Relationship, community and community belonging – students' values at three Hungarian universities

Edit Révay

Introduction

After the collapse of the Communist regime and the subsequent political changes, the transformation of higher education concerned three major domains. One is the increasing number of students, the second is the widening participation in higher education, and the third is the growing share of non-public universities and colleges. The studies that came out in the last two decades primarily inquired how higher education became a scene of mass education, what opportunities graduates have had in the world of work, and the organizational changes within universities and in the HE system as a whole. Only a few studies addressed the questions of students' values. While from the 1990/1991 academic year to the 2003/2004 academic year the number of state maintained universities and colleges decreased from 66 to 31, the number of universities and colleges maintained by the church increased from 10 to 26, and the number of students in denominational higher education increased from 550 to 21626. Yet studies do not discuss the effects and significance of this change. In her PhD dissertation about the state of non-public HE in 2003, Szemerszki discussed data on denominational higher education as part of the wider non-public HE sector, though she did not particularly focus on denominational universities and colleges (Szemerszki, 2006). To my knowledge, except for a micro-research comparing the Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPCU) and the state-maintained Faculty of Arts of the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) (Ambrózy, Katona & Rosta, 2005), there have not been any other research studies which focused on denominational higher education. The field of denominational HE lends itself to scientific analysis not only because of the increasing rates of attendance but also because even though the majority of students are still attending public HE institutions, this trend clearly indicates the rise of public interest towards denominational higher education.

The research project

Our main research questions were the following. What attracts students to denominational universities and colleges? What do they hope to achieve there? What they think they cannot receive at public higher education or at other kinds of non-state universities or colleges? Did the universities meet their expectations? Is there any specific characteristic of denominational higher education? Is it made explicit and if yes, how? How does it manifest in the institutional context? Does it manifests in admission procedures, in the ways professors or other staff members are recruited, in the expectations concerning students, professors and other employees, or in the teaching and leisure-time activities? Is there any difference between public and denominational higher educational institutions, and if yes, what kind of difference is it in terms of teaching, student life, and the norms and values there? Is there any institutional intention stated to enact any particular values? Is there any difference in terms of social background, lifestyles, and values between public and denominational university students? What do students really expect from denominational universities? Why do they choose denominational universities or colleges over public universities or colleges? Do religiousness and denomination have a special importance in their choice? Why non-relegious students choose denominational institutions?

We collected data from three universities and from 1200 respondents in 2007. The universities that participated in the research were the Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPCU), the University of Debrecen (UD) and the University of Pécs (UP). The results were published in a book which includes a summary and analysis of our former research on denominational education putting the data collected in the present research in perspective. In this article, we will present a brief overview of the most significant results with regards to questions on values and community belonging in comparison of the three universities. In the analysis, we ignored the subtle distinctions in the questions about relationship and community cohesion between the two researches.

Relationship

Forming relationships, friendships as well as community and leisure time activities are all important attributes of personal values. The relationship needs of a person partly vary on personality, but it is determined by patterns brought from our homes as well. At the same time, individualism more and more deeply and thoroughly determines our relationship patterns within families, among friends, or in wider social contexts. The bloc of questions about relationships mainly focused on the whether there is any significant effect of religiousness on openness towards others, on the personal requirements to belong to any community, on the quality and depth of friendships and on leisure time activities.

Friendship

Besides family relationships, friendship is the most important kind of relationship in human life. Asking about the number of close friends provides us with a glance to the depth of friendship. It is difficult to estimate the average number of close friends, because it depends on age, maturity, and on character. As well known, the more close friends a respondent has, the less intimacy, security, depth and quality these relationships have. Without doubt, as the time goes by and people get more mature, they identify less close friends. In our research, in some extreme cases, student claimed high numbers of close friends, but the majority of the students indicated one to five persons as close friends. To this question, the answers of students from the three universities' were very similar (Table 1.).

Table 1. How many close friends do you have? (in percentage)

close friend	PPCU	UD	UP
between 1 and 5	58.8	55.3	63.4
between 6 and 10	28.3	29.0	25.2
11 or more	9.1	5.3	5.7
no answer	2.0	3.9	3.7
I don't know	1.8	6.5	2.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: own calculation

Although there are some differences between universities in relation to religiousness, these differences are not so significant, and our data is not sufficient to explain these differences. The number of close friends mostly corresponds with religiosity. It is clear that in all five categories of religiosity, most students majority claimed to have between 1-5 close friends, but it is also evidenced that the more religious persons have more close friends (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of close friends by religiousness
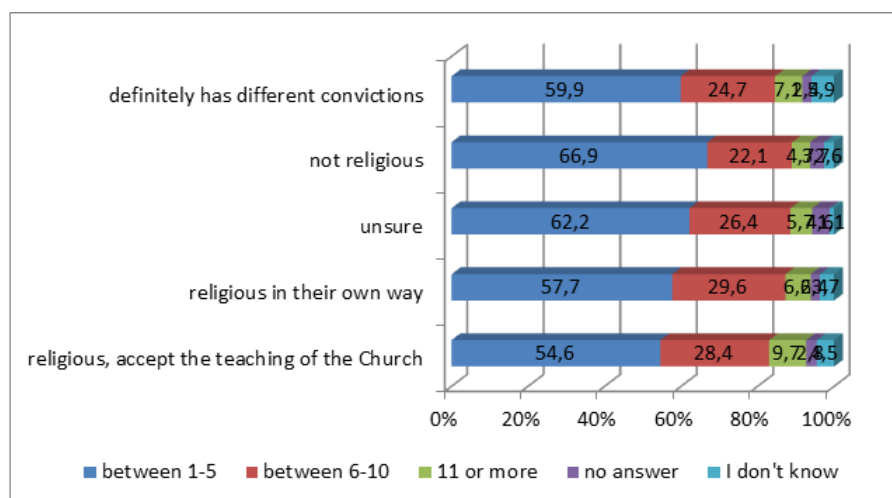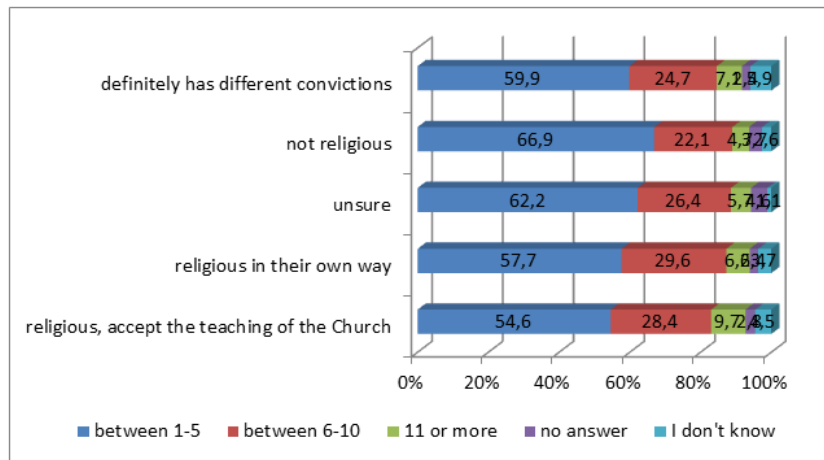

Source: own calculation

What do this data tell us? The majority of the students who participated in this research is Catholic or belongs to other historical Christian denomination. As we know, communitarianism is significant in all Christian religions. This presumption raises the question: does the findings imply strong community as one of the important attributes of Christianity and does this relate to greater tolerance, openness in friendships too? If yes, what can ensure the intimacy of friendships if this also corresponds to having more close friends? Perhaps, students understand something different under the term "close friend". Is it possible that the meaning of this expression has changed in the younger generation? All these are possible hypotheses; unfortunately, we cannot give an answer, because we did not assume that this would be an issue at the construction of the research, and thus we did not ask for a definition of close friends.

Research on young people do not usually asks questions about the number of friends or the subjective definition of friendship or close friend. It was so in 2004 our youth-research. On the ground of that, the results of previous researches cannot substantiate comparison or serve as a pivot for the analysis of our data. We can only keep this question in mind for the next research and until then, for the least, we can formulate questions. On a theoretical level, we can still examine the significance and the relationship between the number of close friends and religiousness.

The number of friends itself implies more openness and personal needs for relationships on behalf of our respondents. However, only based on the number of friends, we cannot say anything about the satisfaction with these relationships. We inquired this in separate set of questions. In the context of religiousness, we found some significant attributes. For a thicker interpretation, first let us investigate the possible relations between religiousness and satisfaction in general. As the answers show, the more people are less dissatisfied with their life, and when we compared the highest two categories of satisfaction, we found that the more religious the people are, the more satisfied they are. Moreover it is visible, that we find the ones who are more likely to be very satisfied with their life on the two poles of religiousness, namely among those who "accept the teaching of the Church" and those who "definitely have different conviction". On the one hand, it is a possible interpretation that religious people "brought what we thought", because belief in God and a personal relationship with God is likely to help accepting the difficulties of life and finding a meaning in life. However, there is another difficult question: what is the situation with those who definitely have different conviction, why are they more satisfied with their life than the group of very religious people? There is a big temptation for quick answers, but for now, we have to leave this interesting question open. Leastwise, it is also clear from our data that not only those who are very satisfied, but also those who are dissatisfied are more likely not to have different conviction. Compared to the results of the Hungarian Youth Research 2004, there is a striking difference in our research. In the Hungarian Youth Research 2004, less respondent claimed to be dissatisfied in the same student cohort, and the sample is more satisfied than our respondents. These differences are valid even if we take into account the small
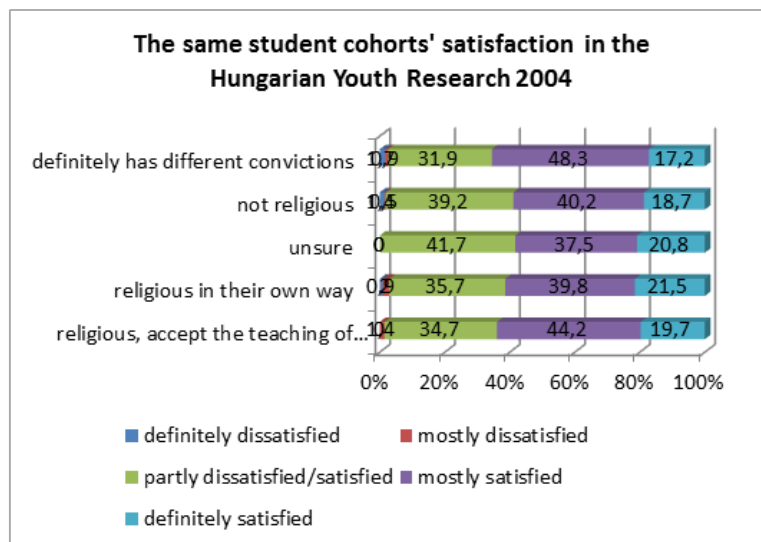
differences in the exact operationalization of satisfaction in the two researches (Figure 2. a-b).

Figure 2a. Students' satisfaction in general

Figure 2b. The same student cohorts' satisfaction as in the Hungarian Youth Research 2004

Regarding satisfaction with family life, relationship with their friends, studies and the financial situation of the country, students are fairly satisfied with the financial situation of the country (Table 2). If we compare the results between universities, in general, PPCU students are less satisfied than the students at the two other universities, and it is also evident that UD students are more satisfied than the other students. But we have to note that it is not easy to answer to such general questions as "Are you satisfied or not?". Momentary states of mind and mood strongly influence our general perception, nevertheless Table 2 offers a general snapshot highlighting that the majority of the students consider themselves satisfied, and a high percentage (about 40%) said they were fairly satisfied.

Table 2. Students' study fields and levels of satisfaction

Satisfaction	PPCU	UD	UP
Fairly satisfied			
Family life	68.8	76.5	70.8
Study	49.1	63.5	53.8
Relationship with friends	85.9	84.4	80.8
Financial situation of the country	35.9	32.5	35.7
Not satisfied at all			
Family life	3.8	1.8	3.3
Study	2.5	1	3
Relationship with friends	0	0.5	0.5
Financial situation of the country	10.4	8.7	9
Satisfaction in general			
Pretty unsatisfied	1.3	0.3	1.8
More or less unsatisfied	4.6	2.8	4.8
Neutral	4.1	3.9	6.1
More or less satisfied	49.9	54	50
Pretty satisfied	40.3	39	37.2

Source: own chart

Accepted or internalised values are easy to capture by some questions. Apparently in terms of mother-child relationship, there is not a big difference between PPCU and UD students. With regards to traditional male-female roles such as housekeeping and women's independence, PPCU students seem to be more conservative than other students (

Table 3). On some of the moral questions, – such as drug abuse, PPCU students are more permissive than others. At the same time, they are less flexible regarding more traditional moral questions than the other students, above all sexual questions such as having a sexual relationship with a married person or homosexual relationships as well as abortion, euthanasia and suicide –. Behind this, we assume, Catholic, Christian values lie or culturally determined values that vary in relation to students' religiousness (

*Table* 3).

Table 3. Students' accepted and rejected values

	PPCU	UD	UP
Totally agree/accept			
The intimacy of the mother-child relationship does not correspond to whether the mother goes to work or stays at home	32.7	37.2	28.8
A child suffers if the mother is employed and does not stay at home	11.9	12.2	9
Women can work, but their real desire is to stay at home with the children	10.9	7.7	5.5
Housework is as much self-fulfilling as paid work	11.6	9.7	9.3
To gain independence, women must have a job	23.8	32.4	26.5
Spouses have to participate in earning the family income	41.5	46.4	41.9
Fathers can as much take care of their children as mothers	15.6	22.9	17.6
Men can less manage their feelings than women	11.6	18.1	10.8
Agree/accept			
Light and hard drugs must be separated	45.1	47.9	53.1
Medication abuse is also drug abuse	71.1	74.2	76.3
Drug abusers are delinquent abusers	19.5	22.8	19
Light drugs pave the way to hard drugs	42.2	42.7	33.2
We have to try out everything, including drugs	8.1	9.5	8.2
Light drugs are not dangerous if we are careful	22.1	17.6	21.1
Drug use is harmful to society	69.5	70.1	62.4
Drugs are not more dangerous than alcohol	15.2	16.2	18.9
Reject			
Cheating with student-card	23.4	30.6	27.4
Tax evasion	50.5	55.5	55.9
Taking marihuana or hashish	51.9	58.3	50.3
Lying for self-interest	16.5	19.7	19.9
Having a sexual relationship with a married person	67.3	54.6	47.3
Accepting a bribe	51.8	47.2	47.2
Having a homosexual relationship	52.4	51.9	48.1
Abortion	44.8	28.1	37.3
Divorce	13.1	7.7	14.9
Active euthanasia	32.9	29.9	28.5
Suicide	67.3	63	58.5
Littering in public places	53.3	56.6	43.6
Having a sexual relationship with someone's mate	39.6	34.4	25.9
Drink and drive	75.7	80.8	75.8
Avoiding value added tax (VAT)	24.7	34.9	34.3
Occasional sexual intercourse outside marriage	27.4	26.8	19.7
Smoking at a public building	46.2	49	37.4
Going over the speed-limit	22.5	32.1	28.4
Sexual intercourse before marriage	4.3	5.1	3

Source: own chart

As we have already stated, the majority of our respondents is catholic or belongs to other historical Christian denominations. Inasmuch as all the Christian religions have a strong community aspect, more committed religiosity implies more community belonging and higher personal openness for relationships. Following this logic, it is easy to understand or to explain the mentioned correlation. On the other hand, the higher personal openness for relationships and the higher number of close friends can affect the depths and intimacy of friendships; the goal is to act against individualism. This could have a clear effect on the satisfaction with friendships, however the answers show no such negative effect with the increase of close friends. On friendships, the results of our research and that of the Hungarian Youth Research 2004 show significant variations. Although, it makes an important difference whether we provide a five-grade scale to measure satisfaction or a definition for each grade on the scale, yet it is very possible that the variation is not due to the different phrasing. This argument relies in the fact that the respondents gave answers on a five-grade scale in both cases and it

there was a clear positive and negative pole. In the Hungarian Youth Research 2004, the majority of the respondents, four out of five categories of religiosity, was definitely satisfied with their friendships, and only the respondents with unsure world view had answered differently. On the other hand, more students were definitely satisfied in the Hungarian Youth Research 2004 than thein our research. Our data from the three universities compared with five categories of religiosity show a quite interesting result. Namely, the majority of the non-religious are very satisfied with their friendships, and hose who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church just come after them in terms of satisfaction. If we combine the categories of "very satisfied" and "quite satisfied", then we can see again the repartition that those are the most satisfied with their friendships who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church, and those are the less satisfied who are unsure in their world view. (Figure 3. a-b.)

Figure 3a Students' satisfaction with friendship.
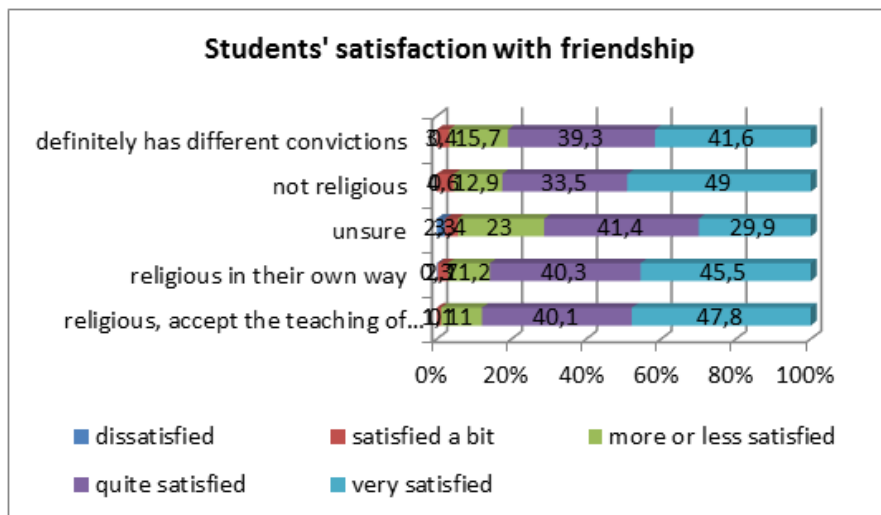
Source: own calculation

Figure 3b. Satisfaction with friendship in the same cohort of the Hungarian Youth Research
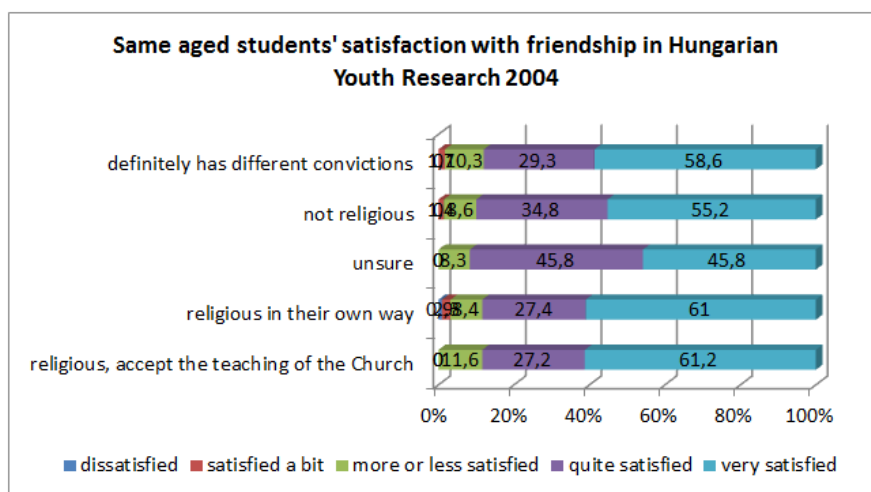
Source: own calculation

Howevere, we have to note that we do not know how students interpreted their satisfaction with friendships. This is clearly an important question that we did not include a in the questionnaire due to length constrains.

Community belonging

Our data reveals that the students in all of the universities have quite restricted belonging to communities. After all, the majority of those who claimed to belong to any community also belong to religious communities and a small minority belongs to political parties. Overall, the students of the PPCU are more likely to be members of some sort of community than the students of UD or UP. The rate of those who belong to religious communities is much higher at PPCU as it is at the two other universities, however in terms of memberships in other types of communities or organizations, although the rate is still the highest at PPCU, the difference is not so significant. The rate of those who belong to any kind of communities or organizations is lower than the average in Western Europe. That is perhaps due to the heritage of Communism. In a very simplistic way, we can say that a tradition was broken: during the Communist era, it was only allowed to be legally members of ideology-based organizations. Religious communities were forced underground and were held under strictt observation. Other kinds of organizations such as civil organizations were banned as part of the ideology was the claim that there is no need for charity since poverty had been abolished. Because in practice it was not a democracy – even though Hungary was named as people's democracy – it was claimed that there is noneed of civil organizations to protect democracy. Of course, the main reason of abolishing civil organizations was that civil societies posed a danger for those in power. After the collapse of the Communist regime, the former communities had slowly revived, new types of civil organizations emerged, and very slowly the culture of civil organizations and communities has commenced to emerge, became visible and stronger. It was and it is a continuous learning process. (Table 4.)

Table 4. The percentage of students who are members of communities in the three universities and in the same cohort of the Hungarian Youth Research 2004 as well as the Student Dormitory Research 2004

Belongs to...	Average of the 3 universities' students	PPCU	UD	UP	Student Dormitory Research 2004	Hungarian Youth Research 2004
Religious community	21,3	32,4	21,5	10,1	7,3	22,0
Civil organization	15,3	14,4	13,5	18,0	***	***
Sport club	13,0	16,1	11,0	11,8	16,2	37,6
Political party	1,9	3,8	0,3	1,5	2,7	1,8
Charity organization	7,4	7,6	6,1	8,5	***	***
Else	9,3	13,0	3,8	15,5		

*** There were few related sub-questions in the Hungarian Youth Research 2004 and in the Student Dormitory Research

As we look at membership in organizations or communities in relation to religious self-identification, it seems that those who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church are quite active, and the majority is committed to some communities or organizations. The non-religious group is the least committed to any civil organization. Interestingly the one third of the religious and those who accept the teaching of the Church do not belong to religious parishes. It is an issue, because the small religious communities have important role in the institutionalized Catholic Church. Within the worldwide Church, parishes are the spaces where personal relationship with those who share the same belief happens. As I said earlier, Christianity is not individualistic, so being part of the community rather means living community life and taking responsibility for each other than visiting the Church once a week. As Thomas Merton said, "no Man is an island". (Merton, 1983) When someone does not belong to a parish within the big Church, how could it work? In the case of students at the three universities one of the reasons can be that some had to leave home and their local community for studies, and perhaps they hadn't found a new community yet. It can be a possible explanation, however it seems to contradict the finding there is not significant variation in correspondence to the variable "the place where she/he lives is in the same city where the University is or not" or "where did she/he grown up till age 14" . The only significant difference is that among those who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church and those who come from villages, a smaller share does not belong to religious parishes. Although being religious and to accept the teaching of the Church does not equals belonging to a parish, but in practice, most of the religious students who accept the teaching of the Church belong to a religious group in the parish, because of the strong community aspect of Christianity. When a believer is not a member of a small community she/he becomes an outsider who only has experience of the liturgical community within the parish without any real attachment to the parish community. However, we did not inquire past church going habits, but for a better understanding, here is an example: among those who are not really attached to their parish, it is more likely that they go to various Churches for Mass. This disattachment can easily cause a sort of "Christian" consumer habit. This consumer habit is mostly characteristic of another generation, and its most typical attribute is that these poeple are consumers of a "religious market", they choose a priest and often change churches. Through this, they can be there as stranger and they can leave the place as strangers too. After this quite long and detailed interpretation of the significance of belonging to a parish within the Church, there is another interesting issue, namely what is the situation with those who are not religious or definitely have different opinions but still belong to religious small communities within the Church. They are in fact a small minority, so small that it is difficult to analyze the data within the sample. (Figure 4.)

Figure 4. The rate of those who belong to communities or organizations in relation to religious self-identification
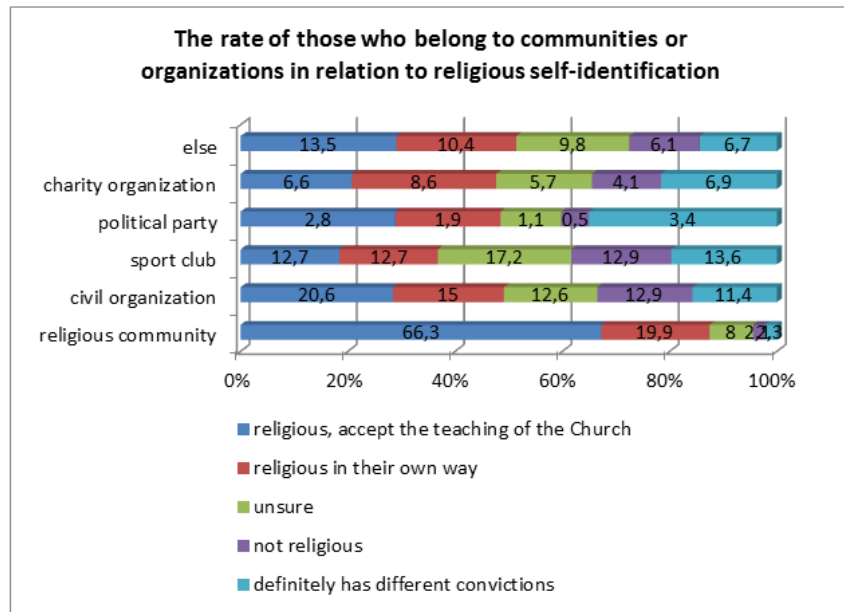
Source: own calculation

If we examine the rate of belonging to communities or organizations in relation to religious self-identification, on the one hand it is apparent that in all three universities, those students who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church are committed to more communities or organizations than other students. It is also clear from our data that those students who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church at PPCU are definitely more active, the majority of them belongs to various communities or organizations simultaneously. More students come from the DU than PU among those who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church and belong to religious parishes within the Church. On the other hand, at the PU, the students who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church, are the most active in civil and charity organizations. One of the possible comments is that the values that come from deep religiosity also correspond to the motivation to serve and help others in non-religious, civil organizations as well. We did not inquire the motivations of belonging to communities or organizations, however it would be very useful to know what the obstacle of becoming religious parish members, as it also remains an open question what attracted them to civil or charity organizations. Due to length constraints, we left such questions open for the next research (Figure 5.).

Figure 5. Belonging to communities or organizations in relations to religious self-identification at the three universities
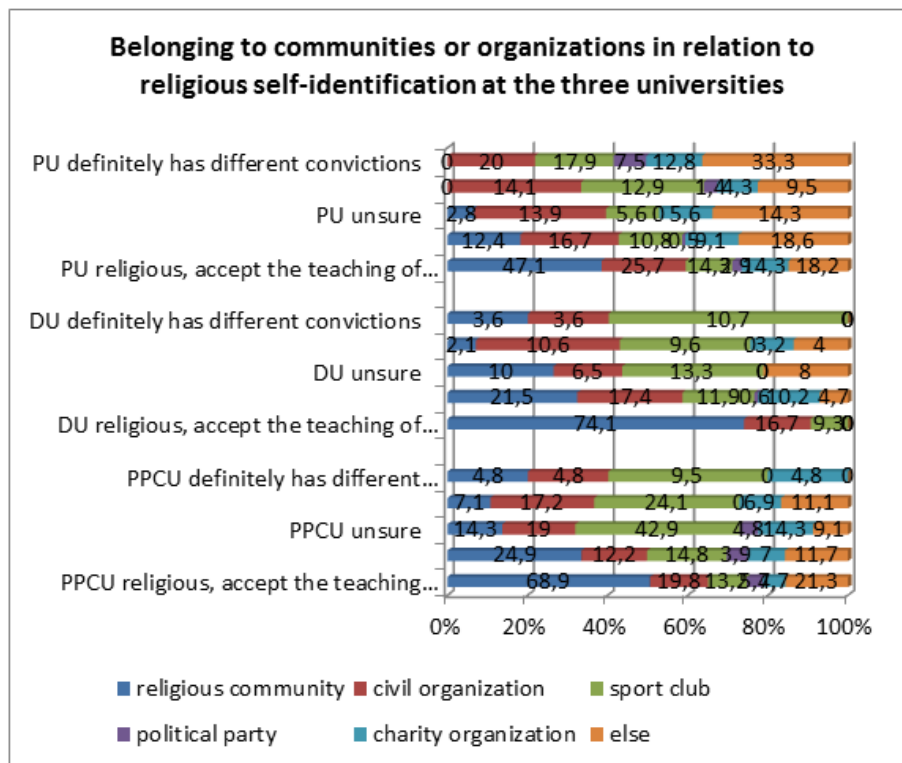
Source: own calculation

To summarize the observations about the relationship, values of community and community belonging, we can say that the majority of students has between one to five close friends in order to protect the intimacy of their friendship. We got very similar answers from all three universities to this question. The most students who are religious and accept the teaching of the Church and those who have definitely different opinions and have less close friends in comparison with the other two universities attend the PPCU. It seems that most students prefer individual leisure time activities. If they choose to spend their free time with friends, they prefer to visit them, or go out to the pub, teahouse or so, so they prefer to socialize in a way that they can chat with each other. In general, at all three universities the students are quite passive in terms of community belonging. After all, among those who do belong to any community, the majority belongs to religious communities and a small minority belongs to political parties. Overall, the students of the PPCU are more likely to be members of community group than the students of the UD or the UP. The rate of those who are belonging to religious community is much higher at the PPCU than at the two other universities, but with regards to membership in other type of communities or organizations, even though the rate is still highest at the PPCU, the difference is not so significant. If we examine the rate of belonging to communities or organizations in relation to religious self-identification, on the one hand, we find that in all of the three universities, religious students tend to be committed in more communities or organizations than other students. The non-religious are less actively commited to any forms of communities.

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