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**SUMMARY OF THE THESIS**

**Desistance from offending. Probation as a support agent for desistance**

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From the earliest times, the theoretical preoccupation regarding criminality was predominantly related to the genesis of crime, the theorists being focused on understanding and explaining the factors and mechanisms involved in the occurrence of crime, and the issues related to ending the criminal activity were ignored. However, we could strongly state that during the last two decades, some researchers have changed the theoretical interest from determining the causes of crime to identifying the elements leading to stopping or abandoning the criminal behavior (Maruna, 1999, Laub & Sampson, 2001, etc.). As a result of this new orientation, a vast literature has emerged, dedicated to the reasons why individuals give up illicit conduct, called desistance from crime.

My interest in the phenomenon of desistance, namely the way in which people abandon criminal behavior and adopt a conduct in line with legal norms, appeared as a result of my professional activity in the probation system. The probation institution represents an alternative to the prison system for punishing offenders, its main objectives being social rehabilitation of offenders, diminishing the risk of new offenses and increasing community safety. In a synthetic way, we can say that promoting and supporting desistance is one of the implicit goals of the probation system. Thus, by investigating the elements associated with desistance and supporting the efforts of this category of persons to desist, it was intended to identify those rehabilitative models and approaches that have the highest efficiency, in order to achieve the general purpose of probation.

Chapter 1 of the present paper gives an insight into the literature and describes the way in which the concept of desistance is defined, pointing out different visions developed by researchers on the investigated phenomenon. Despite the increased interest in desistance, the way in which it occurs and its facilitating elements, and the initial tendency to appreciate that the definition of this process does not raise any issues, being simply understood as a moment when the offender's career is completed, the concept faces a lack of unity as to how it is conceptualized. Scanning the literature reveals the existence of two great perspectives in understanding desistance, either represented as a static event (Farall & Bowling, 1999) or as a process (Bushway et al., 2001). The conceptualization of desistance as a static event considers that the termination of the offender's career involves the existence of a certain moment which temporally and symbolically marks desistance (Farall & Bowling, 1999). This perspective, somehow simplistic, has generated a number of criticisms, the main one being that desistance

does not occur abruptly, as a rupture in the individual's biography, but rather as a long-lasting process, characterized by successive periods of activity and criminal passivity until its completion (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Another criticism is that desistance is defined only from the outside, according to an objective criterion (e.g. the last criminal act established by the researcher or recorded in official documents), ignoring the subjective aspects of the social actor, involving decisions, plans and efforts made by him to change his own behavior (Maruna, 2004). In order to overcome these limits, we have embarked on adopting a definition of desistance as a process (Bushway et al., 2001), thus taking into account a longer period, not strictly identifiable nor delimited over time. In this new approach on desistance, the main problem arises from the duration of the criminal abstinence, after which desistance is considered accomplished. However, this new approach of defining desistance, as a process, doesn't lack difficulties, researchers having set different measurement units according to which they appreciate desistance as a fulfilled fact (LeBel et al., 2002, Farrington, 1994). To overcome criticism in defining desistance, Maruna et al. (2004) used the distinction made by E. Lemert's, the founder of the labeling theory (Macionis, 2008), between primary deviance (the initial violation of social norms, regardless of the cause or the reasons that motivate the individual) and secondary deviance (the cause of the deviant behavior is the labeling itself, following the internalization of the identity of the deviant, prescribed by the label). Referring to this differentiation, Maruna et al. (2004) delimited the two-stage dissolution phenomenon: primary desistance vs. secondary desistance. The primary desistance being understood as the period in which the individual takes a break in his criminal career, regardless of the reason for this interruption, and then returns to the old behavioral patterns, and in the case of secondary desistance, what is new is the identity change (structural changes in his cognitive scheme, attitude, values, etc.), besides the fact that the individual renounced the idea of continuing the criminal behavior (p. 19). Concluding, we can say that the theoretical addition from Maruna et al. (2004), consisting in phasing out the individual's evolution as part of the desistance process, until the moment of abandonment of the offender's career, provides an important clarification for the understanding of the phenomenon. We consider this conceptualization of desistance as a process that takes place over a longer period of time (involving moments of activity and passivity in the sphere of illicit behaviors) and involves changes in the internal structure of the person (beliefs, attitudes, interests, values, etc.) to be a much more complex perspective for defining the desistance process.

The second chapter of the thesis presents the main perspectives on desistance (ontogenetic, sociogenic, agentivity), which contributes fundamentally to the clarification and understanding of the phenomenon. The ontogenetic perspective is the most simplistic way to explain desistance, using the age variable as the central element influencing desistance from offending (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). The sociogenic paradigm emphasizes on the importance of social factors in modulating and favoring desistance, underlining the way in which social biographical events can contribute to behavioral change (Farrington, 1992; Pezzin, 1995). The agency perspective (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Vaughn, 2007, LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway, 2008) emphasizes motivation as the main reason for change, also giving it the central role in coordinating human behaviors. In this vision, will and rational choice generate desistance. However, these perspectives in conceptualizing and explaining desistance are not mutually exclusive, and each of these approaches has its own strengths and weaknesses, which is why a deeper understanding of desistance should reap the components of each, using their particularities for a comprehensive theory.

Since discovering the causes for which certain persons continue to commit offences is a complementary aspect to fully understand desistance, Chapter 3 performs an analysis of recidivism and presents the main explanations for why some individuals do not abandon criminal conduct. Exploring the literature on the subject of recidivism leads to the conclusion that two major trends explain this phenomenon, based on identifying the types of offenders (T.E. Moffit, 1993) or on the risk factors (Gendreau, Little and Goggin, 1996). In spite of this distinction, both explanatory modalities contain relevant information, which contributes to improving the work done by re-socialization agents. Regarding the explanations based on discrimination between possible types of criminals, a pertinent theory is advanced by T.E. Moffit (1993), which describes the differences between what she calls "Adolescence-Limited or AL" and "career offenders" (Life-course-persistent or LCP), basing her conclusions on the results of numerous studies in the field of psychology, biology, criminology, etc. Summarizing the author's theory, the "career offender" characterizes the individual who will be life-long persistent in criminal conduct, although the actual materialization of the anti-social behaviors adopted will be different, but still illegal (Moffit, 1993, p. 25). The factors that contributes to the formation of this type of offender are: neuropsychological deficits, the environmental or structural impediments to change and the process of the person's development (Paulhus & Martin, 1986; E. Kandel & Mednick,

1991; Needleman & Beringer, 1981; Tarter, Hegedus, Winsten, & Alterman, 1984, etc.). With regard to interventions, for managing this type of offender, Moffitt (1993, p. 26) suggests that any strategy would rather be a criminal option for this type of individual than a support to desist. More specifically, a job could be an opportunity for theft, engaging in a relationship could be an opportunity for domestic violence, participating in a group counseling program could be an opportunity to acquire new criminal skills, etc. Therefore, the predictions about the evolution of this type of offender are bleak, which has the effect of inhibiting the enthusiasm of the re-socializing agents in their involvement in generating and supporting the process of desistance for the "career offenders". The situation is distinct for the adolescent offender category, this individual being portrayed as a pragmatic offender, interested in reaching his goals regardless of the means used, which will capitalize the criminal offender skills in his strategies. However, this offender's career is short-lived, limited especially to those years of adolescence where the gap between biological and social maturity is the most prominent, and the transition to conventionality will be done on the basis of becoming aware of the risks involved by his conduct and on the ability to access the right resources and opportunities.

A distinct vision for the causality of recidivism and the way in which individuals continue on a criminal path is represented by the perspective of risk factors. From this point of view, there are a number of factors that strongly correlate with the risk of recidivism and their early identification is a primary aspect of the elaboration and individual intervention programs tailored for each individual's situation. Following a meta-analysis of the results of 131 studies carried out between 1970-1994 investigating factors associated with recidivism, Gendreau, Little and Goggin (1996) classified these factors into 17 topics of interest, whose predictive relevance for recidivism was subsequently assessed. In their analysis, the authors used the differentiation made by Andrews and Bonta (1994, apud Gendreau, Little and Goggin, 1996) between static and dynamic factors that can help to predict the future behavior of individuals. According to the conclusions drawn by the authors, the most relevant predictors of future criminal behavior are criminogenic needs and the criminal past. They have also added, in order of importance: age, peer group, family factors (including family history, parenting strategies and family structure), gender, social success and substance use. The weakest predictors of recidivism seem to be personal distress, intelligence and the socio-economic status of parents. Similar results on the factors contributing to the risk of recidivism were obtained by Andrews and Bonta (2010b). They

pointed out that antisocial attitudes, antisocial groups, antisocial behavioral history and antisocial personality are the central variables that correlate with recidivism, and other significant but moderate factors are: problematic family circumstances (lack of affection, poor supervision, neglect or abuse), low educational level, job instability, problematic/non-constructive ways of spending leisure time and substance use. Given that intervention programs, interested in reducing the risk of recidivism and facilitating the process of desistance and increasing the chances of community reintegration of the offenders, proceed from the identification of the risk factors, the specific knowledge of the results of the studies on relapse predictors is not a redundant aspect for the staff concerned with the rehabilitation of offenders, which is why their analysis was a point of interest for this work.

Chapter 4 of the thesis presents the concept of punishment from a penological and sociological perspective. As the societal reaction to crime is externalized through punishment, meaning that behaviors that disobey the law will be sanctioned, the causal relationship between the two is simple and rational. For this reason, interrogations such as what is punishment, why is applied in one form or another, how is justified, and what is the role that it plays, are issues that have guided our research. The sociological perspective attempts to overcome the limitations of other sciences (philosophy, law, criminology, etc.) concerned with the study of punishment, by considering the social implications of this phenomenon. Without limiting its investigation to how punishment contributes to crime control, the sociological approach is concerned with studying the effects that it has on the society in general. Because punishment is seen as a social institution, sociology adopts an external positioning of analysis, which is through the eyes of society, focusing on identifying the social foundations of punishment, the social consequences and the cultural significance of the application of different types of sanctions. In addition to the theoretical discourse, sociology also points to practical aspects related to sanctioning by identifying how the criminal system operates in modern society, thus contributing to setting more realistic expectations of public policies and identifying more appropriate ways to implement them. Specifically, the sociological perspective seeks to understand how the specific forms of punishment were developed, what are the social functions of punishment, how criminal institutions relate to each other, but also to other institutions, how punishment contributes to social order and how it helps form and maintain state power, but also what are the negative / unwanted social effects of punishment and what are its widespread social costs. Among the most



influential sociologists who have shown interest in studying punishment are Emile Durkheim, Michel Foucault, Norbert Elias, and the neo-Marxist theorists, G. Rusche and O. Kirchheimer, whose theoretical contributions have been extensively exposed (Scott & Flynn, 2014, Burkhardt & Connor, 2015, Breathnach, 2002, Garland, 1991, Rusche & Kirchheimer, 2017, Vaughan, 2000, Foucault, 1995, Elias, 2002).

In total opposition to the multifaceted approach of the sociological approach, the penological perspective examines punishment through its instrumental role, in the simplest possible terms, as a means of controlling and managing crime. Unlike the other perspectives (philosophical and sociological), whose inputs are of particular interest to specialists' communities, the penology approach is common to the general public, criminologists, and practitioners involved in the rehabilitative practices. In other words, penology assumes the study of punishments, their role and purpose, but also their effective management, by studying enforcement rules and their effectiveness on criminality (Sharma, 1998). The current Penal Code does not define punishment, but according to the Penal Code from 1969, "punishment is a coercive measure and a means of re-education of the convicted person. The purpose of the punishment is to prevent new offenses" (Article 52, VCP). In analyzing the way in which punishment is understood from a penological perspective, the paper makes an incursion in presenting its characteristic traits, but also the purpose and functions it assumes (Mitrache and Mitrache, 2007; Basarab, 1995; Sima, 2015).

Chapter 5, entitled Probation - a current system for punishing offenders, discloses information on the birth and evolution of probation (Gelsthorpe & Morgan, 2007; Crow, 2001; Chui & Nelis, 2003), and makes an analysis of the concept of rehabilitation and its implications (Garland, 1985, apud Robinson & Crow, 2009, McNeill, 2013, Raynor and Robinson, 2009, McNeill, 2012, Duff, 2001, 2005). The last subchapter is focused on presenting the romanian probation system by analyzing the successive stages of its development, the role it assumes and the punishment forms with which it operates (Penal Code, Law no. 252/2013 on the organization and functioning of probation and Law no. 253/2013 on the execution of sentences, educational measures and other non-custodial measures ordered by the judicial institutions during criminal proceedings). This subchapter presents statistical data on the number of cases with which the probation system has operated from its beginnings to the present days, compared to the penitentiary system. What the data in Chart 1 and Chart 3 show is the increasement in the

percentages of the population managed through probation system, as an alternative method of sanctioning persons who have committed criminal offenses. Thus the topic addressed in this paper becomes more relevant.

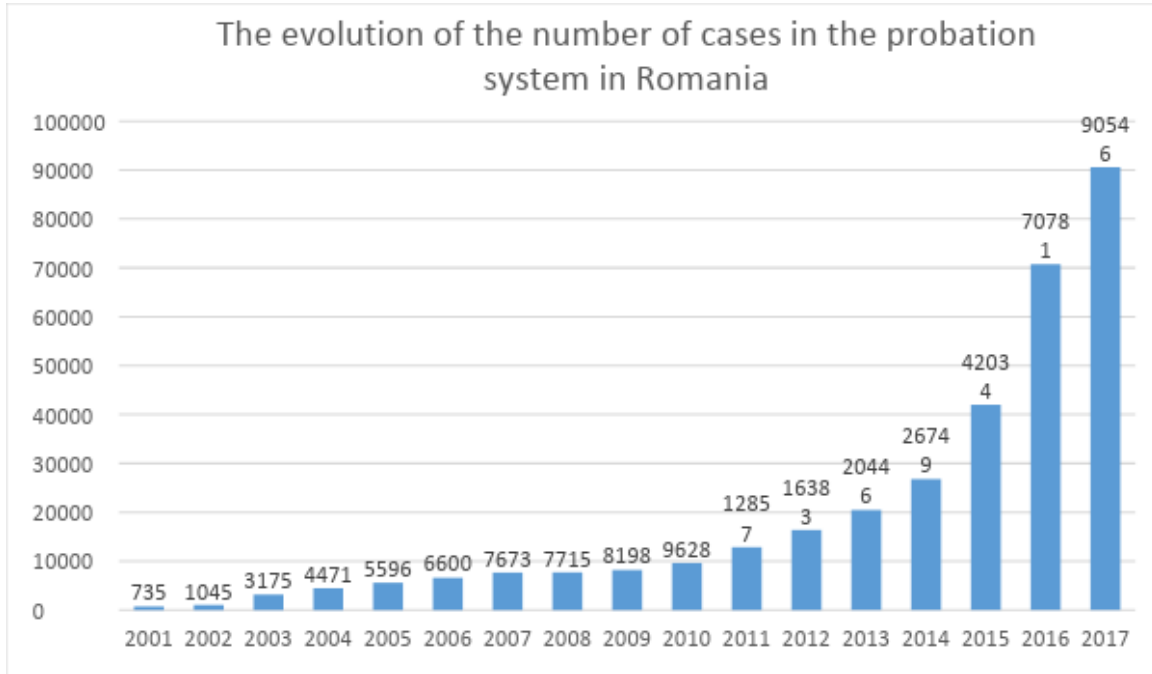


Chart 1. The evolution of the number of cases in the probation system in Romania

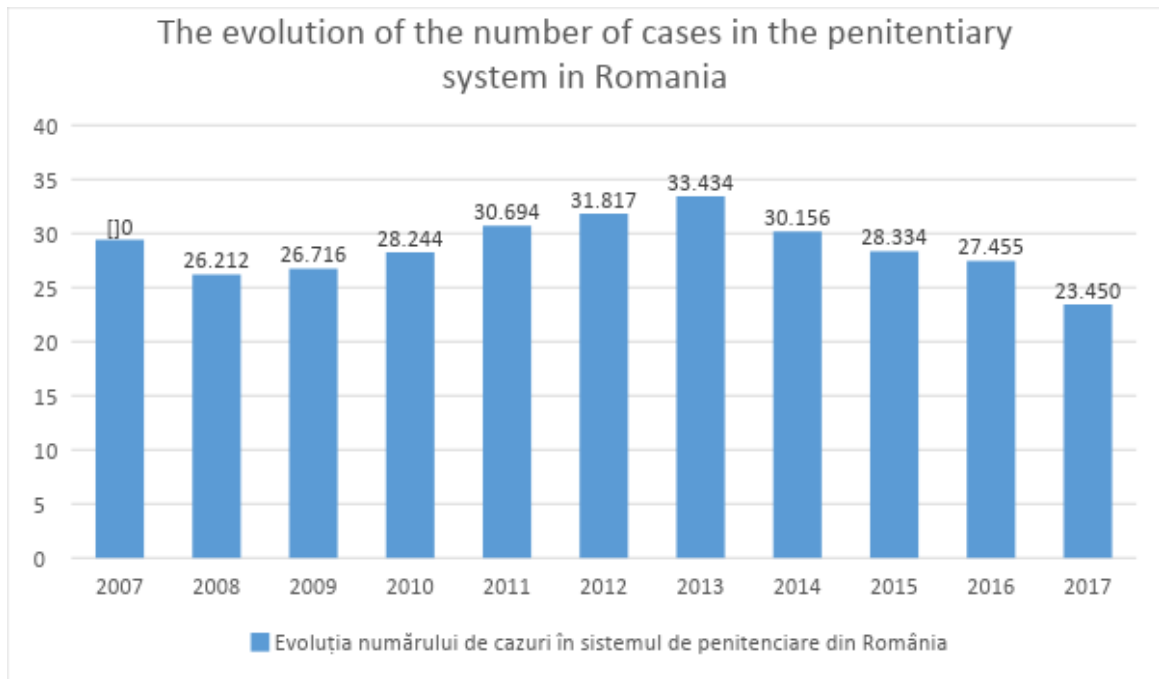


Chart 3. The evolution of the number of cases in the penitentiary system in Romania

The last chapter of the theoretical part moves from discussing the main theoretical perspective on desistance to the analysis of the role and the way in which the probation system manages its own beneficiaries. First, it presents the current models of rehabilitation of offenders, the Risk-Needs-Responsibility Model, known by the RNR acronym (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) and the Good Life Model (T. Ward & C. Stewart, 2003). The RNR model for crime assessment and rehabilitation is based on five general principles (risk, needs, responsiveness, professional wisdom, and intervention integrity), the first three representing the core nucleus (Bonta, 1997). Synthetically, the model shows that the intervention should start from an accurate estimation of the level of risk that the person poses, based on the criminogenic needs identified in his situation, so that the intensity of the intervention will be correlated with the level of risk. The principle of responsiveness refers to how intervention should be dispensed, setting cognitive-behavioral approaches as the most effective in counseling and re-socializing offenders. The Good Life Model (MVB) promotes a positive approach of offenders, based on identifying and amplifying individual strengths, so that they become resources for self-development and optimization (Ward & Brown, 2004, p. 245). What this model claims is that rigid focusing on the negative aspects of an individual leads to a defensive and hostile attitude, and he will mainly present a low motivation for change and lack involvement in the programs. After the presentation of the main models of rehabilitation of criminals, the chapter presents case management in probation (Holt, 2000) and discusses the main dimensions addressed in the rehabilitative practice, the development of the human and social capital of the person (Poledna, 2002; Farrall, 2004a; Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001; MacKenzie, 2006).

Chapter 7 includes the research part of the thesis, and contains information about the research objectives, the desistance concept operationalization, the research design, the participants' sampling and the data collection, the data analysis and the results of the study. The general objective of the present research was to elucidate the factors responsible for the desistance of the beneficiaries of the Cluj Probation Service. At the same time, an additional objective was to identify the contribution of the Probation Service in promoting and in supporting desistance. Since the failure of desistance consists in recidivism, an additional objective was to identify the factors most likely to lead to the later. Also, a particular interest was to identify the traits and characteristics specific to those who persist in the criminal career, and to those who desist.

In Romania there are no specific studies/data about the factors contributing to desistance versus those contributing to recidivism, not even in the case patrimonial offenses, which are the focus of this study. Because the present study was mainly exploratory in nature, the research did not take off from asserting hypothesis, but consisted in exploring all the variables available. The current study started with setting the following research objectives and interrogations:

- identifying the elements and elucidating the factors responsible in desistance from crime, for the population represented by the beneficiaries of the Cluj Probation Service
- identifying the contribution of the probation service in promoting and supporting desistance
- identifying the factors most likely to lead to recidivism and identifying the features and characteristics specific to those who persist in the criminal career and to those who desist
- what are the differences (internal, external resources) between people who persist in crime and those who give up the illicit conduct?
- what are the aspects/features that these people share in common?
- what are the factors/elements that can make a difference between an evolution in line with the law and one marked by deviations from the law?

To achieve the established objectives, the reference study of the paper was The Liverpool Desistance Study (LSD), conducted by Shadd Maruna (2001). The main purpose of this research was to identify the socio-cognitive patterns involved in desistance in order to outline the typical portrait of a person that desists and of one that persists in crime. For this purpose, the reference research was based on "a systematic comparison of self-narratives regarding desistance of former offenders with those of a suitable sample of active offenders" (Maruna, 2001). The main limitations of the study lie in the fact that research is anchored exclusively in the phenomenological paradigm; exploring the subjectivity of individuals through self-narratives developed by them, but also in the neglect of the objective dimension of desistance. Precisely this deficit that was intended to be overcome by the present research. Built on the model provided by LDS, the study added an objective dimension to supplement the phenomenological inquiry. In this regard, the study had a research design that permitted a comparison between individuals that compose the "desistance group" (GD) and individuals assigned to the "persistence group" (GP). Thus, the research was organized in two parts: 1. A quantitative research, where document analysis was used as a research method, and 2. A qualitative research,

which made use of the "life story" interview as a research method in order to identify aspects of interest.

The first eligibility criterion in selecting the participants of the study was the person's origins, all of whom were former beneficiaries of the Cluj Probation Service, all having experienced a non-custodial sanction. The research was designed to have a comparative structure between two categories of people, those who successfully completed the supervision period, introduced conventionally in the "Desistance Group" (GD) and those who continued their criminal activity during the supervision period, introduced in the "Persistent Group" (GP). Another eligibility criterion for creating a homogeneous sampling was the type of offense for which they were convicted, and only those individuals who have committed property thefts were included. The age of committing the offense was also an eligibility criterion, the age limits of the selected sample being between 18 and 32, those who committed offenses prior the age of majority and those over 32 were excluded, because these categories of persons present different particularities.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives and to carry out the quantitative research, between 2011 and 2017, supervision files were analyzed from the archives of the Cluj Probation Service, reaching a final sample of 172 persons having met the eligibility criteria. The 172 persons were classified into two distinct categories, namely 92 persons belonging to the group of persons who did not break the law during their probation period, being included in the GD category (desistance group), and 80 persons who committed other offenses during probation, who became representatives of the GP category (crime persistent group). After analyzing the files, each aspect of interest was transformed into a variable, reaching a total of 29 variables. These were processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences to identify the variables that represent with the highest accuracy the two categories of people.

Regarding the qualitative study, the members of the two groups had to check both objective and subjective conditions cumulatively. Specifically, only those people who defined themselves as "offenders", "thieves", etc. have been included (individuals that composed the group of people who have persisted in crime), and those who have defined themselves as "changed," "being good," (individuals that were included into the category of desisting people). The second criterion for selection, the objective one, was represented by the lack of contact with the penal authorities for at least three years (aspect confirmed by official documents). The reason

for choosing the 3-year period was not entirely arbitrary, but as observed in the results of this study, and also in the statistics on recidivism rates in the Romanian probation system, the relapse occurs in most cases in the first two years of probation.

Part of this study was to interview over 30 people, but only 16 of them met the eligibility conditions. In fact, 9 participants were identified as persistent in the criminal life before they were sentenced to a custodial sanction, and 7 of them abandoned illicit conduct several years ago (as they declared and was confirmed by official sources of information). The interviews conducted were centered on the 'life story' interview and took place either at the headquarters of the Cluj Probation Service or in the Gherla Maximum Security Prison.

The results of the quantitative research showed that among the factors most often associated with desistance from offending and persistence in offending, in order of their relevance, are: vulnerability to negative influence of peer group, the attitude towards the law and the moral reasoning. Regarding desistance from offending, we can say that the people who aligned their behavior with the law were: those who have stopped relations with their antisocial peers and have cultivated their capacity to resist peer influence, those who have presented a law-favorable attitude (that appreciate the laws as being necessary, understand the reason for their existence and want to conform to them), those who accept social conventions and norms (referring to them before adopting behaviors) and those who have a post-conventional level of moral development (that have a proper set of ethical values and principles, that are referring to human rights, the right to private property, freedom, justice, fairness).

The following variables have been shown to significantly associate with investigated behaviors: antisocial behavior before the age of 14, motivation to change, and attitude towards probation. This means that people that desist have shown a lower frequency of anti-social behaviors before the age of 14 and a favorable attitude towards probation. Other factors of relevance are positive attitude towards work, job history and addictive behavior.

Factors that have not been associated with desistance nor persistence in crime are: education, cognitive development, socio-economic background, parents or family members having penal records, individual counseling, and counseling programs. As it turns out, the educational level is not associated with recidivism, people continued to adopt illicit behaviors or not regardless of their educational background. The socio-economic background is another socio-demographic factor that does not associate with the investigated behaviors, the persons

have reiterated or not illicit conducts regardless of their socio-economic level. The last two factors refer to assistance and counseling in probation: individual counseling and counseling programs, and the results of the study show that none of them are associated with desistance. The data indicates that both category of people (persistent and desisted) have benefited to a similar degree of individual counseling, so this variable does not explain subsequent behavior. The same situation is found in counseling programs; people have continued or stopped illicit conduct regardless of whether or not they were included in counseling programs. In pursuing our approach, multiple regressions were made to identify the variables that are the best predictors of persistence versus desistance from offending. The most acute predictors of recidivism are vulnerability to peers' influence and the attitude towards law and supervision/probation. Investigating the socio-demographic variables has shown that job history and family attachment are factors that are associated with desistance. Concerning the behavioral variables, the equation included: antisocial behavior before the age of 14, criminal history and previous arrest. The results showed that all variables are relevant predictors, but the highest level of significance is held by antisocial behavior under 14 years of age and criminal history. The fourth regression analysis was the analysis of the most relevant predictors in anticipating the type of the reoffending behavior. It is found that persons who reoffend with traffic offenses are least characterized by the variables investigated, and they only share with other types of offenses two variables, having a criminal record and the negative attitude towards the law. On the other hand, contrary to traffic offenders, there are those who commit acts of violence, which are characterized by high levels of almost all measured variables: vulnerability to peer influence, moral reasoning developed at the preconventional stage, low motivation to change, negative attitude towards the law, anger management deficiencies, high relapse risk, addictive behavior, criminal record and antisocial manifestations before the age of 14. People who reoffend with drug trafficking and usage have a higher tendency to experience addictive behaviors, present the same low motivation for change, a negative attitude towards the law and have a criminal record. What distinguishes the category of persons who are reoffending with patrimonial offences is the presence of poor social conditions of their families.

The data obtained from interviewing ex-beneficiaries of the Cluj Probation Service, corroborates the results of the quantitative research. At the same time, having a direct access to the most profound reflections of the people included in the study, have brought a plus in

understanding desistance. In this part of the paper, the research on desistance took place from the inside, by listening to the life stories of the individuals that have persisted in crime or have desisted from offending, and we were interested in observing how people interpret their past (actions and decisions) and outline future projects. The format of the interview allowed to capture the way of thinking of the participants (beliefs about oneself, life, law, others, and so on), identifying their general and criminal motivations, their efforts and the steps taken to abandon the illicit patterns, but also other aspects related to the environment in which they grew and developed and the degree to which these external factors influenced their trajectories.

The family background of these people (from both categories, those who desisted from offending or persisted in crime) seems to have been characterized mostly by financial, emotional and educational deficiencies, which they claim have had a major impact on their lives.

Analyzing the stories of the individuals that were interviewed also showed that their family background was characterized by domestic violence, alcohol abuse by parents, but also by physical and emotional abuse or by a lack of attention and interest from their parents. The effects of this unstable family environment were the primary factor of people's decision to run away from home at an early age.

In the majority of cases, the interviewed individuals reported deviant behaviors from a very young age and all showed that their criminal activity intensified with the age of adolescence (16-17) and with their adherence in peer groups formed by other young people with antisocial or illicit behaviors. With the complicity of their peers, people have acquired new criminal skills and strategies or have improved their techniques. A constant in their speeches was taking credit for a wider criminal activity than that for which they were sanctioned. Most participants in the study declared that the offenses for which they were convicted represented only a small part of their criminal career.

As a general tendency, in the discourses of individuals that were persistent in their criminal behaviors, was the attitude of blaming others for their criminal career, positive usage and understanding of the offender label that was put on them, the fatalistic attitude about their destiny, and the lack of willingness to give up illicit behaviors. These major issues are adjacent to other factors that are largely characteristic to this category of people, such as the attitude of appreciating prison and the importance of obtaining a status in that environment.



What was significantly different between people that persist in crime and those who have given up their criminal career was the attitude of justifying their own criminal behavior and minimizing their gravity. To justify their unlawful conduct, interviewees presented different motivations: the need for money, that this is their "job", that their peers influenced them. They also tended to minimize the severity of their own criminal behavior compared to all other types of offenses.

Another difference identified between the two groups of people is that people who persisted in crime do not only accept the 'thief' label, but they use it to define and assert themselves. Beside the admiration they express towards their 'jobs' and the appreciation of their skills, almost all of them show a fatalist tendency about their own destiny, appreciating that "it was meant to be this way" for them, and a lack of regret for their criminal behavior.

On the other hand, people who desisted have been able to integrate their criminal experience in such a way that they do not accept the label of being or having been an offender. They have not tried to build a positive alter-ego but rather have sought to restore their positive selves from the past. They have reported that the person that involved in crimes was not them, because they are not that person now, and have nothing to do with the criminal world.

An interesting difference between the two categories of people investigated in this study (persistent versus desisted) was caught by analyzing the answers that they gave to the question of the turning point of their lives. It has been noticed that people that persisted on the criminal path have pointed out, as a turning point in their lives, the onset of criminal behavior or certain criminal decisions, and those who have given up committing crimes have stated that the turning point of their lives was the decision to give up on offenses and comply with the law.

Focusing on the criminal dimension is revealed in the case of persistent individuals also in the moment when they think and imagine their own future. Persistent offenders have imagined a future that links in a more or less direct way with crime. On the other hand, from the category of desisted offenders, people referred to issues related to family life, preoccupation with their own health and the health of their family members and the importance of inner peace.

Mostly in the discourse of individuals that desisted from offending, the old illicit behavior was connected with feelings of taking responsibility, shame and regret. Almost universal in the stories of the desisted people was the appreciation of the external aid they benefited from in the process of change. These people have shown that entering into a

relationship or marriage or encountering a person who has provided them with external help has greatly contributed to their behavioral change. Although these people have appreciated the external help they have benefited, and who, from their point of view, has made a major contribution to their current situation, thus placing the catalyst for change in the exterior, all the people included in the study (both persistent and desistant) have shown that desistance comes from inside ("just you are the one that can...", "it depends just on you", "if you do not want ... nobody can say/do anything ...").

Applying Steward's Scale for identifying the most important cognitive themes of the participants in the research (Steward et al., 1988), it was concluded that people who desist want to be close to others and want to be useful to others, while people that persist in crime are less interested in being close to others and useful to them. The use of the McAdams Scale Agencies (McAdams, 1992) concluded that individuals that desist tend to have a much higher degree of self-efficacy than those who persist in the criminal career. At the same time, people who have desisted from offending feel that they have been certified for their skills in a higher degree than those who have continued their criminal careers. The results of using McAdams's scale on attribution style (McAdams, 1998) have shown that people that ended their criminal careers are more likely to take responsibility for their crimes and show more regret. At the same time, they are less willing to discuss about their criminal activity than persistent offenders. On the other hand, persistent individuals have come to be more defensive, trying more to legitimize their own offenses. They also had less regrets about their illicit conduct than people that desisted from offending.

Corroborating all the data available by analyzing the results of the two studies, we can say that perspectives that conceptualize desistance as a phenomenon largely determined by the idea of own will, in other words the decision to stop offending is influenced by factors such as personal motivations, values and core beliefs, have a large significance in explaining desistance. All interviewees of this study have shown that desistance depends only on their own decision. Another conclusion of the research was that counseling (individual counseling and counseling programs) is not correlated with desistance. In other words, this means that stopping or continuing a criminal career does not depend largely on probation work. However, we cannot exclude the positive statements of interviewees about the experience in probation and the changes made during the supervision period (understanding it like the external help for their

change). By interpreting the data from a practitioner's point of view, it can be understood that the rehabilitation process should start with supporting the person to cultivate his motivation for change, and wait for the beneficiary to ask for help. In the situation where the beneficiary of probation is willing to change and is open to learning, the effectiveness of individual counseling and counseling programs is greatly increased. Taking into account that persons who desisted from offending have shown a general tendency of not talking about their crimes, of closing that past chapter of their life, and of excluding the concept of crime from their future plans, their interests being related to self-development and certifications of new skills, we appreciate that the Good Life Model could represent a more efficient way of approaching the beneficiaries in order to stimulate and support the process of desistance.