-air services, pilgrimages, evangelism, and community work. Consequently, the efforts of social workers in faith-based agencies, and their efforts to involve citizens, is in direct contrast to the limits placed in the recent past.

### **Homogenization**

In addition to standardizing housing and religious practice, the Romanian government decided that the nation itself was to be “reconstituted” through a neo-Stalinist social engineering project known as omogenizare (“homogenization”).

This understanding of Romania’s cultural destiny implied that differences were equivalent to deviance, whether they be dangerous foreign influences from the imperialist, capitalistic West, or the dangerous effects of the dissidents, reformers, and others inside the country who insisted on maintaining ethnic identities or human rights (Kligman, 1998).

### **Romania after Communism**

Ceausescu’s policies of repression and control of individual liberties, forced “Romanianization” of ethnic minorities, destruction of the nation’s architectural heritage, and adherence to failed economic policies served to push this once proud country, “the land of the Romans”, into a political and economic situation that eventually triggered the violent overthrow of its Communist regime. Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were condemned to death and executed by a firing squad on Christmas Day, 1989. A jubilant Romania celebrated the news of the executions by singing long-banned traditional carols (U.S. Library of Congress, 1990, p.18).

Nevertheless, not unlike a person scarred by the effects of an abusive childhood, the Romanian people collectively share in the trauma of a past that cannot be as easily disposed of as their ruling body. To take this into account, my research questions will focus on the historical effects of a culture and economy that is attempting to integrate change, but is saddled with a past that provides an often cloudy lens and a distorted paradigm for the interpretation and integration of future interventions.

### **The Transition to Privatization**

The transition into a multiparty democracy with a market economy has been traumatic, with the economy transitioning from governmental to private ownership without clear direction. Employers in the private sector have no major social policy obligations, and even those in the state-owned businesses have greatly diminished responsibilities. The ruling class and business owners expected that free markets would solve most socioeconomic problems. However, capitalism, as an economic system based on private property rights, does not directly concern itself with the social inequity created by the uneven distribution of wealth (Plionis & Plionis, 2000).

### **Adoption and Deinstitutionalization: Child Welfare Policies**

Ceausescu's demographic policy had been to increase the birth rate while ignoring the shame of 90,000 to 100,000 children in state asylums, including 40,000 to 50,000 who were in institutions for handicapped persons (Roth, 2000, p. 221). One accomplishment that followed the revolution in 1989, was the opening of Romania's borders to international adoption. In 1990, the attention of the world became focused on the hundreds of starving and neglected children living in Romanian institutions. In the foreign public's mind, the humanitarian thing to do was to "allow children to go to foreign countries and enter nice, middle-class homes where they have all the material advantages they did not have in Romania" (Groza, et al., p. 51, 1999). The adoption process was eased by changes in laws eliminating presidential authorization and by the relatively low costs of adopting a Romanian child (between \$2,000 and \$5,000), and in a short time the system was out of control (Groza, et al.).

In recognition of the corruption and in response to pressure from child advocacy groups such as Defense for Children International, in July, 1991, Romania closed its borders to international adoption. As a result, the population of children in institutions rose (Groza, et al., 1999). This rise may also have been caused, in part, by the fact that Romania lacked an organized domestic adoption program. Because of the elimination of social work programs under Ceausescu in the early 1960s, post-Communist Romania had no trained adoption workers to promote domestic adoption. It was not until 1997, under the Constantinescu government, that plans were made to establish domestic adoption and foster care and to decrease the number of children in institutions. The programs that have



been established lack funding, trained staff, and support from the government and the community (Groza, et al).

Roma or Gypsy children account for about 80% of those who are abandoned, according to UNICEF's top representative in Romania, Pierre Poupard (United Nations Foundation, 2003). Gypsies often leave their children at orphanages for a "provisional" length of time, which often becomes permanent. The practice was actually encouraged during the rule of Ceausescu, who promised that children would have a place in an orphanage if families could not afford to support them. And since the collapse of communism, poverty has only worsened for the Roma people (United Nations Foundation, 2003).

### **Religion in Romanian Policy and Culture**

According to the U.S. Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report (2002), although the Romanian constitution of 1991 provides for religious freedom, the requirement that religions register with the government, and the fact that the government officially recognizes some religions and not others, still pose obstacles to minority religions. As a result, when the U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Romanian government, it considers these discussions in the context of promoting human rights.

The Romanian government has refused to recognize a number of religious groups, and no group has received status as a religion since 1990 (U.S. Department of State, 2002). Unrecognized religions receive no financial support from the state, other than limited tax and import duty exemptions, and are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities. Religious groups that are not one of the 15 recognized religions are registered by the government as either "religious foundations," "charitable foundations," or "cultural associations."

Today, Romanians consider the Orthodox Church to be the "true church" based on the government policies and the doctrines of the church. This conviction makes them disposed to be suspicious of the presence of what appear to be "new" Protestants and of the motives behind Protestant faith-based agencies' provision of social services, thinking these newcomers are only looking to recruit more members for their churches. The neo-protestant (evangelical) cults, according to the Ministry of Culture and Public Affairs, are

considered to be the Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, and Evangelical Christians. The common features of their confessions: they do not acknowledge church sacraments, do not have the cult of icons or that of saints, do not admit ecclesiastical hierarchy, they all practice, with few exceptions, adulthood baptism and "universal priesthood" (any believer can read and interpret the Bible).

## **Literature Review**

### **Faith based NGOs in the International Community**

The available literature acknowledges the contributions of private organizations and governments of the United States and Western Europe in funding the non-governmental organizations that have supported Romania and other Eastern European countries during the transition from communism and centralization of production to capitalism and private markets (Iatridis, 2000; USAID Report, 2003). However, no research is available to identify the role being played by NGOs affiliated with religious organizations, barriers to their service, or the outcomes of their intervention. There is little or no evidence to suggest that policymakers, including those making decisions about funding welfare programs, have any empirical knowledge of the benefits or pitfalls of supporting an agency that has a religious identity. The fact that faith-based agencies are working in Romania at all demonstrates that someone is assuming that their services are worth having. But there is a lack of data to examine questions about the quality and type of services they provide, how effectively they are structured, whom they serve, and—perhaps more importantly—whom they do not serve.

However, a new initiative, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), sponsored by the World Bank Group and the Archbishop of Canterbury, is attempting to engage in an international and national discussion among faith and development institutions. In July, 2002, a conference was held in Canterbury on the contribution that religious communities are making to the subject of poverty reduction strategies. The aim of the conference was “to demonstrate how religion/spirituality can lead to a different vision of development institutions, by providing insights and inspiration, motivation and

ethical guidelines for work with grassroots groups (conference information available at [www.wfdd.org.uk/programmes.html](http://www.wfdd.org.uk/programmes.html)).

### **Religion and Development**

Katherine Marshall (2002) claims that religious institutions, especially faith-based non-governmental organizations, have played an honored role in development work since the early 1960s. Examples of longstanding faith-based NGOs are Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, Christian Aid, and Lutheran World Service. Marshall cites (2002) as a further example the link between the International Labor Organization, which has had senior religious advisors because of links between churches and trade unions, and the United Nations, where many religious organizations maintain permanent representations and participate actively in many facets of its work. Despite these prominent counter-examples, however, research has generally avoided exploring religious issues and organizations, and what research has been done has not been systematically described or organized.

Yet Marshall reports (2002) seeing some encouraging signs of change in attitudes toward the work of faith-based organizations. World Bank president, James Wolfensohn, and his counterparts, have begun to speak more openly about ethical issues such as the “challenge of inclusion,” empowerment, inequality, and the problem of corruption. Marshall is hopeful that framing development issues in ways that go beyond strictly technical and economic considerations will develop into a movement toward bringing together the apparently separate areas of religion and development.

While most studies have looked at how individual churches act in society, Peter Dobkin Hall, Hauser Lecturer on Non-profit Organizations in the Kennedy School of Government, postulates that the greatest obstacle to understanding the public role of religion has been the attachment to using the congregation as the basic unit for study (Hall, 2000). He asserts that faith-based organizations comprise the largest part of the charitable tax-exempt universe in numbers of organization, volume of individual donation, and commitment of volunteer time, and are the single most important arena for imparting the values and competencies associated with effective civic participation. However, he says, despite their importance, neither secular nor religious researchers have specifically addressed the ways in which faith-based organizations differ from their

secular counterparts in organizational structure, mission, and process. Nor has there been adequate exploration of the impact on faith-based organizations of different types of funding and regulations, or sufficient account taken of the diversity among religious entities.

Hall (2000) concludes that any useful framework applied to the study of faith-based groups must focus on their “connectedness,” the extent to which individual congregations are part of larger systems. Thus, the appropriate way to understand religious groups is not merely as communities of believers, which emphasizes the autonomy of individual congregations, but in terms of the connection of believers to other people in their community and the world—their social, economic, and political relationships. A notable example is the American missionaries who brought not only the word of God but also health care and social services all over the world, even before the well-known international relief organization UNICEF was conceived (Cnaan, 1999). Churches and denominations around the world were among the first entities to demonstrate against apartheid and to boycott companies that dealt with South Africa. Pratt noted that that a coalition of denominations in Canada formed the Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility, a group that was at the forefront in pressuring corporations to cut ties with South Africa during the era of apartheid (Cnaan).

Another researcher who takes a systems approach by discussing the role of the church in relationship to the larger political system is David Herbert. His 2003 study of religion and civil society outlines four ways in which religion contributed significantly to the development of civil society in the late Communist period in Central and Eastern Europe. First, religion provided an institutional space within which it was possible to organize forms of opposition to the communist states. Second, religion provided a fund of collective memories that served to oppose state-imposed communist ideologies. Third, religion functioned as an ideological connection with an international order, a way of reaching beyond both the state and the communist bloc. Fourth, religion functioned as an intellectual force from which opposition thinking could be constructed.

### **Research Questions**

The questions that guided my research are framed by Healy’s six “globally relevant” concepts for social work dialogue and theory development (2001) and grounded

in the categories in Van Wormer's (1997) contemporary value policy configuration (see Figure 1, p. 5). They were chosen because I wanted to reflect an appreciation of the rich and tragic history of Romania in the information obtained, along with the dynamic nature of its present economic, social, and spiritual conflicts. Each of Healy's concepts has been explored to some extent through the qualitative interviews that I conducted. After briefly describing each concept below, I have listed questions that probe the extent to which these concepts inform the dissertation research, and were also relevant to the situation or context of the interviewees.

### **Social Development.**

Particularly relevant to social work are the themes of participation, capacity building, equity, and inclusion—all factors in a culture's social development. Development is a process, best measured on a continuum in which no country is fully developed or undeveloped. Issues of concern to social workers in every culture include poverty eradication, equality for women, and social integration. In Romania during Communism, the development of a civil society was impeded by dependency on the central government, and the impossibility of belonging to private organizations or participating in community development.

Relevant research questions to explore in this area include:

1. Are there gender issues related to leadership in the community? Are the women involved in faith-based agencies or other NGOs in Romania accepted in executive or administrative positions?
2. Where do people in the community expect to receive assistance? Do NGOs provide opportunities for Romanian participation in their outreach programs?
3. Are family and friends the first line of assistance when needs are present?
4. Is there recognition of the differences between secular and faith-based organizations?

### Human Rights.

The International Federation of Social Workers (1994) has asserted that social work is a human rights profession. Human rights can serve as a statement of social work values, a source of policy guidelines, and a framework for professional practice. It becomes a core concept for global dialogue and strategy development in social work. Nations may have different records on human rights, but no nation is without problems. Human rights practice can involve not only direct social work with individuals and groups but also community and policy work. This concept helps social workers focus on social justice rather than exclusively on individual pathology. It can also help the social worker understand the legacy of Ceausescu's government, under which even reproductive rights were eliminated to insure a large labor force for the benefit of the economy. In this kind of society, the needs of the individual are buried under what the ruler determines to be needs of the society as a whole.

Relevant research questions to explore in this area include:

1. Do faith-based agencies in Romania justly and fairly distribute resources to the most vulnerable and needy?
2. Is there a distrust of organizations that are connected with a religion, or are such organizations welcomed after years of oppression?
3. Do residents feel any pressure to "convert" to the faith that provides service?

### Multi-Culturalism/Cultural Competence.

Social work practice and education seek to promote multiculturalism, or cultural competence: learning about others in order to promote intergroup understanding. This also implies examining issues of structural inequality and power relationships. In Romania, the communist government destroyed villages in order to more efficiently house workers in identical block housing, and even prescribed meal plans. Ancient tabernacles and places of worship were bulldozed to make room for socialist government buildings.

Relevant research questions to explore in this area include:

1. Do faith-based organizations in Romania model acceptance and tolerance of diversity, or do they reflect the norms of society?
2. Is the Greek Orthodox Church perceived as a potential source of welfare services, or would this be incongruent with the public perception of its mission?

#### Social Exclusion or Inclusion.

Refugees, migrants, and displaced people are often excluded socially—prevented from enjoying all the benefits of citizenship. The growing gap between the richest and poorest nations, and between the richest and poorest segments of the population within nations, is a major indicator that many are not participating in the opportunities available in the society. As an applied profession, social work needs to be interested in the development of strategies for social inclusion. The Roma, who have suffered grave inequalities throughout Eastern Europe, have one of their largest population centers in Romania, where poverty and discrimination persist or have worsened since Communist times.

Relevant research questions to explore in this area include:

1. Are faith-based agencies in Romania required to serve anyone who qualifies for services, regardless of their religion?
2. Do the faith-based agencies require recipients of services to comply with requirements to attend church or listen to evangelical Christian messages?
3. Do funding sources affect what and to whom welfare services are offered, or what services are developed?

#### Security.

In current social work parlance, the concept of security is used to refer to a person or population's prospects for a peaceful existence without threats of violence, terrorism, hunger, or lack of income. The challenge for social work is to design interventions and policies that improve security both in the U.S. and abroad, without compromising individual human rights. The Securitate, Romania's secret police, was established not to bring security to individuals but to cement the government's control over the populace.

The presence of the Securitate was a constant source of anxiety, and created a sense of distrust and isolation among the population.

Relevant research questions to explore in this area include:

1. Are social workers supporters of the status quo, or advocates for improved services?
2. Are faith-based NGOs able and willing to participate cooperatively with other community organizations?

#### Sustainability.

To be sustainable, social work interventions must match the resources available to the clients or the community, both in terms of human skills and in the material environment needed for programs to continue. This concept is valid in micro, mezzo, and macro work, domestically as well as internationally, and is of particular relevance where there is dwindling funding for human services. The non-governmental organizations acting in Romania are increasingly aware of the mandate to establish programs that involve the education and leadership of the Romanian people. Programs that only provide charity have not been effective and are not welcomed by the current administration.

Relevant research questions to explore in this area include:

1. How are services affected by the NGOs' funding sources?
2. How are the local government and community involved?
3. What is the composition of the staffs of the NGOs? Who holds administrative positions?
4. How dependent is the program on the ideology and faith of leaders from the U.S.A.?

A useful model for understanding the overarching concern inherent in Healy's justification of social work in foreign countries is the possibility of "humane internationalism." Pratt (2000) defines this as "an acceptance by the citizens of the industrialized states that they have ethical obligations towards those beyond their borders and that these in turn impose obligations upon their governments" (p.3).



## Definition of Terms

Defining terms relevant to the subject of this study is challenging, since multiple meanings have been attached to words like “church,” “religious” and “faith-based organization.” The intricacy hinges on the structural diversity and complexity of religious institutions, which can include a wide range of formal and informal entities. For instance, and for the purposes of this study, formal religious organizations can be understood to include (Hall, 2001):

### Free-standing congregations

from corporate organizations like the Anglican Church to the storefront quasi-commercial enterprises of urban neighborhoods.

### Federated organizations

ranging from the constitutional monarchy of Episcopalianism to such loosely federated denominational bodies as the Southern Baptist Convention.

### Parachurch organizations

like the Promise Keepers and Habitat for Humanity, which combine devotional and service provision activities that may or may not substitute for membership in an established community of worship.

### Interdenominational and ecumenical bodies

which operate on local, regional, or national levels and coordinate joint activities, worship, and/or service across denominational lines.

### Secular corporations

established by clergy or members of religious orders or by lay members of faith communities. Such organizations range from traditional voluntary non-profits through quasi-public agencies like community development corporations.

An important 1993 paper by Thomas Jeavons attempts to schematize these definitions by singling out four possible ways to identify an organization as religious. According to Jeavons, an organization can be considered religious if: 1) its primary purposes and activities are sacerdotal; 2) it identifies itself as religious through its

commitment to fields of work “typically associated with religious endeavors”; 3) its participants, resources, products or services, and decision-making processes are religious in nature; or 4) it participates in formal or informal networks of organizations in which religion plays a major part. I will be using this schema to include what will be considered religious for this study.

Despite the difficulty and limitations inherent in selecting meaning, for the sake of clarity, for this research, the following definitions were used:

Secular agency

An organization funded and established by either the government or a private party, excluding those of religious or congregational nature.

Faith-based agency

a “purposive organization that draws staff, volunteers, and board members from a certain religious group and is based upon a particular religious ideology that is reflected in the agency’s mission and operations” (Cnaan, 1999, p. 26).

Religiousness

“relationship to or membership in an organized faith community that institutionalizes a system of religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices” (Netting, Thibault, & Ellor, 1990, p. 16).

Congregation

a group of persons who voluntarily band together for religious purposes and who share an ideological identity. These groups of people usually own a property where they periodically meet, and observe a theological doctrine that to some extent guides their governance and worship practices (Garland, 1997).

Global

pertaining to or involving the whole world; used to refer to phenomena affecting the entire planet (Stein, 1990).

### International

of or pertaining to two or more nations or their citizens; pertaining to the relations between nations; transcending national boundaries or viewpoints (Random House Webster's College Dictionary, 1995).

### International social work

International professional action and the capacity for international action by the social work profession and its members. It is comprised of four dimensions: internationally related domestic practice and advocacy, professional exchange, international practice, and international policy development and advocacy (Healy, 2001).

### Social welfare

“a condition of human well being that exists when social problems are managed, when human needs are met, and when social opportunities are maximized” (Midgley, 1997, p. 5).

### Non-governmental organization (NGO)

a nonprofit organization of private citizens motivated by humanitarian and/or religious values, organized to serve a range of functions, including relief and development; advocacy; education; international networks of social and youth agencies; and cross-national work of domestic agencies targeted at international problems, such as adoption, child custody, and refugee resettlement. Although an NGO writes its own charter and mission statement, independent of government and commercial sectors, its funding may come from public as well as the private sector.

### Culture

social heredity; a way of thinking, feeling, and believing that sets one group apart from another. It is the traditional knowledge that is passed down from one generation to the next (Van Wormer, 1997).

### Values

Preferences that serve as guides or criteria for selecting good or desirable behavior, for “what is worth having or being,” and for “those conceptions of desirable

states of affairs that are utilized in selective conduct as criteria for preferences, or as justifications for proposed or actual behavior” (Loewenberg, Dolgoff & Harrington, 2000, p. 20).

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Project Description**

This qualitative, exploratory research took place in Romania during the months of May and June in 2003. The interviews focused on the delivery of what, from a U.S. perspective, would be considered “faith-based” social welfare services, in that these agencies (with one exception) incorporate religious values and practices into their policies and programs. In the interviews I also sought to assess, at the macro level, the economic, political, and societal/cultural value systems that affected both the community and its individual residents, and the types of welfare services the agencies provided. The questions I asked took into account Romania’s history of repression, poverty, and institutionalized religion (including the unique perversity of the Ceausescu regime’s control of reproduction), with the goal of identifying the effects of this history on welfare delivery, while also recognizing the effects of the current socio-political situation. Behind my line of questioning were the contemporary value-policy configuration referenced in Figure 1.1 and the globally relevant concepts of social development, human rights, multiculturalism/cultural competence, social exclusion or inclusion, security, and sustainability.

### **Method of Inquiry**

Constructivist inquiry, a qualitative method of research, is the epistemological perspective guiding this research. As a qualitative researcher, I made my sample purposive or theoretical, which means that I selected participants and sites based on their ability to provide needed information rather than at random. My initial interviews focused on the macro sources of funding for welfare services provided by faith-based NGOs in Romania, which led me to interview administrators from USAID and World Learning. To assess the effectiveness of and community support for NGO’s in Romania, I targeted the directors of agencies with religious affiliations. I also interviewed other

community and church leaders to gauge their views. Finally, I sought interviews from the program staff who were themselves members of the agency's surrounding community. I wanted the sample of those I interviewed to include both men and women, Romanian and foreign, social workers and others affiliated with faith based NGOs.

### **Participants**

For this study I interviewed a total of nineteen persons: three administrators involved in evaluating or selecting social welfare programs for funding, six persons directly in charge of running NGOs, five employees of a faith-based NGO that work directly with clients (four Romanians and one volunteer from the U.S.), two social workers from the U.S. who were involved at the time of this research with Romanian programs, one director of a social welfare program of the Romanian government, a pastor in one of the local evangelical Christian churches, and a Peace Corp volunteer. All of the participants spoke English, so a translator was not needed.

### **Data Analysis**

I followed the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994) by creating explicit research questions for each of my major topic areas. I interviewed only agencies located in Romania, and the majority of the interviews focused on the faith-based issues confronting them.

I predetermined some of the interviews by following a generic funneling sampling technique (Erikson, 1986, in Huberman), working from the outside in to the core of the setting. For example, I began interviewing persons involved in administering the funding of NGOs, then the directors of the NGOs, and finally the NGOs' employees. However, I also did some snowball and multiple-case sampling, which had more of a "rolling" quality, making choices to add cases as the research continued and patterns became evident. A deliberate choice to contact a non-faith based agency director was a maximum variation in the sampling, a strategy advocated by Guba and Lincoln (1989). However, selecting multiple cases that were similar in purpose and design helped to strengthen and validate the findings. For this reason, all of the other agencies I chose to observe were faith-based.

## **Results and Implications of the Findings**

### **Social Development**

All of the NGOs I studied promoted programs and missions consistent with the encouragement and support of social development. The period of repression under Communism created a context of distrust and limited social involvement among citizens who thought of their neighbors as possible governmental informants, not as sources of collaboration or friendship. As a result of this history, many of the NGOs reported special difficulties in developing trusting relationships with the Romanian people. After their experience with a large, centralized government that controlled all activities of daily life, Romanian citizens seem ill prepared to participate as leaders, or even just as members, of a community. NGOs play a special role in modeling the possibilities for a more civil society. The organizations that are successful are those that have stayed for at least five years and have maintained continuity of services by retaining their staff. They follow through with promises and even display some vulnerability. In spite of prevailing attitudes, the leaders of successful non-governmental organizations model good citizenship by paying taxes and obeying the law. A policy of transparency appears to be essential in a society where distrust and corruption are the norm. And although it may lead to more controversies and conflicts, diversity must be cultivated and all employees treated with respect if social development is to occur. One program director acknowledged this fact with the hiring policies she established for her organization, enabling Roma to assume advocacy positions, to the surprise of many employees and in spite of the consternation of some.

On a more macro level, the NGOs I researched recognized the need for cooperation from the community in order for the agencies to successfully carry out their mission. Examples included: local Romanian women employed as paid caregivers, involvement of local government and the Orthodox Church in projects, before establishing the domestic crisis program, one NGO carried out an extensive survey to determine community members' perceived needs. NGOs promote social development when they increase local control and indigenous leadership, and adapt to foreign

assistance in a way that does not compromise the particular and unique needs of the population addressed. These results support the work of Herbert (2003) and Cnaan (1999), who have signalled the positive contributions that faith-based agencies have made in the area of community participation and development.

### **Human Rights**

Especially in an impoverished country like Romania, the NGO leaders were exquisitely aware of the power of precious resources in coercing behavior. All of the NGOs I researched indicated that although they may utilize service provision as an opportunity to evangelize, services were never provided or prohibited on the basis of religious belief. People were provided with assistance based on what they needed, not on what they believed. The NGOs' success in promoting cooperation and trust with Romanian citizens affirms Timothy Brown's (1999) hypothesis that religion is helpful in promoting civil society if it does not force others to accept it as the only way to truth, thus alienating any other religious traditions or beliefs in the community.

### **Multiculturalism/Cultural Competence**

In a country where almost 90% of the population adheres to the Orthodox faith and where there is virtually no separation between church and state, the faith-based "neo-Protestant" organizations researched in this study found themselves a distinct minority. For the most part, the Orthodox culture and the faith-based NGO's coexisted in relative harmony. One of the NGO's actively recruited employees from the Orthodox Church and did not force them to denounce their faith or embrace Nazarene beliefs, recognizing that the identity of a Romanian citizen was tied into the practices and customs of the Orthodox Church

All of the NGOs indicated that by providing concrete services, they were navigating territory rarely explored by leaders in the Orthodox Church. Those I interviewed generally viewed the lack of cooperation from Orthodox leaders not as a result of hostility but rather of a difference in focus or purpose. (As previously stated, the Orthodox Church does not see its role as ministering to the whole person, but concentrates its ministry on the spiritual development of its members.) Only in situations where Orthodox leaders thought their ministry might be threatened by the popularity of

new beliefs, as in the small Gypsy villages, did the NGOs experience any conflict. As long as the neo-Protestant churches and affiliated organizations did not interfere with the participation of mainstream Romanians in Orthodox ways, the relationship remained cordial, or at least one of grudging tolerance for each other's existence.

From the interviews, I ascertained that due to the scarcity of resources in Romania, services were welcomed from any provider, irrespective of the ideological beliefs driving the contribution. Most of the recipients of these services—poor women and children, often physically disabled or abused, or from the Gypsy villages—were not valued by those in power, so assistance for them was seen as being of little consequence to the overall functioning of the larger community.

Interestingly, it appears from their reports that the NGO leaders who appeared to receive greater tolerance and respect were foreigners. American women could assume greater leadership in the community than other women because they were not from Romania, and thus not constrained by the customary expectations about women's behavior in that society. Romanians hold in high esteem the people from the U.S., whom they saw as liberators and preservers of human rights.

### **Social Exclusion or Inclusion**

The Roma are the minority population in Romania that suffers most acutely from poverty, discrimination in the areas of education, housing, and employment; and other problems caused by social exclusion. All of the social welfare agencies cited in this research are working with Roma clients, attempting to bridge the gaps in their social experiences so they can participate on a more equal footing with other Romanian citizens. Another group generally excluded from the privileges of society is the institutionalized children—particularly those with any type of disability, who are regarded as a source of shame and stigma. None of the agencies I surveyed denied services to anyone on the basis of ethnicity, and their funding sources, although influencing the types of service they offered, did not prohibit them from providing services to any population.

Women also are generally excluded from positions of leadership in Romanian society. In establishing a domestic crisis program, one of the NGO's has empowered women by providing them with the knowledge of what constitutes abuse, and options to end it. When social inclusion is encouraged, civil society is promoted and enhanced. A



faith-based organization can demonstrate that cooperation and tolerance of diversity are important values for both Christianity and professional social work.

Social inclusion was a distinct focus for the agencies I surveyed, as they sought to reach those who have been neglected or barred from the benefits of membership in mainstream society. These NGOs have done so in a way that does not demand any prerequisites, whether religious or otherwise, for entry into their programs. However, although none of the agencies had funding directly influencing the choice of participants, the directors of several voiced concerns that some populations and needs seemed to hold greater appeal for private funders than others. As one leader astutely observed, orphaned babies appear to attract more outside support than wives of abusive husbands, and educating Roma adolescents in computer skills seems less compelling to funders than teaching Bible stories to Gypsy children. The directors themselves were aware of the macro picture and could identify other programs that would enhance the participation of all members of the community, regardless of age, ethnic background, or level of capability. But they realized that those who hold the purse strings may have a narrower perspective, reflecting agendas that may have more to do with personal preference or political advantage.

### **Security**

Obtaining the trust of the Romanian people was identified as a difficult obstacle by people connected with all of the faith-based NGOs I surveyed. For Romanian people who have been taught the Orthodox Church is the one true church, to participate with an organization pertaining to another religion seems contrary to their culture and faith. As a result, the faith based agencies agreed it would have been easier for organizations to be secular, to avoid conjuring up the negative connotations connected with many of the neo-Protestant evangelical associations. Nevertheless, the faith-based agencies in this research were still able to be successful insofar as they recognized the problem and were willing to endure for the long haul, which attested to their reliability and the earnestness of their desire to meet needs without the ulterior motive of proselytizing for souls. This result supports Katherine Marshall's (2000) contention that religious organizations can be useful in development programs and actually have been an unrecognized force for some time.

A strong desire to create for their clients a sense of peace without the threats of hunger, abuse, loneliness, or abandonment was an essential part of the mission and vision of the NGOs participating in this research. In an environment of corrupt government and a black market economy, uncertain and fluctuating funding for social welfare, a stagnant economy, and a diminishing population, NGOs find themselves a part of a larger environment that is often antagonistic toward, rather than supportive of, their efforts. Orthodox church leaders often attempt to denigrate the efforts of these strange neo-Protestants who really do not seem to know their “place in society”. And even most individuals in the community are emboldened to go to the NGOs only because of poverty or exclusion due to racism or incapacity, and because the agencies promise material assistance not available elsewhere. In Romania, security is elusive on multiple levels and in manifold ways.

### **Sustainability**

The efforts of NGOs will continue as Romanian citizens continue to develop and to identify their own approaches to social problems by adapting existing programs to meet their culture and values. Two of the programs are demonstrating that their services have changed from primarily humanitarian aid to the education of the populace, and are almost exclusively managed by Romanian staff. The four other programs I studied seem to be more dependent on the charisma and personalities of their foreign-born leaders and on contributions from churches and other faith-based groups located outside of Romania. Sustainability in these faith-based organizations is also affected by the causes they choose to promote. All of the NGOs do, however, have Romanian employees working alongside the American volunteers. One of the directors was clear about the goal of working herself out of a job by educating the Romanian caretakers about the psychosocial and physical needs of the institutionalized babies.

As for the sustainability of the people behind the organizations, all of the directors of the faith-based agencies without exception testified to the importance of their religious faith. Without the biblical mandate to provide care and compassion for those in need, they do not think they would have had the conviction or the internal resources to sustain their efforts in this work. For the organization itself, an identification with Christianity, far from being positive, gives cause for concern and suspicion in the

community about its motivations for helping. On a personal level, however, the Christian faith has imparted to the NGOs' employees a sense of purpose and meaning beyond the often meager rewards associated with measurable and tangible success, which can seem inadequate in relationship to the labor expended. One of the secular funders for the Faith Based Agencies (FBO's) appreciated the devotion of religiously affiliated groups. She observed that they are able to deliver services ethically, economically, and with more passion than most NGOs. Concerns about the involvement of faith-based agencies are based not on their sustainability but on how fair and equitable their hiring practices might be, and their ability to collaborate with other community organizations.

Finally, the sustainability of organizations with a religious affiliation may in some respects be increased by the abject poverty of the populace and the racial discrimination shown to the Gypsies. The force of the gospel is particularly welcome to those who are disenfranchised by the dominant culture and see themselves as aliens in the community. The loose ties felt by the Roma population to the Orthodox Church has increased their receptivity to a new message of acceptance and inclusion, regardless of heritage or status in an earthly community. For the poor who see limited options or opportunities for material gain in a world of corrupt hiring practices and economic policies, a faith that promises better coping on earth and rewards in heaven is truly a welcome message. Acceptance and participation in an agency that also provides clothing and food has especially strong appeal when resources are limited.

### **Van Wormer's Reciprocal Value-Policy Theory**

The research information, obtained by framing questions in the context of Lynne Healy's relevant concepts, can also be placed in the context of Katherine Van Wormer's (1997) dynamic theory that social policy is in a reciprocal relationship with itself--shaping as well as being shaped by values, economics and existing policies ( see Figure 1, p. 5). Characterizing social policy in the broadest perspective, using Barker's (1995) definition in *The Social Work Dictionary*, policy in Romania can be viewed as the plans and programs in social welfare, made not only by government organizations, but also by the voluntary NGO's and the people in general. From this perspective, the values and economics of the Romanian people, along with the transported values of foreign and faith-based NGO's, affect the distribution and the type of services provided.

To illustrate, the history of repressive reproductive policies and institutionalization of children influenced the position of Romanians negatively toward the concepts of foster care and adoption. As a result, one of the faith-based child welfare agencies has carefully educated the community about the psychosocial needs of children, the concepts of family, and the possibilities of alternative care arrangements for the country's children. These policies have now been adopted not only by their totally Romanian staff, but also by the newly established child welfare agencies in the surrounding area. However, the poverty of the population has affected these values, and children remain institutionalized and abandoned, often as a result of the parent's limited resources to care for them.

In summary, the contemporary state of social welfare policy in Romania is a product of past cultural influences, particularly communism, and the construction of new values affected by changing economics and political philosophies. The restrictions and repression of the past has driven the current desire for transparency and freedom of expression. The power of centralized government has been shattered by a need for less bureaucracy and more local involvement. The emphasis on homogeneity and systemization has surfaced in racism and fear of change. Katherine Van Wormer (1997, p. 51) succinctly stated: "Social welfare policies are not created in a vacuum, but are embedded in the social fabric of the society of which they are a part. The very social and personal values which give them life and meaning at one point in history may be their undoing later on."

### **Implications of the Research for Social Work Practice**

By using globally relevant concepts as the framework for structuring and analyzing the data collected for this research, I hope to encourage and enhance dialogue among social workers and others involved in international development and aid. Especially now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, technological advances have greatly enhanced the ability of social workers to communicate with each other through electronic mail and video linkages. American social workers have an abundance of experience to contribute to the work of international development, especially to a profession that is rebuilding after its demise for a half-century in Romania.

With knowledge of ecological theory and macro social work practice in community settings, American social workers have a rich background in the knowledge

necessary to promote social change and the development of civil society. Social work's historic emphasis on social justice and human rights, also give it the skills and knowledge base to do effective work in areas like Eastern Europe that have been deprived of basic rights along with economic security. However, even in the United States, social work caseloads are increasingly more ethnically diverse, and comprise client populations from Eastern European countries

Social problems are shared by both countries. Child welfare concerns involving the need for supportive foster care, lack of resources for those with special needs, and educational inequities are not unique to developing countries. Although American social workers may have a longer history working with these problems, their Romanian counterparts also have practice innovations and ideas developed out of necessity from their recent tragedy of broad-scale institutionalization of children.

Social workers also have something to learn from government organizations. Research funded by the Carnegie Foundation in 1997 and 1998 found that non-governmental organizations were limited in their effectiveness if they did not involve local government officials. Familiarity with current policies is also essential to the work of social workers participating in programs funded by governmental organizations such as USAID. A prime example is the faith-based initiatives promoted by the administration of U.S. president George W. Bush.

### **The Need for Further Study**

Although President Bush has issued three executive orders based on the theory that religious organizations make important contributions to the delivery of humanitarian and economic assistance in much of the world. Research confirming this theory remains extremely limited. This exploratory study, limited to the single Eastern European country of Romania, cannot begin to cover all of the possibilities for research raised by this issue, although it has identified some of the major struggles and also the strengths that faith-based organizations face that make them uniquely resilient when confronting the challenges of aid and development in a foreign country.

Additional research is needed in similar and differing regions of the world to confirm, add to, or refute the findings in this study. More comparisons are needed between secular non-governmental agencies and those that are faith-based—do they

approach projects differently? Is one type of agency better suited to address certain kinds of problems? This research indicated that in Romania, more faith-based programs are involved with children's welfare issues than with promotion of a more civil or democratic society. What are the dynamics behind this phenomenon? What is the success rate of faith-based NGOs compared to that of secular agencies? What are the defining characteristics of successful ones versus the failures? A longitudinal study would be able to more accurately assess these concerns and a more empirical or quantitative study could, for example, pinpoint relationships between an organization's longevity or success and the sources and amounts of its funding. In a relatively unresearched area, the possibilities for study are limitless, and the emphasis on welfare provision by religious agencies is likely to remain strong, especially as the current administration emphasizes devolution, shifting responsibility for the administration of social welfare to local governments and nonprofit faith-based agencies.

Whether or not the diversion of government to faith-based providers is a good one can only be speculated at this time. I think it is in the best interest of society as a whole, and the social work profession in particular, to continue exploration of the methods we use to provide services to those who are in need. This is especially important as we boldly (or even tentatively) cross the boundary lines into countries where we are guests, possessing at best only a partial understanding of their history, current situation, and native point of view.

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