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School, society, culture and national identity in Oradea in the period 1920–1930

Abstract

Cultural and social life clearly contributes to accentuate the self-awareness within a community that, through the act of culture, asserts itself in the field of international relations. At the same time, culture represents a sensitive barometer for socio-economic and political life, through which a series of vital factors can be identified in the process of recovery and development of nations.

In the interwar period, Romanian society faced a complex situation, generated by the extensive socio-political, economic and cultural changes that occurred after the end of the Great War. The promotion of the interests of the Romanian national state and of mass culture at the level of the entire country was pursued with consistency, this reality also manifesting itself in the historical province of Crişana, with the city of Oradea as its center.

In the new context, a justified emphasis was placed on the culturalization project of Romanian society, for which an appeal was made to the main state institutions and the numerous cultural associations and reunions organized after 1918. Thus, the cultural and economic development program was intended to be implemented on a social scale as wide as possible.

In a general view, the schools and organized cultural events led to a series of positive results, accepted as such by the society of Oradea. First of all, the percentage of illiteracy, at alarming levels at the beginning of 1920, was significantly reduced, especially in the countryside. The network of schools in Bihor County, together with inten-

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sive conference activity, supported by specialists, allowed not only the enablement of the peasantry in socio-cultural life, but also the understanding of some socio-economic and cultural phenomena that took place with an overflowing rapidity in the interwar society.

Key words: Bihor, education, culturalization process, reunions, Romanians, Hungarians, Jews

Introduction

Romania at its largest extent was established through plebiscite acts, of a democratic essence, by the Unions of 1918 representing the high point of Romanian historical existence, the culmination of a series of centuries-old acquisitions. The Act of Unification can be considered as “the sum of our historical life”, as the Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu said about the moment when Romania won its independence as a state in 1877–1878. From the perspective of long-term history and the dramatic events through which the Romanian nation went in the 20th century, the Great Union of 1918 was the peak moment of a multi-century historical diagram.

It was the moment when Romanian society moved from the census vote to universal male suffrage, the most comprehensive agrarian reform in Eastern Europe was also taking place and a new modern society being formed. The individual was free to think and act according to their own conscience, was aware of the power they holds and took an interest in the political and cultural life of the country. The achievement of the Great Union was to catalyse all levels of national existence, including a cultural and educational evolution, which would succeed in integrating Romania as a whole into the flow of modern European civilization.

Interwar Romania experienced four distinct stages, those of crisis being followed by those of development, in a chain of events closely linked to external political and economic realities.

In the present study, we opted for the period 1920–1930 because it includes a sub-period of restoration and recovery for Romania after the Great War (1918–1922), followed by a sub-period of economic and cultural momentum (1922–1930).

For the entire period to which we are referring, the Romanian state planned and implemented a series of cultural policies that aimed, with priority, at the reconstruction and development of the education system, which had a crucial role in the process of consolidating the unity of Romanian society for the formation of a functional entity, capable of introducing Romania into a new stage of modernization. Thus, in this time

frame, the educational system was upscaled and massively supported by funds from the state budget, so that by the end of the interwar period, the proportion of literate people had increased considerably.

This was the case with Bihor County, situated in the north-western part of Romania, where the authorities had to deal with a complex situation; it being a multi-ethnic region.

The situation of the education system in Bihor and measures implemented for an education in Romanian language after 1918

After the establishment of Greater Romania, a series of policies and cultural structures were outlined in a national educational process geared toward a series of concrete initiatives, aimed at strengthening the fundamental unity of Romanian societies in order to enable the country to embark upon a new stage of the modernization processes. A major element of this program was the standardisation of the education system throughout the country, both institutionally and in terms of the educational content focused on combating illiteracy, ignorance, and erroneous conceptions that kept Romanian society in a situation incompatible with the socio-political realities after 1918, and an increase in the general level of culture. As a result, the education system was resized and received massive financial support, allocated from the state budget. Under the leadership of Constantin Angelescu, Minister of Public Instruction during the liberal governments of 1919, 1922–1927 and 1933–1937, a national program entitled “cultural offensive” was implemented. Based on it, the education system was reformed and modernized, this trend being continued by other ministers of education, such as savant Dimitrie Gusti, during the government of 1932–1933 (Zaharian 1971: 189; Livezeanu 1998: 45, 53).

In Crișana, as in other historical provinces recently united with the country, the impacts of the application of the denationalization laws issued by the contemporaneous foreign rulers were noticeable also in the frames of interwar Romania, solidifying a worrying school reality (Bradu 1974: 169; Baba 1987: 361). Alexandru Pteancu, regional director of secondary education, published in the pages of the *Cele Trei Crișuri* magazine a report on the school situation in the Oradea constituency in the first years after the Great Union. It was found that the educational process faced serious difficulties, generated by the limited number of schools and boarding schools, teachers and appropriate didactic mate-

rial. In a statistic drawn up for the years 1920–1924, it was stated that, in rural primary schools, almost 20% of teaching positions could not be filled due to the lack of qualified staff.

Another delicate problem of the system was related to the poor assimilation of the Romanian language by the majority of secondary school students. Consequently, for them, starting from the summer of 1919, the Romanian state initiated intensive Romanian language courses. From the entire region of Oradea (which then included the counties of Bihor, Sălaj, Sătmar and Maramureş) only 166 Romanian students attended these courses “who, due to the strange circumstances, did not know Romanian at all or barely knew it”. Following some inspections carried out in Maramureş County (at the Civil School in Baia Mare and at the Girls’ High School in Sighet), it was found that in this part of the country, only a few students could express themselves correctly in Romanian, a similar situation being identified in Oradea, too. The figures in the report are telling in this sense: “...at the Civil School for Boys and Girls we found 50 [students], and at the Vocational School 150 students, who hardly knew Romanian at all.” (CTC 1920, 8: 28)

This difficult situation had its roots in the political and social realities prior to 1918. At that time, Romanians, although they represented the vast majority of the population of Transylvania, were deprived of many natural rights, among which it is necessary to mention only that related to the establishment of educational institutions in Romanian language. The primary schools in the Oradea district were controlled by Hungarian school inspectors, the Hungarian language being mandatory in the education process. Moreover, there was only one Romanian high school for boys in the area and one middle school for girls, both in Beiuş. (The school for boys was the Romanian High School from Beiuş, set up by the Greek-Catholic bishop Samuil Vulcan in 1828.)

At the same time, the network of Hungarian schools was represented by a considerable number of such institutions: 11 boys’ high schools, 4 girls’ high schools, 15 civil schools, 4 commercial schools, 2 arts and crafts schools, 10 apprentice schools, 4 agro-economic schools, 2 pomiculture schools, one mining, one painting and 10 standard schools.

After the Act of Union from 1918, the development of the Romanian school network was imposed as a necessity to remedy the realities of the previous era. A concrete first step was the action of the Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction, which established, for the urgent needs of the population on the western border of the country, a series of Romanian schools and high schools: six Romanian high schools for boys, two for girls, six civil schools and five normal schools. Also in this context, it

was decided to establish a state secondary school with Romanian as the language of instruction. Thus, in Oradea, the “Emanuil Gojdu” High School began its activity, with five classes. Also, intensive language courses lasting six weeks were organized for those who were unable to master the Romanian language. This was followed by an extensive process of taking over school institutions under the coordination of the Romanian state. “This fact is of great importance – emphasized the same Alexandru Pteancu – because through these cultural institutes the poor Romanian people from these parts will suddenly be freed from the nets of denationalization and, under the warmth of the beneficent rays of the national school, hundreds and thousands of dark souls will revive to a new life, to the true life” (CTC 1920, 8: 28).

In the school year 1919–1920, the city councilors of Oradea held discussions with the leadership of the Governing Council regarding the local educational system. Kindergartens remained in the city administration, with Hungarian as the language of instruction, but it became mandatory to hire a teacher of Romanian origin in each preschool institution. At the same time, it was decided to establish two Romanian kindergartens and the operation of two Jewish kindergartens was approved. Negotiations were also held for the establishment of a Reformed school and a girls’ gymnasium. At the Royal State School in Oradea, teaching was bilingual: in the first grade – Romanian, in the second grade – Hungarian. In the following years, due to the low number of enrolled students, the school was subordinated to the Gojdu High School.

In the early 1920s, Bihor faced a difficult situation: illiteracy had high rates (70–80%), especially in the countryside; the school network was poorly developed; there were no Romanian libraries and newspapers; insufficient teaching staff; reduced own financial funds. All this was integrated into the general difficult reality due to the consequences of the world conflagration (Bradu 1974: 169).

Another important issue of education in Oradea was related to the textbooks in the local educational circuit. In an overwhelming proportion, they came from Hungary, and their content was overtly anti-Romanian. Thus, starting from August 1922, the purchase of school textbooks from Hungary for the western part of the country was prohibited by order of the minister, with the relevant Romanian ministry engaging in editing new textbooks and their distribution throughout the national territory.

For their part, the confessional schools went through a period of restructuring and survived with difficulty after 1918 due to financial difficulties, but also the mandatory introduction of the Romanian language as

the language of instruction, a fact that represented a veritable touchstone for the majority Hungarian teachers. Due to the constant refusal to respect the laws issued by the Romanian authorities and to swear an oath of allegiance to the Romanian unitary national state, a number of these establishments were closed. This is the case of the Catholic Pedagogical School of the Ursulines and the Premonstratensian Gymnasium. The 1925 law on private education stipulated that the Romanian language was compulsory, and the geography and history of Romania became, alongside the Constitution, compulsory subjects that had to be included in the new school curricula. Other school institutions reached a compromise by applying a bilingual system, but with the obligation to introduce the Romanian language as the predominant language of instruction. This is the case of the Israelite Orthodox High School in Oradea, where tensions were eased by the possibility of teaching in Yiddish and Romanian (Fleisz 2005: 208–209, 213; Romînaşu 2011: 119–130).

Also in the 1920s, the central authorities considered, based on the educational project for the western border, the establishment of a university in Oradea, together with a Trade Academy and a Post and Railway Academy. The other existing educational institutions were to benefit from financial support, and the expansion of the network of primary schools was also desired. Unfortunately, this generous educational plan for Oradea and the western part of the country did not materialize in all its points, due to multiple objective and subjective reasons that we will not cover in this material.

Another representative school institution in Oradea was the Greek-Catholic Normal School, which in the years of The Great War, despite the daily hardships, continued intense activity, especially due to the quality of the teaching staff. It was oriented - as in the past - towards the good quality academic training of future teachers in Romanian villages. It is worth mentioning teachers who stood out during this difficult period: Gheorghe Miculaş (director of Preparandia during 1914–1919), Petru Tâmâian, regular teacher and future director, Cornel Sabo, full professor since 1907, Vasile Kirvai, graduate in mathematics and physics at the University of Budapest, Ioan Teiuşan, Dr. Ioan Georgescu, Gavril Toustu, Mihai Silaghi, professor of singing and church rite, etc. In the interwar period, the School was reorganized over a period from 1923 to 1937, according to the model of the schools of the Old Kingdom, integrating it into the common flow of education and national culture, a reality in which both people and institutions collaborated in an ardent start towards progress and European synchronization, an unprecedented phenomenon in Romanian national history.

Oradea higher education was represented – for the specified time segment – by the famous Law Academy (140 years old), the Roman-Catholic Theological Seminary (with Hungarian and Latin teaching languages) and the Greek-Catholic (both resuming activities in 1922), the Orthodox Theological Seminary (founded on 29 May 1923, the inauguration of the courses taking place on October 16, the same year) and by the Israelite Orthodox Talmud School which was assimilated to higher education institutions. The three theological Seminaries functioned throughout this period under the name of the Academy.

A special situation was registered at the Academy of Law, where, starting from 1st of October 1919, the courses were interrupted until the reorganization of the school program was completed; the cultural institution also changing its name to the Royal Academy of Romanian Law. Most of the ethnic Hungarian professors refused to swear an oath of faith to the new Romanian state that emerged after 1918, with the exception of two academics (Dr. Hovámyi Gyula, the new dean of the Academy, and Dr. Sigmond András), who taught for another decade and half at the prestigious academic educational institution. Starting with the 1921–1922 school year, all courses were held in Romanian, being restructured on the basis of specialized Romanian legislation, also at that time the Regulations of the Faculty of Law from Cluj came into force. In addition to the two mentioned Hungarian professors, the Ministry of Education appointed Bogdan Ionescu (originally from Bârlad) and Iacob Lazăr as academic staff at the Academy. In the academic year 1923–1924 the number of teachers increased to 16, then, in the year 1926–1927, it decreased to 11 (Fleisz 2005: 219–221, Chirodea 2011: 28–35; Savu 2013: 28–32).

In 1929, local intellectual groups resumed an older movement for the establishment of a university in Oradea, which, according to the new approach, was to include the Faculty of Law and the two Romanian theological academies. The university situated on the banks of the Criș Repede river adopted the name “King Michael I” University. For reasons related to the context of the economic crisis from 1929–1933, doubled by the lack of will of the central authorities, the educational project started in Oradea with the encouragement of intellectual groups was not realized, despite receiving support from the prime minister.

After the achievement of the unitary Romanian national state, Jews became the third largest minority in Romania, representing 4.2% of the total population. In Transylvania, the Jews paid special attention to education, a noticeable fact especially from the second half of the 19th century, following the agreements concluded between the community and the

Austro-Hungarian authorities (Neumann 1999: 47, 52). The increase in the number of Jewish schools was thus achieved gradually.

After 1918, the Union of Romanian Jews requested that the state provide the most substantial support possible to Jewish confessional and private schools. Through the Jewish Parliamentary Club, established in 1928, the Union of Romanian Jews persistently raised, at the tribune of the Parliament in Bucharest, at different meetings, in public debates and in the press, the problem of the violation of some rights and freedoms of the Jewish community, strongly condemning a series of anti-Semitic activities (Crăciun 2010: 274; Crăciun 2008, 10–11: 16).

The ordinances of the years 1923 and 1924 of the Minister of Public Instruction, Dr. Constantin Angelescu, placed minority schools in the sphere of immediate concerns of the state.

The interwar Jewish community, through exceptional efforts, managed to support its own school network in the general configuration of the Romanian education system of the time we are referring to. The notes of a former student from Oradea, named Ney András, are suggestive for the spirit within the school walls of those times: “We went there every morning like in our own citadel” (Mózes 1997: 158).

The high interest shown by Jews in the educational act is provided by statistical data of the time, especially those between 1921 and 1935, which show a very high percentage (7.6%) - compared to other ethnic groups - of the number of Jewish children enrolled in elementary schools and who ended up graduating from higher education institutions (Kuller 2004: 47).

Jewish students integrated into the schools of the city of Oradea without major difficulties. For example, at the Premonstratensian High School, a state school, they enjoyed fair treatment based on respect and collaboration, not being prevented in exerting specific traditions. However, community leaders warned about the fact that the state school institutions could not meet all the religious requirements claimed by the Mosaic spirituality. The statement was a pertinent one, because religion marked, in a very particular way, the historical trajectory of the Jews who, more than any others, preserved traditions and mentalities while other civilizations lost or suffered essential alterations over time.

In the school year 1927/1928, the Middle School for Boys, founded in 1888, had 8 classrooms, a laboratory, a chancellery, a room intended for meetings of the teaching staff and a space for archiving official documents. Modern didactic materials were also purchased, such as apparatus for physics (that cost 650 lei), mathematics (650 lei), geography (2,400 lei), and music. Romanian historical paintings and portraits of

Romanian literary figures were also bought (worth 3,000 lei). In turn, the Girls' Gymnasium, which had been established in 1892, operated with 6 rooms for study. Also here, a physics and chemistry laboratory were set up for a sum of 15,000 lei. Geographical maps and other teaching materials were purchased. Both schools benefited from access to a modern gym, equipped with specific equipment worth 30,000 lei (ASMPC 1927/1928: 3–4; AGSPC 1928/1929: 7; AGSPC 1934/1935: 6; Crăciun 2009: 78).

In the 1922/1923 school year, 208 students enrolled in the Middle School for Boys, and 283 girls in the Girls' Gymnasium. In the following year, a decrease in the number of students was observed at both schools, the difference being noticeable especially at the boys' institution, where 183 students enrolled (25 less than the previous year). In general, the trend of declining numbers was maintained throughout the interwar period, with a revival of enrolments in the first year of study being recorded in the school years 1933/1934, 1934/1935 and 1935/1936 (AGSPC 1933/1934: 8; ASMPC 1925/1926: 8; ASMPC 1935/1936: 11). The gymnasium did not have boarding facilities, as most of the students were from the city or its hinterland. Those from other counties of the country (Severin, Timiș, Storojineț, Arad, Sălaj, Satu Mare Maramureș, Someș, Târnava Mică) were hosted by different families in Oradea, where they were "researched regularly", especially by the tutors (ASMPC 1925/1926: 7–8; AGSPC 1937/1938: 22). In most cases, the students of the two above-mentioned schools were Romanian citizens of Mosaic denomination (ASMPC 1927/1928: 10).

By ministerial order, starting from the 1933/1934 school year, all students were compelled to wear a school uniform, and the Israelite gymnasium in Oradea was the first in the country to apply the new regulation, which shows the seriousness of the institution's management in observing and implementing school regulations. In the same period, the students received, in addition to an identity card with a photo, a card for recording academic achievement (AGSPC 1933/1934: 10; 1934/1935: 10).

In the school year 1922/1923, the teaching staff of the Middle School for Boys had 19 teachers. In the following school year, the teaching staff had 17 members. In general, the number of the teaching staff varied between 15 and 20 (ASMPC 1922/1923: 3–5; ASMPC 1923/1924: 4–5).

The subjects taught covered a wide range of disciplines. Thus, in the middle school, the series of subjects provided in the analytical curriculum were taught: religion and the Hebrew language, the Talmud, the

history of the Jews, geography, drawing, descriptive geometry, Romanian language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, law, civic instruction, natural sciences, calligraphy, manual work, gymnastics, music, household skills, agricultural notions, French and Hungarian (ASMP 1923/1924: 10; ASMP 1925/1926: 11–12). For students of other denominations, Roman Catholic or Reformed priests were hired for religious instruction. In order to promote a comprehensive education, open and towards a practical profile, in the school year 1921/1922, director Biró launched the educational program “Let’s train tradesmen”, which aimed to establish a school with an industrial-agricultural profile of 7 classes. His intention came to fruition only in 1945 (Mózes 1997: 154).

In the following school year, based on the order no. 4327/1922 of the regional inspectorate, the management of the gymnasium decided that the educational subjects would be taught in Romanian, while Hungarian, which had been used until then in the education process, was proposed only as an optional subject. This fact presented a rather serious problem for both teachers and students, as Hungarian was the language used in the family and community. Gradually, the acquisition of the Romanian language was achieved to a satisfactory degree, according to reports drawn up on the occasion of the annual inspections.

Romanian cultural associations and reunions in Bihor after 1918

Attempts were made by the intelligentsia from Oradea to solve the problems in the educational sector, which joined the effort initiated by the central and local authorities of the Romanian state. Thus, Colonel George Bacaloglu, together with numerous Romanian intellectuals from Oradea and Bihor, laid the foundations of a cultural Reunion entitled “Cele Trei Crișuri” (1919), which, together with other similar societies, initiated a programme to promote Romanian culture and education along the western border of the country. The purpose of the meeting was clearly formulated in the statutes: “to strengthen the intellectual and spiritual ties between the sons of our people in the cities and villages and to extend the friendly and benevolent influence over the inhabitants of every race, desirous of a quiet and fruitful life, in order to obtain, as far as on a larger scale, the consolidation of social life” (Statutes 1919: 3).

We recall, in this sense, the activity of the 2nd section of the Reunion (propaganda), entitled “Crișul Negru”, which, according to the statutory provisions, was particularly concerned “with the creation of bookstores

and schools, supporting them and churches, as well as their endowment...” (Statutes 1919: 5). Through this orientation, the Reunion proved that it understood the new cultural coordinates of the time, acting for the establishment of new schools in Crișana, with the aim of removing the great mass of Romanians in the area of the western border from the darkness of ignorance.

The most important contribution of the Reunion of Oradea in the activity of establishing and supporting Romanian schools in this part of the country remained the creation of the “*Cele Trei Crișuri*” Adult School in Oradea, which launched its courses in 1920. This represented a form inherited from the old traditions of the Transylvanian culture, the Reunion promoting it as an objective requirement on local level, because there were people who had not managed to acquire in time the minimum of useful knowledge required for effective participation in social activity, and others did not possess the Romanian language as a means of expression.

By 1921, the courses had been attended by 280 participants, both men and women, who came from a variety of social backgrounds: lawyers, magistrates, teachers, civil servants, craftsmen, etc. (CTC 1921, 21: 672)

The goal was achieved as the students who could not express themselves in Romanian ended up, after attending to the courses, having “conversations both from the vocabulary of their job and with elements from the literature, geography and history of the Romanians...” (BCNAS Reuniunea dos. 7: 1–2).

Through a desire to make known the network of schools in Transylvania, the *Cele Trei Crișuri* magazine published their statistics according to the language of instruction: “Romanian primary schools 1,064 (in Bihor 86), Hungarian 296 (Bihor 17), communal schools 418 (331 Romanian, 38 Hungarian, 32 German, 17 Slavic), confessional schools (Greek-Orthodox Romanian 1289 – in Bihor 207, Greek-Catholic 984, Roman-Catholic 276, Reformed – 446, Evangelical Lutheran 9, Unitarian 30, German 311, Slavic 64, Israeli 64), professional schools – 18 industrial, 26 commercial, 137 civil, 5 gymnasiums, state high schools for boys 39, for girls 8, confessional for boys 40, for girls – 6, standard schools for teachers 22, for female teachers 16, Orthodox confessional lyceums 3, Greek-Catholic 13, Evangelical-Lutheran 9, Unitarian 2, Israelite 3”; higher education was represented by the “University of Cluj (4 faculties: letters, sciences, law, medicine), the Academy of Agriculture in Cluj, the Academy of Law in Oradea, the Commercial Academy in Cluj and 13 Theological Seminaries” (CTC 1922, 16: 255).

The “Cele Trei Crișuri” Great Reunion tried and succeeded, to a large extent, by establishing schools both in the urban and in the rural environment, to bring the light of book science to the Romanian population on the western border of the country. It understood the challenges faced by interwar Romanian education and constantly acted in the direction of reducing illiteracy and promoting the Romanian language in all social environments.

Along with the Great Reunion, the effort to culturalize the western border was also supported by other Romanian cultural associations. Some were established before 1918, going through a necessary stage of reorganization after the “Great War”. We mention, in this sense: The “Hilaria” Singing Reunion from Oradea, which, through the new statutes of 1921, set out to cultivate Romanian national music, develop the musical sense, support young talents from the local artistic life, establish a permanent mixed choir along with a philharmonic orchestra, the organization of special music theory courses within a music school; The Oradean branch of the *Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (ASTRA)*, reorganized between 1920–1923 by the well-known Oradean lawyer Dr. Aurel Lazăr. Starting from 1926, the Oradean department turned into the Bihor County Central Department of ASTRA, which proposed the establishment of an agency in each commune of the county, respectively a cultural circle, the establishment of a public library, the intensification of cultural propaganda in the villages through lectures and cultural-artistic sessions, the organization of literacy courses for the rural world, as well as the organization of village choir competitions (Zainea 1999: 337–338; SCNAS Astra dos. 45/1923: 9, 42, 50; SCNAS Astra dos. 47/1924: 15); *The Reunion of Romanian Teachers from Bihor*, which saw a revival after 1919, initiating numerous specific forms of activity (teachers’ cultural circles, school meetings) but also common to all interwar cultural associations (conferences and cultural-artistic events, supporting village libraries, organizing some improvement and literacy courses, etc.); *The Romanian Women’s Reunion from Oradea and its surroundings*, established on 8 June 1914, reorganized immediately after December 1918, the “*Holy Mary*” *Greek-Catholic Religious Reunion (Marian Reunion)* - branch of Oradea, the “*St. John Chrysostom*” *Reading Society of the Theologians of the Greek-Catholic Theological Academy in Oradea*, both reactivated after 1919, with activities in known directions (culture, education, religion, philanthropy). Others were established in the new interwar political-cultural context: the *National House of Bihor County* (1929), with the role of conglomeration of Romanian cultural groups from Bihor for the realization of a unitary and viable cultural program on the western border of the

country (Romînașu 2008:109); the *“Athanasius the Great” Reading Society of Students from the Orthodox Theological Academy in Oradea* (1927), the *Association of United Romanian Students in Oradea* (Astru) – 1929, both standing out through a series of cultural and religious activities in both urban and rural environments; the *“Army of the Lord” Orthodox Association from the Diocese of Oradea* (1929), with a role in strengthening the religious and national consciousness of the members, the fight against social currents that attacked the traditional family, combating neo-Protestant currents, etc.; the *“Saint Gheorghe” Orthodox Association - Oradean branch* (1924), which grouped especially the students who were active in state education, with the aim of developing the religious, cultural, social and civic life of the members; *“Andrei Șaguna” Association of the Romanian Orthodox Clergy - Oradean branch* (1919), which developed, as forms of expression, pastoral conferences, the establishment of libraries in each department, the organization of specific conferences and courses; *The General Association of United Romanians* (A.G.R.U.) – Oradean branch (1929), which sought to consolidate religious sentiment within society and fight against socialist ideas and historical materialism; *“Temperance” Society – Oradean branch* (1927), with involvement in anti-alcohol propaganda campaigns; the *“Kindness League of Oradea and its surroundings” Association* (1927) involved in philanthropic actions at the level of Bihor County; *The National Society of Romanian Orthodox Women*, with a major contribution to the religious and national education of the youth of Romanian Bihorean society.

Hungarian and Jewish cultural associations and reunions in Bihor after 1918

For their part, the Hungarian and Israelite cultural and philanthropic associations and reunions in Oradea facilitated mutual understanding, the exchange of ideas and collaboration between people of different social and cultural origins, noting the role of diversity in the development of human potential at the local and national level. Moreover, all these spaces of spiritual and social creativity represented a vector of modernization, and the intellectuals grouped in such associationist forms were considered true agents of the “new”, those who ensured the diffusion of national and European cultural models in the public space.

In the present material, only the most representative examples are mentioned: *“Szigligeti” Society (Szigligeti Társaság)* – 1892 was a society in which poets and writers of the caliber of Biró Lajos, Nagy Endre,

Juhász Gyula, Dutka Ákos, as well as writers from the young generation of Oradea. Among the outstanding members of the society, we find the Romanian scholar Iosif Vulcan, and after 1900 the poet Ady Endre. The association did not propose exclusively literary purposes, but was also concerned with the visual arts, visual artists or art critics being welcomed into its ranks. In 1919, the society ceased its activity, but in 1922 it was re-established under the leadership of bishop Dr. Karácsonyi János (Tóth 1981: 185, 188). *Holnap (Mâine)* was another elite Hungarian literary society, created in Oradea in 1908 by a group of young journalists who met at the “Emke” café (Borcea, Gorun 1996: 268). The place was also frequented by Ady Endre, Juhász Gyula, Dutka Ákos, Emőd Tamás, Babits Mihály, Balázs Béla, Miklós Jutka. Several meetings between Ady Endre and Octavian Goga took place here, and a lasting friendship was formed between the two. The discussions engaged in this framework aimed - primarily - at revitalizing Hungarian lyric poetry on a modern basis, closer to the pulse of contemporary society. The society managed to publish, with the help of Ady Endre, two anthologies that grouped the most successful creations of the young members (Tóth 2007). An important Hungarian cultural association was the “Ady Endre” Society. The idea of its establishment crystallized in the days immediately following the poet’s death (27 January 1919). The inaugural meeting took place on 19 February 1919, and Antal Sándor, one of the promoters of the modern literary movement in Oradea from the “*Holnap*” *Literary Society*, was elected president. The society proposed the organization of scientific seminars on various topics. Due to the historical events of the spring of 1919, when Oradea became an area of military operations, a state of emergency was declared on the territory of the city, and the society’s activity was suspended. It failed to reorganize itself, its cultural objectives being taken over by the above mentioned “*Szigligeti*” *Society* (Tóth 1994: 431–433). The *Hungarian National Casino of Bihar (Bihari Nemzeti Kaszinó)*, a society established in 1833, also carried out intense cultural activity. It managed, during the interwar period, to group the forces of the Hungarian intelligentsia animated by the desire for freedom, progress and the culturalization of society (Fehér 1933–1937: 200).

Regarding the Jewish organizations and associations from the interwar period, the existence of the Union of Romanian Jews, established in 1923, has to be mentioned, which included, along with Jews from the Romanian Old Kingdom, communities from Bessarabia, Transylvania and Bukovina. To begin with, the position of president was held by Dr. Wilhelm Filderman. The statute, adopted in 1929, established that the

Union of Romanian Jews had as its main objective the defense of the individual and collective rights of the Israelite population in Romania, provided by the country's Constitution and international treaties.

Hungarian and Jewish feminist reunions and associations tried to support the culturalization process of the western area. They proved their effectiveness especially in terms of social life, where they developed, depending on the possibilities of the time, a significant philanthropic activity. Balls, celebrations, evenings and cultural events captured the attention of civil society, offering a fertile ground for the reception and consolidation of ideas that promoted sociable and charitable feeling, the values of Hungarian literature and culture, in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional space. From this perspective, we recall the *Hungarian Women's Association of Oradea and Bihor*, which strove, together with the *Protestant Charity Association*, the "*Elisabeta*" *Association*, the "*Prietenii Copiilor*" *Association* – the Hungarian women's branch, the "*Crucea Albă*" *Association*, the *Association for the Care of the Poor* and *The Reunion of Israelite Women from Oradea*, to carry out charitable activity related to the care of the sick, the education of children from families with reduced financial means, and the procurement of clothing, shoes, school supplies and food for needy families (BCNAS Primăria dos. 171: 35; NN 1910, 102: 9).

Conclusions

In the interwar period, Romanian society faced a complex situation, generated by the extensive socio-political, economic and cultural changes that occurred after 1918. The promotion of the interests of the Romanian national state and of mass culture at the level of the entire country was consistently pursued. A justifiable emphasis was placed on the culturalization project of Romanian society, for which an appeal was made to the main state institutions and the numerous cultural associations and reunions organized after 1918. Thus, the cultural and economic development program was intended to be implemented on a social scale as wide as possible. This was the case with the historical province of Crișana, with the city of Oradea as its center.

The schools and organized cultural events produced a number of positive results, accepted as such by the society of Oradea. First of all, the percentage of illiteracy, located at alarming levels at the beginning of 1919–1920, was significantly reduced, especially in the countryside. We specify that throughout the interwar period, Oradea spent the sum of

4,692,877 lei on the education sector, which demonstrates the fact that the city remained one of the important centers of education in the whole of Romania (Fleisz 2005: 217).

In addition to the effort made to “enlighten” the students, the teachers also participated in the cultural-artistic and religious activities organized under various patronages, having an important role in spreading interest in the school and the cultural act in the community of Oradea. They also encouraged the students in the actions of setting up choral ensembles and school exhibitions, setting up libraries, participating in the representative cultural-artistic moments arranged by the societies and reunions in the city of Oradea, urging, at the same time, intensive reading and subscription to various publications. Education was and always remained one of the central concerns during interwar period.

Therefore, the network of schools in Bihor County, together with the intensive conference activity, supported by specialists, allowed not only the activation of the peasantry in socio-cultural life, but also an understanding of some socio-economic and cultural phenomena that took place with an overflowing rapidity in the interwar society.

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Szkoła, społeczeństwo, kultura i tożsamość narodowa w Oradei w latach 1920–1930

Streszczenie

Życie kulturalne i społeczne w sposób oczywisty przyczynia się do kształtowania samoświadomości w obrębie społeczności, która poprzez akt kultury asertywnie zaznacza swoją obecność na polu stosunków międzynarodowych. Jednocześnie kultura stanowi czuły barometr życia społeczno-gospodarczego i politycznego, dzięki któremu można zidentyfikować szereg istotnych czynników odbudowy i rozwoju narodów.

W okresie międzywojennym społeczeństwo rumuńskie stanęło w obliczu złożonej sytuacji spowodowanej rozległymi zmianami społeczno-politycznymi, gospodarczymi i kulturowymi, które nastąpiły po zakończeniu I wojny światowej. Konsekwentnie realizowano promocję interesów rumuńskiego państwa narodowego i kultury masowej w skali całego kraju. Tendencje te były również widoczne w historycznej prowincji Crișana, z miastem Oradea jako jej centrum.

W nowym kontekście uzasadniony nacisk położono na projekt kulturotwórczy społeczeństwa rumuńskiego, o co zaapelowano do głównych instytucji państwowych oraz licznych stowarzyszeń i zjednoczeń kulturalnych utworzonych po 1918 r. Tym samym program rozwoju kulturalnego i gospodarczego miał być realizowany w jak najszerzej skali społecznej.

W ogólnym rozrachunku edukacja szkolna i organizowane imprezy kulturalne zaoferowały wieloma pozytywnymi wynikami w społeczeństwie Oradei. Znacznie zmniejszył się odsetek analfabetów, zwłaszcza na wsi. Utworzenie sieci szkół w powiecie Bihor oraz intensywne działania konferencyjne wspierane przez specjalistów pozwoliły nie tylko na społeczno-kulturalną aktywizację chłopów, ale także na zrozumienie niektórych zjawisk społeczno-gospodarczych i kulturowych zachodzących z nadspodziewaną szybkością w społeczeństwie międzywojennym.

Słowa kluczowe: Bihor, szkolnictwo, proces kulturalizacji, zjazdy, Rumuni, Węgrzy, Żydzi