



ROMANIAN DIASPORA: THE 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AS POSITIVE COMMUNITY PRACTICE^{1,2}

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Abstract: Romania has a very complex history of outbound migration, which resulted in numerous Romanian communities in several countries of the world. And on the occasion of the presidential elections in November 2014, all these communities united, in a higher turnout than usual, towards the achievement of two major common purposes. The first one was exerting a democratic right in difficult conditions, as the organization of the elections at the Romanian Embassies and Consulates abroad was poorly organized. The second one, and with the most important long-term consequences was contributing to the creation of a new Romanian society, to which they might want to return someday. In this paper, we shall analyze the theoretical explanation of the phenomenon in relation with active participation, and then we will apply the theoretical concepts to the responses of a group of Romanians living abroad, regarding their motivation behind their decision to vote, whether they encountered any difficulties, and what are the hopes they associated with casting their vote. The willingness to participate and make their voices heard and the passion manifested in pursuing a collective goal, especially for a country with a fairly recent tradition in the field, make the voting participation of Romanian diaspora a lesson in active citizenship, and, consequently, positive community practice.

Keywords: immigrant communities, elections, active citizenship, return migration, media communication.

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1. Introduction

Romania is one of the European countries with the most numerous communities abroad. Since the fall of communism, outbound migration has constantly grown, and this phenomenon has transformed across various stages. Generally speaking, Romanian communities have been analyzed based on the host country, but a special event in the very recent history made it worth approaching the subject in a global way. We are talking about the presidential elections of 2014. Not only there has been an issue of the number of voters both in Romania and abroad reaching the highest point after 1990, at the first democratic elections after the Revolution, but the Romanian diaspora gave a real lesson in civic participation and willingness to see positive change happening in their country of origin.

First of all, we will have an insight on the stages of Romanian external migration, emphasizing the points in history which had a role in modifying its tendencies, and also the preferred countries of destination throughout all these stages. The next step will be to look at the facts and figures of the Presidential Elections of 2014, as well as the associated controversies. Further on, the events will be analyzed theoretically, from the perspectives of civic participation and the role of social media in mass mobilization. Last but not least, the responses of 20 Romanians living abroad will be presented, in order to see what exactly lied beneath their voting behavior. Was it simply a matter of civic duty? Was the voting emotional? Or, most importantly, did they really believe in a positive change for Romania, change which might affect their return home?

2. Romanian Outbound Migration: Stages in History and Defining the Community

Taking into consideration historical and geopolitical changes, there have been identified a total of five key moments which Romania went through, and which, implicitly, have influenced migration outflows.

The first three stages have been clearly defined by sociologist Dumitru Sandu, in his book *Lumile sociale ale migrației românești în străinătate (The Social Worlds of Romanian Migration Abroad)* (Sandu, 2010: 87):

- a) 1990 – 1995: The first years after the Romanian Revolution against the communist regime was characterized by the sudden abolishment of travel restrictions. On one hand, there was the completion of ethnic migration of minorities towards Germany, Hungary and Israel. On the other hand, there was the newly found freedom and desire to travel, rather than emigrate, of the previously restricted Romanian population. Therefore, Romanians also orientated themselves towards Turkey and Central and Eastern European countries, for small commerce activities. Last but not least, various people sought asylum in the Western world, by taking advantage of so-called consequences of communism and the Revolution (Diminescu in Anghel and Horvath, 2009: 46-47).
- b) 1996 – 2001: The levels of long-term and definitive migration are on the rising. This was largely caused by the decline of Romanian industry in the transition process

from communism to capitalism. This fact led to more than three million people losing their jobs throughout the 1990s (Alexe et al., 2011:42). Desperation caused this recent unemployed workforce to seek out work abroad, although not always legal, and not always in line with their previous skills and competencies. Simultaneously, many high-skilled Romanians had the opportunity to emigrate towards Canada, the United States of America, and even Australia and New Zealand, as these countries issued favorable immigration and integration policies, placing a considerable value on human capital (Serban, 2011:120).

- c) 2002 – 2006: A period in time which was marked by Romanians' freedom to circulate within the Schengen area, as a consequence to the negotiations for adhesion to the European Union. Romanian citizens were allowed to enter the territory of Schengen countries without a visa, for a maximum period of 90 days within a six months interval. This encouraged numerous people to migrate temporarily for seasonal work towards Western Europe, especially Italy and Spain.

The last two stages are also the consequences of major moments in the history of Europe.

- d) 2007 – 2013: Romania becomes a member of the European Union. This implies total freedom of circulation, although some countries still apply restrictions regarding employment. As expected, most destinations are represented by Western European countries, and the purposes of migration range from university study to work, in several domains and all levels of qualification.
- e) 2014 – present day: Starting with the 1st of January 2014, all member states of the European Union were obligated to abolish all work restrictions for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens. Of all the previously-restricted countries, major attention has been given to the United Kingdom, which, until this point in history, was very difficult to enter, and finding employment of the territory was a rather bureaucratic process.

This brief section is meant to give a quick insight on the complexity of Romanian outbound migration – multi-directional, varying across time and in relation with the subjects' social status and level of qualification. Consequently, there should be no surprise at the size of the Romanian community abroad – on the 1st of January 2013, data offered by the National Institute of Statistics declared a number of 2.344.183 Romanians living abroad for more than one year. In the meantime, the number of immigrants is believed to have grown.

Can we consider these millions of people a community in their own right, although they are spread across several countries of the world? First of all, let us define a community. The classical definition suggested by Mercer in 1956 describes it as “a functional group of individuals who live in a specific geographical localization in a specific moment, share a common culture, are arranged in a social structure and express a conscience of their uniqueness, as well as a of a separate identity as a group”. (Mercer in Pitulac, 2006:118). T. Pitulac continues the analysis of the concept of community, by emphasizing the importance of common beliefs and values, as well as direct relations as well as mental representations (Pitulac in Zamfir and Stanescu, 2006:119-120). Another

definition offered by S. Cace in the article “Mobilizarea comunitatii” (“Community Mobilization”), which appeared in the *Journal of Community Positive Practices*, explains that “The human settlement or community is not only a group of houses, it is a human, social and cultural organization. (...) Plus, the community is not only a collection of individuals, it is a socio-cultural system, it is social organization. Social animation (the promotion of community participation) is what mobilizes and organizes the community” (Cace, 2001:38). Consequently, although the Romanian community is widely spread in space, its members are all united by the Romanian sociocultural identity, in all its sets of values. And this time, in a moment in history which called all Romanians to action, all these communities merged together towards the achievement of a common goal. In conclusion, in this particular situation we can definitely talk about one big community, in spite of geographical proximity not being applicable, but rather distance dissolved by one unifying identity and set of ideals.

3. 2014 Presidential Elections: Facts, Figures and Controversies

The Romanian presidential elections took place in two rounds, on the 2nd and respectively 16th of November 2014. According to the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC), the final results concluded with the victory of Liberal Klaus Iohannis, Mayor of Sibiu, with 54, 6% votes in the second round, over Social Democrat Victor Ponta, Prime-Minister of Romania, who obtained 45, 4% of votes. The total of voters was reported at 62% of the Romanian population, at an all-time high since 1990, the first democratic elections in post-communist Romania. The data of all election polls since 1990 are present in the book *Inequality in Romania: Dimensions and Trends*, coordinated by Precupețu and Precupețu.

Table 1. Voting participation in Romania

	Parliamentary Elections (%)	Presidential Elections (%)	Local Elections (%)	European Parliament Elections (%)
1990	86	86		
1992	76	76	65	
1996	76	76	56	
2000	65	65	51	
2004	58	58	54	
2007				29
2008	39		51	
2009		54		28
2012	56	-	-	-
2014	-	62	-	32

Sources: Precupețu and Precupețu, 2011: 82; Central Electoral Bureau (BEC)

As far as Romanians' voting presence abroad is concerned, it also reached a much higher number than in the recent past, with 377.651 voters, compared to 146.000 in 2009. In Table 2, it is presented an outline of the countries with the highest number of voters from Romanian diaspora.

Table 2. Romanian diaspora voting presence, by countries

Country	Number of voters
Italy	96.600
Spain	82.744
Moldova	35.543
United Kingdom	25.850
United States of America	17.683
Germany	17.506
France	16.053
Belgium	13.040
Austria	9.533
Canada	6.490

Source: Central Electoral Bureau (Biroul Electoral Central)

A surprisingly high voting turnout, and a fair share of controversy. Throughout both election days, national and international media have reported the abnormally slow process of voting in Romanian Embassies, Consulates, Cultural Institutes, and other authorized institutions where Romanian citizens should have exerted a fundamental democratic right. Various media platforms showed in real time how thousands of Romanians had been queuing for hours, waiting to vote, forming proper crowds on the streets leading to the institutions of the State. Moreover, the queues were not advancing fast enough in order to guarantee all present people the chance to vote, hence a fair number of people did not manage to vote at all. The most dramatic situations could be encountered in cities such as London, Paris, Torino, Vienna and New York, which are home to numerous Romanian communities. In some cases, crowds of angry Romanians decided to invade Embassies and Consulates, claiming their right to vote, a right which apparently was being denied to them, often causing rather violent clashes between themselves and the local police force. Apart from the permanent transmission on behalf of niche television channels, these masses of people provided live updates on social media regarding the situations they found themselves in, causing other diaspora members and also Romanians at home to create solidarity towards a common goal.

4. Elections, Active Citizenship and Political Participation

Analyzing the theoretical concepts and the official data beneath these facts, the first issue to be tackled in connection with voting participation is the one of active citizenship – the general perspective, and the particular case of Romania, as a country with a new tradition in the field. Active citizenship, also known as civic and political participation, is most often associated with involvement in voluntary activity – civic organizations or community initiatives, as well as voting in election polls, the latter being the aspect we will concentrate upon.

When it comes to civic and political participation, Adrian Hatos defines five directions of research and analysis, all of them united by a common ground (Hatos, in Zamfir and Stoica, 2006: 180):

- theoretical and empirical investigation of political participation and socialization;
- participation in voluntary organizations;
- research on social movements in the past 20 years;
- efforts dedicated to community involvement during the past 20 years;
- debates related to social capital.

The author mentions that all these typologies of active citizenship and participation are centered on “individuals who engage voluntarily in solving collective problems, on different levels”, or contributing to the creation of a common good. Or, as mentioned by A. Dinu in the article “From European Migrants to European Citizens: an Unfinished Process”, which appeared in the *Journal of Community Positive Practices*: “These steps include identifying the matrix that enable individuals to perceive themselves as belonging to the same group and building a common project” (Dinu, 2014:21). Hence, these individuals are not materially or financially motivated, but rather sustained by a spiritual motivation, such as an ideal or a desire for change. In our case, one could argue that the “common good” or “common purpose” was a new political situation in Romania, or simply exerting a fundamental right as citizens, at a time when circumstances were obstructing this purpose.

We can link the idea of common purpose with the expectations associated with participating in the elections. Which specific measures would the citizens expect from a new president?

In the study conducted by the Romanian Institute of Evaluation and Research (IRES), entitled *Political Romania after the Presidential Elections 2014 (Romania politica dupa alegerile prezidentiale 2014)* and published on the 20th of November 2014, the first main expectations of Romanians in relation to the new President's changes in the political and social system would be the following:

- creating new workplaces (15, 2%);

- fighting against corruption (13, 9%);
- increasing salaries / pension / child allowance (7, 6%);
- changing the political class / members of parliament (5, 4%);
- obtain independence of justice (3, 2%).

Moreover, would it be possible, in the case of the Romanian diaspora, to consider the common purpose as the possibility for return migration? What if changes in the Romanian society, such as the ones mentioned above, or perhaps different ones, represented the premises for immigrants to return home someday?

Generally speaking, return migration is a decision based on a small number of major factors, according to the OECD report *Return Migration: a New Perspective*, written by J.C. Dumont and G. Spielvogel, and published in 2007. The findings of the study sum up four key motivations behind return migration (Dumont and Spielvogel, 2007:163):

- a) failure to integrate in the society of the host country;
- b) the individual's preference for his country of origin;
- c) having reached a financial objective in the country of emigration;
- d) the opening of employment opportunities in the country of origin; however, for this latter argument, we could extend it to a positive transformation in all sectors of society, not just the professional one.

Going more in depth, Dumitru Sandu has been analyzing return migration from the perspective on Romanians living in Spain, but surely the findings could be applied to various countries of migration. Apart from the situations of return based on dissatisfaction with life in the country of destination, there are also the situations where positive perception of the home country acts as catalyst. The core of the matter amounts to two main sets of causes, of which the second could surely be connected to the voting turnout of the Romanian diaspora, as our own research results will show. Rephrasing the author's idea, we can say that returning to Romania would mean that “the way I live right now in the country of migration compared to the way I lived in Romania and the way I perceive the future for workplaces and institutions in Romania compared to the ones in the country of destination determines what I project, as a migrant, for my future regarding the location of my life” (Sandu, 2010:123-124).

Having outlined the main characteristics of active citizenship, as well as the common goals associated with participating in the presidential elections of 2014, we shall move on to other parameters of analysis, which, although they might be less evident upon a first impact, they are surely very valid theories and perfectly applicable to our specific case study.

4.1. Active Citizenship as a Cultural Trait

We should mention that this high voting turnout may not be the case of a mere interest in politics, as according to the *World Values Survey 2010-2014 (wave 6): Romania 2012*, in

response to the question “How interested in politics are you?”, 32% of Romanians have responded “not very much”, 30, 8% - “not at all”, 28, 2% - “somehow” and 8, 6% - “very much”.

But what can really be said about participative culture in Romania? Adrian Hatos is suggesting a few variables for analyzing civic and political participation, and one of these is, indeed, the *cultural perspective*. Based on already established theories, the author is giving us some reference points, such as the fact that there are specific cultural traits leading to or putting impediments towards a participative lifestyle, or, as based on Hechter's 1987 theory, that “participation could be the result of conforming oneself to social norms or sets of collective obligations” (Hatos, in Zamfir and Stoica, 2006:182).

However, these theories might not apply to Romania and its citizens, and this is confirmed by the results of the research study “Participative Culture in Romania” (“Cultura participativa in Romania”), by Dan Sultanescu, presented as part of the European funded project *Initiative for the Civil Society (Initiativa pentru societatea civila)*, of Fundatia Multimedia, in 2013. The study had as primary objectives to discover the level of participative culture in Romania, its main characteristics, and what can be done for a higher participation. Some of the findings of the research include:

- The Romanian society is a traditional one, despite several years having passed since the adhesion to the European Union.
- Romanians' values tend to be focused rather on survival, than achievement and status.
- The civic profile of Romania is not a participative one, different from Western Europe.
- Community participation is insufficiently developed.
- Citizens are available for participation and information, but they do not participate effectively, and are not sufficiently informed.
- In Romania, there is an evident discrepancy between social and political, and participation in election is notably higher than civic participation.

As the conclusions of the study punctually point out, Romania and its citizens have not developed yet a strong sense of active citizenship and participation in its culture as a country. However, does this status-quo change with migration? What happens when a 'traditional' Romanian migrates to a different country, with different values? Perhaps the host country values civic participation, and, as a consequence, the Romanian immigrant will adopt this tendency in the process of integration. Or, there could be cases when emigrating changes the way the subject sees his/her country of origin. Some of these points are explained by R. Careja and P. Emmenegger, in the article “Making Democratic Citizens: the Effects of Migration Experience on Political Attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe”, which appeared in the *Comparative Political Studies* journal. Amongst the explanations given, the issue of arriving in an environment which might have different values and different ways of seeing and experiencing civic participation is just one of various aspects.

More interestingly, the authors describe migration as “a means to access an institutional context favorable to the development and expression of political attitudes” (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012:6). Although the example used relates to immigrants who fled dictatorship and it does not exactly apply to the case of Romania, we can definitely admit that numerous migrants left behind a country with a difficult political and economic situation, as well as with numerous social problems. Therefore, by adapting the idea to this slight variation, we could state that they use the setting of the host country in order to make their voices heard. They might have found a better life abroad, at least from some points of view, but this does not mean that what happens in Romania, to the family and friends left behind, or even to the society itself, with or without an intention to return in project, no longer affects them, or that they do not wish to see positive changes.

Moreover, the authors also claim that, in the case of immigrants, there is “less concern for personal interest, more concern towards a common purpose” (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012:7). So, as we can see, this statement is in line with the definition of the community, presented in the second section of this article, and also with the core characteristic of active participation, regardless of its type. Consequently, we have the different way of relating to one's country of origin, which is an effect of migration, we have an increased value placed on civic and political participation, and we have common purposes in the form of desire for change in the Romanian society. Although active citizenship may not be very typical of Romanians as a nation, there are circumstances under which this reality can transform, showing that Romanians, and especially the members of the Romanian diaspora, can change a national imprint whilst fighting for a common goal.

4.2. Active Citizenship and Psychological Factors

This section will also start with some classical theories offered by A. Hatos in his work on participation (Hatos, in Zamfir and Stoica, 2006:182). The recurring theme is that behind participation there is often a strong emotional motive, such as the anger associated with protest action, as theorized by Kemper (1978) and Ost (2004), as well as the idea according to which the involvement in social movements is caused by dissatisfaction with a certain status (Lipset, Raab, 1978; Lenski, 1956). Moving to our specific case, we find confirmation for these theories. The Romanian presidential elections did not start off as a protest, but the difficulties encountered at the Embassies and Consulates generated a feeling of anger in the crowds of aspiring voters, causing them to react sometimes aggressively towards authorities. Anger was provoked also for the Romanian population within the country's borders, by seeing what was happening abroad, everything resulting in the (rather peaceful) demonstrations on the evening of the 16th of November, concluded with the celebrations after the announcement of the final results.

An opinion often produced by the media in the aftermath of the election is that the population's electoral behavior was dictated by emotion rather than logic. Indeed, emotion is believed to play an important part in dictating reactions and decisions when it comes to political choices. This phenomenon is explained by D. Westen in the book

The Political Brain: the Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation. “It is no accident that the words motivation and emotion share the same Latin root 'movere', which means 'to move'. (...) Emotion channel behavior in directions that maximize our survival (...) and care for the welfare of others in whom we are emotionally invested” (Westen, 2008:71). The emotions behind all this unexpected behavior during the Romanian presidential elections could have ranged from a negative reaction to one particular candidate whom the population did not trust, or to the negative reaction towards the organization of voting polls abroad, automatically associated with the State institutions still in power.

Westen continues to explain the way certain emotions work. “We feel scared or angry when someone attacks us and we feel admiration when someone shows courage. (...) All these emotions motivate us to behave in ways that are ultimately in our own interest and in the interest of those within our sphere of care or concern” (Westen, 2008:49-50). The range of emotions mentioned by the author are more numerous than just anger and admiration, but for our situation, these are the ones which reflect what might have happened with the Romanian voters. The anger was felt especially when a fundamental human right of democracy was being attacked. At the same time, admiration was felt by fellow voters inside and outside the country, towards the members of diaspora who did not give up in front of difficulties, being determined to persevere in their quest for exerting their duty as citizens, but also for a new Romania. Eventually, anger and admiration were the feelings which acted as an engine in increasing mobilization.

As we can see, the participation in the 2014 election was highly emotional, but by no means illogical. It was the reaction of a worldwide community, and of an entire nation, towards difficulty and disrespect. This controversial situation not only called to action more people than usual, but also caused a rather individualistic nation to unite and fight against obstacles towards their common goal.

4.3. The Role of the Media as a Connecting Network

In this sub-section, we will tackle the last theoretical issue: the power of influence exerted by networking and the media on active participation, in the context of the presidential elections. Thanks to the ubiquitous nature of the media and its fragmentation, the audience has the possibility to stay informed via a wide variety of sources, whilst comparing the content and credibility of the received information. News on the development of the event, from all perspectives, locations and political orientations, were transmitted in real time, especially by TV news channels, yet the most important role was played by social media. Thanks to its user-generated content and mobile technology, social media revolutionized the freedom of expression, as virtually any person becomes a real-life reporter and a mobilization agent, in any moment in time, and in all types of circumstances.

In the study *Social Media: the New Power of Political Influence*, by Auvinen, published by the Center for European Studies, the author gives examples of several political episodes, more or less controversial, from across the Globe, where social media played a major role in mass mobilization and establishing communication between participants. Eight

key characteristics are given, with the purpose of emphasizing the advantages of social media over other forms of communication (Auvinen, 2012: 5):

1. Possibility of anonymity.
2. Richness and diversity of information.
3. Omnipresence, and ease of access.
4. Speed, and the ability to publish in real time.
5. Diversity of roles and mutual connection of users.
6. Subjectivity
7. Combining information.
8. Near absence of regulation.

This also can be said in connection with diaspora voting participation. Apart from the materials transmitted on television and published in online press, the first level of reporters were actually all those people queuing at the Embassies and Consulates. When technology, in the form of mobile Internet facilitates the connection to social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube, all written and video updates on what is actually happening on location becomes social media content, and goes viral in a very short amount of time. The more people post, the more people have the occasion to be informed, ultimately being influenced to join forces, by either participating in voting (or at least trying), or by spreading the information further.

This huge media and social media exposure on the days of the elections merged with the emotional factor discussed in the previous sub-section, adding an extra amplitude to mass mobilization. In his book *Mass-Media Sociology (Sociologia Mass-Media)*, Rieffel takes as a departure point the classical theory of early 20th century sociologist Gabriel Tarde, which, although represents a historical period when little did mankind expect about something called 'media' and their power, is all perfectly applicable to nowadays' context. Tarde makes a distinction between 'the crowds' and 'the public' as being two types of human communities which function on the basis of imitation, but each one of them has a different approach, as the author rephrases. "The action of the crowd is unstable and unexpected, it reacts impulsively and emotionally. In this sense, it is often intolerant, subject to prejudices and passionate outbursts" (Rieffel, 2008:41-42). This principle can perfectly be linked to the issue of emotional voting and emotional participation which we talked about earlier on. The factual information could be easily transmitted amongst queuing voters and the audience in Romania, as well as the feelings of rage or frustration associated with it, and the media played a major role, causing people, now seen as 'crowds', to act in similar ways. On the other hand, Tarde also gives the definition of the 'public' as being "a purely spiritual collective, made of physically separated individuals, whose cohesion is only mental" (Tarde, in Rieffel, 2008:42), united by shared ideas and purposes. This is also true in our case study, as these communities were in physical proximity only locally, but they had the same purposes and were encountering the same obstacles in reaching them, a fact which was also emphasized by the media. Therefore, we can say that the members of the

Romanian diaspora acted as both members of a crowd and members of the public, with the media by their side for the entire duration of events.

On a last note, we are returning to the parameters of analysis for public participation, proposed by A. Hatos, more specifically network effects. The main premise of this approach, originally defined by McAdam and Paulsen in 1993 and is that active participation is based on being closely connected with other participants, as “dense interpersonal networks increase the audience of an invitation to participate and decreases uncertainty regarding mobilization” (Hatos, in Zamfir and Stoica, 2006:182). In our case, the connection was happening live on the local level, but also virtually, yet in real time, thanks to social media, which are also networks in their own right.

Through this section, we had opportunity to analyze in detail the principles behind active citizenship or public participation in relation to voting behaviour, all theory being applied to the presidential elections held in Romania, in November 2014. The next step of the study will be to verify if this theory is confirmed or not, through the empirical research carried out among a group of representatives of Romanian diaspora. What was the motivation behind their decision to go voting, whilst risking to queue in vain for several hours? Was their decision dictated by emotional factors of any kind, or pure civic duty? Last but not least, what were the hopes associated with casting their vote, and would the fulfillment of these hopes encourage them to return to Romania?

5. Beyond Theory: Voters' Motivation and Return Perspectives

In order to compare theory and practice, 20 structured and semi-structured interviews have been carried out. The chosen segment of population consists of high-skilled Romanian immigrants, aged between 25 and 40, students or professionals of various fields: IT, teaching, cultural management, languages, graphics and design, finance and accountancy, business management. Their countries of residence are: Italy, Great Britain, Germany, and Czech Republic, and all respondents emigrated at least one year ago. The main issues tackled in the interviews are the motivation behind voting (or the mere attempt to vote, in some unfortunate cases), as well as the hopes associated with voting.

Of the main motivations behind their emigration, we find: accompanying working parents during childhood or adolescence (20%), the difficulty to progress professionally in Romania (20%), continuing university studies (10%), and general uncertainty regarding the future of Romanian society (10%).

As means of information before the election days, all respondents have cited online newspapers and social media, as well as exchanges of opinions with family and friends at home. Communication and staying informed on the development of the situation continued also during the election days, and those who queued for long hours kept posting social media updates on what was happening on the premises. The voting experience has proven itself to be difficult exclusively in the cases of those subjects living in Italy and Great Britain, who add up to 60% of the interviewees. In some cases, they did not even manage to vote, after queuing for a time frame of between four and

six hours, while some others have managed to enter very shortly before closing time. One person in particular witnessed the clashes between the Romanian crowds and the police in the Italian city of Torino.

What were the emotions behind the voting? 70% of the respondents admitted to have voted specifically in favor of one candidate or against another, associated with strong feelings of liking or disliking, and in some cases the alternatives were described as 'dramatic'. The flawed organization of voting polls caused feelings of frustration or rage, emphasizing any previously-existing negative feelings, as well as provoking a fiery determination to go ahead and not give up until the vote was cast. Plus, the unusual situation also created a positive feeling: the feeling of belonging, of pride to be Romanian, and making a move towards a better future, a feeling which was also created by the situation of fighting together for a common purpose on the election days 50% of the respondents mentioned as motivation exerting a democratic right, and the fact that they participate in all elections. Other motivations include: desire for social change and collective conscience.

What about the expected changes, and would these changes affect the immigrants' choice of whether to return to Romania? First of all, we have to specify that none of the respondents claimed to expect sudden changes, but believe that even the smallest of steps can make a difference in this moment. Contrary to common belief, high-skilled immigrants are no strangers to the idea of returning to Romania in a near or more distant future. What would make for a better Romanian society, in their view?

- Changes of the general mentalities and attitudes of the people: more respect for others, more community spirit, learning to value ourselves as a nation, appreciation for our national values and traditions.
- Better healthcare and education services.
- Complete eradication of corruption.
- EU-level salaries and pensions, and a good balance between incomes and prices.
- Work opportunities in accordance with academic studies.
- Economy and industry being brought (back) to full potential.
- Better and cheaper transport connections and infrastructure.

Being away from Romania, everything good and bad about our home country is amplified – from the concern when something is not functioning well in society, to the desire to see changes happening, to the need of building a positive image on an international level, and actually acting upon these situations which would need fixing. As the responses show, people believe that Romania has potential, and that there are very clear directions towards a good society – opinions which are surely shared by non-migrants as well.

We can say that the Romanian diaspora have proven to have a proactive attitude as opposed to resignation and indifference, and unlike the famous mentality of 'Why

should I vote? After all, nothing changes!” For the first time since 1989, a very strong community spirit could be seen like never before, and everything started from diaspora. Because, if it hadn't been for them, and judging according to what was happening in Romania, it would have been just an election poll with a slightly higher turnout. Not only there was a high value being placed on active participation and democracy, but everything was evident in the behavior of the people, and the various media platforms did their very best to emphasize this fact.

Conclusions and Future Developments

Apart from practice confirming theory almost entirely, we can surely consider the events connected to the Romanian diaspora on the November 2014 election days a true lesson in positive community practice. Several communities across the world have demonstrated that they value, first and foremost, their country of origin and their national identity, and, despite having lived far away, in some cases for many years, they still care about what happens to Romania, and wish to see things changing for the better, to match the country's potential. Sentimental as it may sound, being Romanian and being a patriot transcends geographical borders.

Nevertheless, this episode brought to light an aspect of society which, until now, was not as well exploited in Romania: active citizenship. Although sometimes wrongfully dismissed on the basis of 'communist associations', active citizenship is about knowing your own rights as a citizen, knowing what values and ideals bring yourself and your peers together, and considering the collective interest as well, not only the individual one. The elections episode serves us as a reminder that people have the power to make changes and move a situation towards a desired outcome, one step at a time, instead of expecting change to simply happen from above. Resignation and indifference are not beneficial attitudes for a good society.

As direction for further research, it is still early to have a clear and obvious view of the changes that have happened since the election. However, good research topics would be the way active citizenship will be perceived and experienced by Romanians in the near future, and the domains should not be restricted only to participation in the election, but also taking part in voluntary activities, as well as what will happen in the following years with the Romanian diaspora, and whether, in the eventuality of positive changes, there would be an increase in return migration.

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