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BABEȘ-BOLYAI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITÄT
BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
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**EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THE RELIGIOUS-MORAL
FORMATION OF ADOLESCENTS THROUGH THE SCHOOL – FAMILY –
CHURCH PARTNERSHIP
PhD THESIS SUMMARY**

Author: PhD student Ana Fântână

Doctoral advisor: Prof. Univ. Dr. Habil. Dorin-Corneliu Opreș

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INTRODUCTION

The present thesis addresses a topic that remains insufficiently researched in our country: the impact of extracurricular activities carried out within the school–family–Church partnership on the harmonious development of adolescents, with a particular focus on their moral-religious formation. The holistic and harmonious development of adolescents takes place not only within institutionalized frameworks but also through the non-formal dimension of education, namely through extracurricular activities. Schools, through teachers, establish partnerships with various institutions concerned with education, based on the idea that a well-developed and functional society requires responsible citizens who can cope with social changes and are actively involved in community life.

Extracurricular and co-curricular activities aim to improve students' ability to adapt to community life, increase their level of personal and social autonomy, develop appropriate social behavior, and support their religious and moral formation. At the same time, extracurricular activities provide a favorable environment for cultivating religious and moral values, as well as for developing specific behaviors (Sadykova et al., 2018).

Thus, the doctoral thesis entitled *"Extracurricular Activities and Moral-Religious Formation through the School–Family–Church Partnership"* aligns with this perspective, aiming to explore both theoretical and practical aspects related to the impact of extracurricular activities on the moral-religious development of adolescents.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The thesis is structured into five distinct chapters, the first three of which are dedicated to the theoretical foundation of the research topic, thus providing a solid scientific basis for the subsequent investigative approach. **The first chapter** offers a descriptive presentation of moral and religious education, analyzing the determining factors involved, the methods through which these educational dimensions are implemented, as well as the points of convergence and divergence in their approaches. The terms *"moral education"* and *"religious education"* are presented in relation to their intended goals, the educational agents involved in their implementation, and the broader objectives of education. Moreover, the chapter details the methods through which each educational dimension is realized, as a holistic and continuous process.

Of major importance is the explanation of the complementary relationship between moral and religious education, by highlighting the role both dimensions play in the harmonious and

integral development of the adolescent. In order to emphasize the importance of these two dimensions—moral and religious—perspectives offered by pedagogues throughout time have been studied. The analysis reveals that the development of moral conscience and conduct is a current concern of education, and that each educational factor contributes in a unique way, which must complement the influence of the others in order to achieve the educational ideal: the formation of a responsible, autonomous, creative, and balanced young person, by cultivating empathy, responsibility, and respect for moral and social values.

Furthermore, the religious dimension is an essential part of a person's integral education, as it helps define one's self-image and worldview. Religious education is also conditioned by the collaboration among educational agents—family, school, and church—thus supporting moral education by providing it with spiritual meaning and deep awareness (Croitoru & Munteanu, 2014; Steć & Kulik, 2021).

These two educational components are considered essential foundations of an integral formation, existing in a relationship of complementarity and interdependence.

- **Moral education** aims at the formation of ethical conscience and conduct, supporting the individual in understanding moral values and norms, making correct decisions, and taking responsibility for their own actions. It contributes to the development of self-awareness, adaptation to social demands, and the promotion of solidarity.

- **Religious education** goes beyond the informative dimension, targeting the development of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in accordance with one's faith. It supports the formation of a personal system of values and beliefs, promoting respect, understanding, and love for others. Its objectives include formative, informative, and educational dimensions, with the ultimate goal of spiritual fulfillment and the realization of communion with God and with fellow human beings.

The connection between moral and religious education is expressed through the following aspects:

- ✚ Religious education represents a higher stage of moral education, integrating religious values into social behavior.
- ✚ It provides moral action with intrinsic motivation and deep spiritual grounding.
- ✚ Both types of education rely on cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral models that contribute to the gradual formation of personality.

Main agents of moral-religious education:

The family – the first and most important educational agent, offering a favorable environment for moral and religious development. Within the family, initial behavioral habits are formed,

and religious practices begin to take shape. The quality of family relationships influences a child's aspirations and capacity for social interaction.

The school – continues the education initiated by the family, providing a formal framework for the development of moral and religious dimensions. The religion class, in the Romanian context, where it is a mandatory subject for schools but optional for students, plays an essential formative role. It contributes to the development of faith, prosocial behavior, emotional and spiritual intelligence, and the reduction of prejudices.

The Church – complements the educational work of the family and school by strengthening the sense of belonging to the religious community and supporting the process of moral and spiritual fulfillment. Through the promotion of religious values and social involvement, the Church provides models of love, freedom, and solidarity.

Mass media – represents an influential educational factor in the lives of young people, having an impact on their moral and civic formation. In this context, it is essential to develop critical discernment in selecting and interpreting information.

Chapter Two addresses the role of extracurricular activities carried out through various types of educational partnerships, as complementary forms of the learning process. The holistic development of the adolescent requires the harmonious articulation of the three forms of education—formal, non-formal, and informal—each with its own specific characteristics and contributions. In this context, schools have become increasingly aware of the need to collaborate with other forms of education in order to fulfill their formative mission. The quality of education is directly influenced by the cooperation between educational agents, which is realized through the organization of extracurricular and out-of-school activities within educational partnerships that support the formal learning process (Bodrug-Lungu, 2020; Lazăr, Peun & Mierlea, 2019; Storsve, 2024).

Since the terms *extracurricular activities* and *out-of-school activities* are often used interchangeably, a conceptual clarification is necessary, based on the theoretical contributions of Bocoș, Țîra, and other authors. Thus, extracurricular activities include actions (artistic, sports-related, cultural, etc.) organized either within or outside the school institution, which are complementary to the school curriculum—both in relation to the compulsory and the optional parts. These activities are planned and coordinated by teaching staff and aim to complete or extend the educational process by integrating non-formal education alongside formal education.

In contrast, out-of-school activities refer to extracurricular activities carried out outside the school institution, by other organizations, with or without the school's support. They are addressed to groups of students from one or several educational institutions. Due to their

attractive nature, such activities stimulate active student engagement, diversify and develop practical competencies, promote an integrated approach to learning, and contribute to the development of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a positive attitude toward education and life (Bocoş, 2016a).

Considering the complexity of contemporary educational objectives, an effective integration of curricular, extracurricular, and out-of-school activities is required. In this context, educational partnerships become essential tools for achieving higher academic performance and for fostering a balanced development of young people, so that they may succeed both academically and in their personal and social lives.

In a society marked by continuous change, educational partnerships represent a shared responsibility of all actors involved in education. These partnerships are grounded in values and positive attitudes and require collaboration, effective communication, and coordinated action.

Types of Educational Partnerships:

- **School–Community Partnership** involves collaboration with local authorities, economic agents, the media, and cultural institutions. This type of partnership facilitates the use of local resources and the engagement of students in addressing real-life community issues.
- **School–Family Partnership** aims to create a close cooperative relationship to support students' academic progress. Such collaboration contributes to strengthening the parent–child relationship and to a better understanding of the formal educational process.
- **School–Church Partnership** seeks to shape students' conscience and behavior in the spirit of Christian moral and religious values. The Church provides valuable ethical and spiritual guidance, contributing to the formation of a coherent worldview and philosophy of life.
- **Educational Confluence (School–Family–Community–Church)** represents a complex form of partnership aimed at increasing the efficiency of educational institutions, supporting teaching staff, and ensuring student well-being. By combining positive educational influences, this type of partnership promotes the holistic development of young people.

Examples of Best Practices in Educational Partnerships:

- The national program "**School Otherwise**", initiated by the Ministry of Education, aims to develop learning and socio-emotional skills through non-formal activities that stimulate creativity, cooperation, and social abilities. This program relies on extended partnerships and has demonstrated a positive impact in strengthening student–teacher relationships and increasing students' motivation to learn.
- **The Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA Romania)** promotes

partnerships among schools, families, communities, and other institutions, with the objectives of promoting values, a healthy lifestyle, and a safe educational environment. The international camp *HarmonY* is a notable example of an activity that contributes to the physical, mental, and spiritual development of youth.

- **The "New Horizons" Foundation** supports education through programs targeting students, families, and teachers. Projects such as the *IMPACT Club* promote learning through civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and environmental protection, fostering character development and life skills among students. The foundation also implements service-learning (educational volunteering) activities and parent-focused projects such as *Open Hearts*.

- **The "Christ Shared with Children"** project, carried out in partnership with World Vision Romania and the Romanian Patriarchate, complements school-based religious education by promoting Christian values among youth through a practical and accessible approach.

- **The National Organization "Scouts of Romania"** (ONCR) contributes to the holistic education of young people through practical and experiential activities. Projects like *Ready for Life!* promote outdoor learning, civic involvement, and the adoption of a set of moral, civic, and religious values, having a significant impact on the integral development of students.

The third chapter is dedicated to analyzing current trends in educational research academic progress, religious-moral formation, and the social development of adolescents. To frame the research topic in the current context, it was necessary to analyze contemporary research directions in the fields of moral education, religious education, and complementary educational activities. The results of specialized studies emphasize the significant role of these components in shaping adolescents' formative paths, with notable effects at cognitive, relational, social, and religious levels (Bogan et al., 2019; Eccles et al., 2003; Youniss et al., 1999).

To clearly delineate the position of the topic within the educational research field, a reference to specialized literature was made, which indicates that the integral formation of students depends not only on the formal educational process but also on active participation in extracurricular activities and the development of the religious-moral dimension. The conclusions of these studies underline that moral and religious education cannot be ignored and are increasingly addressed in scientific works analyzing the influence of extracurricular activities on students' spiritual and moral lives.

The moral and religious dimensions of education are essential in adolescent formation and require further exploration, including within the Romanian educational context. In a context

marked by increasing emphasis on integral development, religious-moral aspects gain special relevance, considering that extracurricular activities provide valuable opportunities for complementary formation (Sadykova et al., 2018).

These activities, alongside formal and informal education, contribute to the comprehensive formation of young people:

- Extracurricular activities are organized within educational institutions or outside them, having a complementary nature to the school curriculum. Coordinated by teaching staff, these activities are optional, interdisciplinary, and dynamic, stimulating motivation and the effective management of free time.
- Out-of-school activities are considered those extracurricular activities that are initiated by other institutions or organizations, with or without the support of the school, outside the institutional setting. They attract students through their engaging and interactive nature, contributing to active involvement, the development of practical skills, and the strengthening of self-esteem.

The impact of extracurricular and out-of-school activities is multiple and profound:

- **Formation of religious-moral character:** These activities significantly contribute to strengthening the spiritual and moral dimension of students by promoting fundamental values such as responsibility, honesty, empathy, and solidarity. Participation in volunteering or religious groups (e.g., scouts) is positively correlated with moral and civic development.
- **Academic pathway:** Complementary educational activities can positively influence school performance, reduce the risk of academic failure, and contribute to lowering dropout rates. Studies show that involvement in such activities is associated with high educational aspirations; however, excessive time devoted to them (over 10 hours per week) may negatively affect results in certain subjects.
- **Social relationships:** Out-of-school activities support the development of interpersonal relationships, active participation in community life, and the sense of belonging. They also serve as a protective factor against social isolation or depression, especially among students from vulnerable backgrounds. Essential social skills are developed, such as teamwork, effective communication, and leadership.
- **Prevention of risky behaviors:** Adolescents involved in non-formal educational activities are less prone to risky behaviors such as alcohol or illegal substance use. While participation in prosocial activities (volunteering, religious groups) has protective effects, involvement in team sports is sometimes associated with increased alcohol consumption, which requires careful monitoring.

- **Personal development and vocational guidance:** These activities provide opportunities to discover and cultivate personal interests and skills, supporting the definition of professional identity and the development of career resilience.
- **Motivation and well-being:** Participation in out-of-school activities stimulates intrinsic motivation, a sense of self-efficacy, and contributes to overall well-being. Adolescents are motivated by the pleasure of participation, the desire for self-improvement, and the feeling of personal achievement.

In conclusion, moral and religious education, alongside extracurricular and out-of-school activities, carried out through solid and well-structured partnerships, are essential for shaping responsible, autonomous, and well-balanced young people capable of positive integration into society and contributing to its well-being.

INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH

Chapter Four presents the psychopedagogical research, beginning with a description of the research design, followed by a detailed account of the five conducted studies. It is a comprehensive endeavor, as it analyzes the research problem from multiple perspectives: students, parents, teachers, and youth activity coordinators within religious denominations.

The deepening of the specifics and effects of extracurricular activities on the cognitive, relational, and social development of adolescents contributed to the formulation of research questions and hypotheses, as well as to the establishment of variables that allow us to highlight the interconnections among mutually influencing elements. It also aided in the effective selection and use of research methods and in the construction of instruments aligned with the pursued objectives.

In the **preliminary study**, opinions of religious youth activity coordinators and former students, as participants, were analyzed through data collected via interviews, regarding the specifics and outcomes of extracurricular activities they participated in or organized, highlighting the changes observed in the youths' lives.

With the help of interviews administered to youth activity coordinators from religious denominations and to former students as participants in extracurricular activities, as well as through questionnaires applied to students, parents, and teachers in our country, we obtained data that emphasize the importance of organizing extracurricular activities and participating in them for the complete and complex formation of adolescents.

All youth activity coordinators interviewed from religious denominations stated that they organize extracurricular activities according to age categories: 7–11 years, 12–18 years, and over 18 years. The most frequently organized activities, at least once a year, are camps, philanthropic activities, volunteering, and debates. Other activities with young people are regularly organized as well, including excursions, board games, movie nights, painting workshops, conferences, catechesis, or Bible study sessions.

It can be observed that these activities involve social interaction, cooperation, and communication, but also activities through which moral-religious values are transmitted and formed: faith (religious beliefs), love for others (through empathy and understanding), and wisdom (the ability to distinguish good from evil and choose good). These activities emphasize the young person, their needs (socialization, personal and religious development), interests, but above all their spiritual growth.

The statements of the youth activity coordinators are confirmed by former students who consistently participated in extracurricular activities organized by the school, the Church, and ASCOR, due to the fact that the organizers succeeded in awakening and cultivating interest for involvement in such initiatives. The types of extracurricular activities most frequently attended by former students are the same as those presented by the religious coordinators: camps, excursions, volunteering, and debates.

Regarding the effects these activities produce in the lives of young people, from the perspective of both organizers and former students, we can say that they revolve around one key aspect: personal transformation. The youth mission coordinators from religious denominations in Romania, who participated in the interviews, affirm that changes in young people's lives are visible among those who are constantly and actively involved. In addition to social development, which focuses on relationships with others and group belonging, personal development is also influenced in various components.

Former students, as participants in extracurricular activities, have also noticed changes in their lives following their participation. The changes affect all aspects of their lives: social, personal, cognitive, and religious-moral, emphasizing the idea of self-knowledge (each respondent mentioned at least two observed effects). This conclusion confirms research data provided by Jang and colleagues (2016), who state that adults who participated in scouting activities during adolescence believe that those activities positively influenced their later relationship with themselves and with others.

The proposed activities are, in fact, the same actions that they participated in as young people, affirming that the needs remain the same: the need for knowledge, the need for

socialization, the need for development, and the need for adaptation, meaning cognitive and spiritual growth.

Since the former students were interviewed after a period of time (at least one year after finishing high school), we can state that extracurricular activities have not only immediate effects (a sense of usefulness, spending time with educational quality) but also a series of medium- and long-term effects: internalization of moral and religious values, formation of civic and religious behavior, and maintaining interest in knowledge and involvement. These conclusions are supported by the findings of research conducted by Williams and Chawla (2016), who analyzed the long-term effects of a non-formal activity focused on environmental protection. Former participants stated that through participation in such activities, they developed interpersonal relationships and responsibility.

The results show that activities organized with young people are not the subject of consistent partnerships between religious denominations and other institutions; the main supporters/funders of these activities are the parents. Partnerships are often only at the internal level (denomination/religious community – parents), but ways to encourage their development can be found because they could reduce encountered difficulties: financial, human resources, and time-related.

Thus, new research directions are emerging regarding how religious-moral formation is carried out today by the three educational factors: school, family, and Church, through analysis of types of extracurricular activities successfully implemented, motivations, and intended outcomes in various partnerships.

The next three studies, which utilize data collected through questionnaire surveys, analyzed the opinions of students, teachers, and parents regarding various aspects related to the organization and participation in extracurricular activities.

Study I investigated the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents regarding the factors that contribute to religious education carried out in both school and extracurricular contexts. According to the three categories of respondents—students, teachers, and parents—the most important factors in achieving religious education are the family, the Church, and the school (in this order), reflecting their influence on the religious and moral development of adolescents: family (students 56%; teachers 89%; parents 71.8%), Church (students 54.6%; teachers 72.8%; parents 44.1%), and school (students 28.3%; teachers 45.8%; parents 35.8%). Statistically significant differences were found between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the role of the three educational agents in religious education, all in favor of the teachers. Additionally, statistically significant differences were identified between the views of

students and parents on this matter, in favor of the parents. It is important to note that, concerning the role of the Church in religious education, students' responses recorded higher percentages than those of parents. Moreover, statistically significant differences were also found between the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the importance of the family and the Church in fulfilling the religious dimension of education.

Another aspect investigated in the first study focused on analyzing the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding the ways in which the Church contributes to religious education. The results revealed significant differences in the importance attributed to this type of education by each respondent category.

From the students' perspective, the most impactful and immediate ways through which the Church achieves religious education are religious services and the personal example of the priest and believers. In contrast, teachers and parents believe that the Church influences the religious and moral development of students primarily through the personal example of the priest, followed by religious services. A possible explanation is that students are more influenced by direct, immediate experiences during services, while adults emphasize the long-term effects of others' examples on the child—namely, the shaping of religious and moral values.

As for the family's contribution to the religious and moral formation of children, all three respondent categories consider most important those methods that have long-term effects: the "parents' personal example" and the family's religious life, including "shared prayer" and "attending services together." Each respondent category acknowledges that the family contributes to young people's religious education in different ways. From the students' viewpoint, the family contributes through methods such as the "parents' personal example" (47.4%), "discussions with parents" (39.5%), and "attending services" (37%). Teachers emphasize methods like the "parents' personal example" (71.8%), "attending services together" (57.8%), and "shared prayer" (54.2%) as the most important in religious education. Parents, in turn, believe the family contributes through the "parents' personal example" (56.6%), "parent-child discussions" (46.6%), and "shared prayer" and "attending services together" (with close values – 38%).

Statistically significant differences have been found between the opinions of the three respondent categories regarding the forms through which the family achieves religious education. Teachers' views on the methods used by families—such as the "parents' personal example," "attending services," "discussions with parents," "shared prayer," "charitable activities," and "watching religious programs"—were stronger than those of students and

parents. In the student–parent comparison, significant differences were also observed regarding methods such as discussions with parents, parents’ personal example, and shared prayer, with adults attributing greater importance to these aspects than students. This idea aligns with the findings of Gemar (2023), Floroia (2020), and Brânză (2021).

Regarding the methods through which the school delivers religious education, students and parents consider the most effective to be the religion class and the teacher’s personal example—methods that have both immediate effects (through cognitive acquisition) and long-term effects (through the development of skills and attitudes necessary for integration into society). Teachers share the same opinions, although in a different order: for them, the “teacher’s personal example” (63.8%) ranks first, followed by the “religion class” (58.1%). Teachers believe that the school contributes to the religious and moral development of students not only through the religion class and the teacher’s personal example but also through extracurricular activities carried out in partnership with the Church.

A final aspect of this study investigated the opinions of students, teachers, and parents regarding how extracurricular activities respond to the community’s moral, family, spiritual, educational, and social issues and expectations. The results show that, from the students’ perspective, extracurricular activities “always” or “often” respond to educational issues (75.7%), social issues (69.6%), family-related issues (54.3%), moral issues (57.7%), and spiritual issues (43.8%). For teachers, the percentage of positive responses exceeds 75% across all five categories of community problems. Parents’ responses fall between those of students and teachers in terms of frequency, with high percentages at the “often” and “always” levels regarding the way extracurricular activities address the community’s issues and expectations.

The results complement the findings of Cucos and Labăr (2008), who state that in addition to providing religious knowledge, the religion class also contributes to shaping both religious and social identity by promoting enduring values such as respect, responsibility, and tolerance (students become more attentive in their interactions with others and adopt appropriate behavior in society).

The second study explored the opinions of students, teachers, and parents regarding the motivation, purpose, types, frequency of extracurricular activities, and the individuals involved in them. The first topic analyzed concerned teachers’ motivation for organizing extracurricular activities, in relation to students’ motivation for participating in them. The results indicate the existence of statistically significant differences between the two respondent groups. The most important motivation for both categories is “the opportunity to get to know students/peers” (78% of teachers, 38.9% of students). For teachers, this motivation is not influenced by teaching

experience, professional rank, or the environment in which the activity takes place, but it is statistically influenced by age, educational level, and gender. For students, the selection of this motivation is not influenced by school level, age, or place of residence.

The second most cited motivation is the opportunity to apply previously acquired knowledge, which is particularly strong among students (with statistically significant differences in favor of those aged 11–14), as well as among younger teachers (aged 20–30). For students aged 15–19, a strong motivation is the opportunity for self-discovery. The goals pursued by teachers in organizing extracurricular activities reflect the connection between these goals and the types of activities selected: the development of social skills is pursued through trips, camps, and volunteering; the cultivation of compassion and empathy and engagement in community life are promoted through charitable actions and volunteering; the formation of religious and moral behavior is encouraged through charitable actions, religious activities (e.g., attending services, participating in a religious choir), and discussions or debates with theologians, priests, or notable public figures. The goal that received the most support from teachers was “developing social skills” (88%). This was not statistically influenced by age, teaching environment, or professional rank. About 40% fewer responses were recorded for three other goals: “developing compassion and empathy,” “engagement in community life,” and “developing cultural competencies” (the percentage differences between these are small), all of which support the social and cultural development of young people.

The results of the questionnaire administered to students and teachers regarding the types of extracurricular activities organized by the school and the intended outcomes align with the views of former students and representatives of religious denominations responsible for youth work, as revealed in the preliminary study: the involvement of children and adolescents in extracurricular activities positively influences their development. The results obtained through the questionnaire confirm the findings of other studies (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Eccles et al., 2003, among others).

Schools offer a wide range of extracurricular activities, which are known by both parents and students; however, students’ willingness to participate in these activities is lower than the school’s actual offerings. The types of extracurricular activities organized include trips, debates, charitable actions, religious activities, theatre, and choir. Among teachers, the highest frequency of organized activities is for trips (78.4%), followed by debates (61.1%), charitable and religious activities, theatre, and choir. These are activities that involve social interaction (trips, debates) and the practice of moral and religious behaviors (charitable actions, religious activities, theatre, choir).

In relation to the research question concerning whether there are associations between the frequency of organizing extracurricular activities and variables related to teachers' individual profiles, the results show significant associations with age, gender, and teaching experience. Higher frequencies of extracurricular activity organization are found among teachers over 40 years old, with more than 20 years of teaching experience, and female teachers. There are no statistically significant differences between the frequency of organizing extracurricular activities and the teacher's professional rank or level of education.

A strong association is observed between the school level at which the teacher teaches the most hours and the school level at which they most frequently organize extracurricular activities (teachers tend to organize activities more often at the level where they teach the most hours).

From the students' perspective, the highest participation rate is recorded for trips (67.2%), followed by debates (37%), charitable actions (28.9%), theatre and religious activities (18.9%)—activities that also appear in the school's offering. There is a discrepancy between the school's offering and student participation, with a 6.9% difference in favor of the school.

Analyzing these two aspects of extracurricular activities—organization and participation—by age, place of residence, and gender of the students, statistically significant differences were found only in student participation by age: students aged 11–14 participate more in extracurricular activities than those in the older age group.

These types of activities contribute to increased religiosity, fostering empathy and respect for others, as also confirmed by the study conducted by Coman and collaborators (2024).

Another aspect investigated in the study concerned the relationship between the school's offering of extracurricular activity types and students' willingness to participate in them. The analysis was conducted from the perspective of teachers, students, and parents, aiming to highlight any statistically significant differences between these viewpoints.

Parents' opinions show that they are aware of the school's extracurricular activity offerings, but the results indicate statistically significant differences between this awareness and their children's actual participation: in the case of trips and religious activities, the differences are in favor of the organization (i.e., parents are aware of the offer but do not support or give consent for their children to participate in these activities).

The collected data reveal statistically significant differences between the frequency of school-organized extracurricular activities and the frequency of student participation in them: the school's offer is greater than students' willingness to engage. When comparing students'

perspectives on their participation frequency with that of their parents, only small differences are observed, indicating that parents are aware of and generally support their children's participation in the school's extracurricular activities.

Another objective of the research was to identify the people involved in organizing extracurricular activities, analyzing the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents regarding the educational actors who contribute to the initiation and implementation of these activities. Teachers report being assisted in organizing extracurricular activities by their colleagues (73.8%), as well as by students (66.4%), parents (46.8%), and various educational partners (21.9%).

From the students' perspective, the main organizers of the extracurricular activities they participate in are their class teachers (84.9%) and religion teachers (23.5%), with no statistically significant differences based on age, place of residence, or educational level. Since extracurricular activities take place during students' free time, they claim to be responsible for organizing that time, supported by their parents. Their responses are not influenced by gender or place of residence but are influenced by the level of education: high school students are more likely than middle school students to decide how their free time is organized and spent.

Parents, being familiar with the range of extracurricular activities offered by the school, are also able to identify the organizers. For parents in rural areas and those with high school education, the class teacher is considered the main organizer of extracurricular activities (84.9%)—a view shared by both students and teachers. The religion teacher is more often viewed as a suitable organizer of extracurricular activities by parents with higher education. Parents also get involved in organizing extracurricular activities when asked (68.9%), especially those from urban areas and those with higher education.

The third study focused on extracurricular activities organized in collaboration with the Church, as contexts for learning and promoting civic and moral-religious values. A novel element of this research is the analysis of the impact of extracurricular activities conducted through the school–Church partnership on the development of adolescents' civic and moral-religious values.

Since an extracurricular activity carried out by the school in collaboration with the Church targets objectives in various thematic areas—cultural, psychological, moral, sociological, historical, ecumenical, and theological—the three categories of respondents were invited to share their views on this issue. Respondents' opinions differ according to their individual motivations and needs.

Students report that they mainly choose activities focused on learning about national culture, openness to other cultures (cultural aspect), and those that aim at personal development (psychological aspect). Regarding the psychological dimension of extracurricular activities, girls have higher expectations than boys, particularly for outcomes related to discovering personal potential and self-knowledge. High school students believe that extracurricular activities help them more in terms of self-discovery and personal development than middle school students. No statistically significant differences were found based on students' place of residence regarding expectations for the goals pursued in organizing extracurricular activities. However, when it comes to the theological dimension, a lack of consensus is observed.

Teachers organize extracurricular activities aimed at shaping moral behavior in relation to others (moral aspect) as well as those that foster and develop a relationship with God (theological aspect). Statistically significant differences were found in relation to moral goals depending on teaching experience: teachers with more years of experience have higher expectations for moral content in extracurricular activities. No statistically significant differences were found for the other variables—teaching environment, age, or teaching rank—regarding any of the educational aims. While a consensus can be observed for six of the educational goals, this is not the case for the ecumenical aspect, which is characterized by a diversity of opinions.

Along the same lines are the opinions of parents, who prioritize extracurricular activities that focus on the moral dimension (similar to teachers) and the psychological dimension (similar to students). There is no consensus among parents except regarding the sociological aspect of the activities' aims. The importance assigned to these goals in organizing extracurricular activities is not influenced by parents' age, education level, or place of residence.

Through these extracurricular activities, moral and religious values are shaped, internalized, and developed: tolerance and interreligious dialogue, solidarity, national cultural values (which can be defined as moral values), and the development of personal religiosity, affirmation of religious identity, and a religious worldview (religious values).

There are statistically significant differences between students' and teachers' perspectives regarding the civic and moral-religious values pursued through religious activities organized by the school in partnership with the Church. For instance, the value *"respect for human dignity"* is considered by students to be more important to emphasize in extracurricular activities than it is by teachers. On the other hand, values such as *"promotion of tolerance and interreligious dialogue," "development of human/social solidarity,"* and *"promotion and*

assimilation of national cultural values" are regarded as more important by teachers in the organization of extracurricular activities.

Regarding the values with a predominantly religious character—"development of personal religiosity," "overcoming the challenges of contemporary society," "affirmation of religious identity in society," and "integration of religious values into one's worldview"—no statistically significant differences were found between students and teachers, indicating a shared perspective between organizers and beneficiaries. While students place greater importance on "development of personal religiosity" and "overcoming the challenges of contemporary society," teachers give more importance to "affirmation of religious identity in society" and "integration of religious values into one's worldview."

Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that both students/young people and teachers understand the role of extracurricular activities conducted in collaboration with the Church, namely: the formation and internalization of civic and moral-religious values necessary for the harmonious development of young people's personalities.

These values are cultivated through predominantly religious activities such as participation in church services, prayer, excursions and pilgrimages, catechesis, icon-painting workshops, celebrations of major religious and national holidays, spiritual conferences, as well as through moral-civic activities such as charitable actions, volunteering, camps, cultural and patriotic events, and personal development activities.

The analyses revealed that activities with predominantly religious aims are organized more frequently by teachers compared to those with moral-civic content. Students tend to participate in these religious-oriented extracurricular activities in greater numbers than in moral-civic ones. Parents show interest in both categories of activities, with their preferences aligning more closely with those of students in the case of moral-civic activities.

These findings are consistent with the opinions of the respondents in the preliminary study—youth coordinators from various religious denominations and former students—who stated that extracurricular activities organized by the Church or in partnership with the Church had the greatest impact on their development. These results support the conclusions of previous research asserting that religiosity has beneficial effects on the holistic development of adolescents (as discussed in Chapter III of this work).

Extracurricular activities can be an essential support in identifying young people's needs, as highlighted in the preliminary study. Consequently, each category of research participants was asked to propose three extracurricular activities they would either participate

in or be willing to organize. The extracurricular activities proposed by the respondents were of the same type as those they had previously participated in or helped organize.

We can conclude that extracurricular activities organized in collaboration with the Church were appreciated by all those involved and yielded positive educational outcomes.

The experimental study investigated the cognitive and relational effects of adolescents' involvement in extracurricular activities with a religious-moral character. It was based on the conclusions of both international and national studies that have explored the impact of various types of extracurricular activities on school performance, social development (interaction with others), and the development of social and personal identity (group belonging, self-esteem). Additionally, numerous studies have examined the contribution of moral and religious education to shaping students' educational paths.

The novelty of our research lies in the development and implementation of a formative program consisting of twelve extracurricular activities with predominantly religious goals, carried out over the course of one year within the school–family–Church partnership, involving 20 adolescents from the municipality of Sebeș. Four extracurricular activities were conducted during a camp organized in partnership with the family and the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, while the other eight were held monthly, all within the framework of the school–family–Church partnership. (Extracurricular activities organized in collaboration with the Church, family, and school represent a relatively new direction in educational research, which deserves proper attention and importance.)

Building on the conclusions of the previously mentioned studies, we designed and conducted an experimental approach to highlight the need for organizing extracurricular activities aimed at the holistic development of adolescents. The innovative aspect of the research consists in examining the effects of such activities on cognitive development and the formation of religious-moral behaviors in high school students. The research is longitudinal in nature, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches: through a knowledge test, we analyzed cognitive progress; using interviews, we gathered and examined relevant data (leisure activities, motivations, expectations); and by means of observation, case studies, sociometric methods, and further interviews, we monitored changes in cognitive development (academic performance) and the formation of religious-moral behaviors in high school students following their participation in the extracurricular activities.

The topics addressed during the extracurricular activities complemented the content taught in religion classes, emphasizing the need to assume moral-religious role models, to understand and value religious traditions, to shape an authentic and responsible lifestyle, as well

as to raise awareness and reinforce the positive changes that occurred in the participants' lives. Given the openness expressed by adolescents toward this type of activity, the themes were selected based on both their interests and needs, and on the conclusions drawn from interviews conducted with representatives of religious denominations involved in youth activities and with former students, focusing in particular on the dimensions of social, religious, and moral development.

The formative program led to cognitive, relational, and behavioral changes. In the cognitive domain, results from the knowledge test were analyzed. Applying the Shapiro-Wilk test for samples with fewer than 30 students revealed that the variables were normally distributed, allowing for the use of the paired sample t-test (pretest–posttest, posttest–retest, pretest–retest). Statistically significant differences were observed between the pretest–posttest and pretest–retest results, indicating the stability of knowledge over time. Since 50% of the participants stated that their participation in extracurricular activities stimulated their school learning, we also analyzed the participants' annual school averages from the academic year prior to the experimental intervention and from the year that included the formative program. For ten participants, the annual averages increased, prompting the use of the non-parametric Wilcoxon test for this subsample. The results showed a statistically significant increase in academic performance. Thus, we can conclude that the formative intervention contributed to an improvement in school performance: the motivation for learning fostered through extracurricular activities positively influenced motivation for academic learning as well.

As a result of the formative intervention, improvements were observed in the participants' relationships, both with their schoolmates and with members of their group. The decrease in the number of mutual rejections and the increase in mutual selections indicate an improvement in the social relationships among group members. The improvement in sociometric indices (preferential status, group cohesion) demonstrates enhanced relationships between participants. This conclusion is also supported by data collected through observation checklists and interviews. These findings confirm the results obtained by Eccles and colleagues (2003). Regarding relationships with schoolmates, these too were positively influenced by changes in perception of others, stepping out of comfort zones, face-to-face interactions, and openness towards people.

Another positive impact of the formative program concerns relationships with parents. Practicing communication skills and expressing personal opinions on various topics led adolescents to apply these skills in their relationships with parents, resulting in closer bonds and discussions on various subjects.

An aspect deserving special attention, as it represents a novel element, is religious development. During the formative intervention, data collected through various methods indicated significant changes in religious-moral behavior. This behavior concerns relationships with others and with God. Regarding relationships with others, adolescents reported internalizing and applying religious-moral values such as respect, empathy, mutual help, understanding, tolerance, and praying together. Concerning their relationship with God, they improved their prayer routines: personal prayer moments increased, and participation in worship services intensified. Moreover, participants in the experimental program affirmed the need for such extracurricular activities involving educational stakeholders, as these help develop competencies that support both their integral formation and adaptation to adult life. The results confirm that adolescents' involvement in extracurricular activities with predominantly religious-moral content leads to cognitive and relational changes.

The materials used in this research, along with a detailed account of the entire process, serve as a source of inspiration for teachers, religious representatives, and other institutions interested in this field. The positive impact of extracurricular activities with religious-moral purposes can contribute to the development of extensive programs applicable to other age groups as well, aiming to achieve current and meaningful results. This study confirms previous research supporting the importance of religious education (Carbonaro & Maloney, 2019), its contribution to optimizing motivation for learning (Khalid, Mirza, Bin-Feng, & Saeed, 2020), and the impact of extracurricular activities on academic performance, peer relationships (Kurniawan et al., 2023), and parent-child relationships (Dworkin et al., 2003). Moreover, our research continues the line of inquiry initiated by Fernandez (2019), who highlighted that students participating in camps developed the conviction that anyone can improve their character. In this context, the present study tracks the long-term evolution of adolescents by analyzing how they become aware of positive changes in their lives.

By achieving these results, this research highlights the urgent need to diversify and intensify the organization of extracurricular activities within the school-family-church partnership, emphasizing the significant changes that have appeared in adolescents' lives. In an era when the influence of technology, social, and educational environments is increasingly strong, these extracurricular activities become the link between adolescents' need for socialization and self-expression and their harmonious development.

The final chapter of the thesis synthesizes the research conclusions from both theoretical and practical perspectives, systematically presenting the findings summarized here, thus concluding the proposed analytical journey.

One limitation of our study is that among the interviewees responsible for extracurricular activities within religious denominations, representatives of all legally recognized denominations in Romania were not included. Another limitation is the lack of uniform representation across counties or development regions among the respondents to the questionnaires. Additionally, since the effects of the interventions may manifest over time, possibly even after data collection ended, we consider that the research managed to identify and capitalize on only a part of these effects.

As directions for further research, we consider it important to identify in more detail the reasons why students participate rarely or very rarely in extracurricular activities. Another need is to investigate how schools and churches can more actively involve parents in organizing and conducting extracurricular activities, as well as to highlight the reasons behind the limited organization of such activities by teachers. Furthermore, we believe additional research is needed to better align the objectives of religious-moral extracurricular activities conducted in partnership with the church with those of the religion curriculum.

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