Associations in Temesvár during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with Particular Focus on the Associations that Promoted Regional Identity

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GOALS, METHODOLOGY
This research work aims to analyse the activity of association in the royal town of Temesvár during the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, intending to shed light on the interaction between the town’s development and the associative movement.

After the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the political and socio-economic environment has created the fundamental conditions for the development of associational life. The free royal town of Temesvár also gradually saw the emergence of associations, societies and clubs, with various life spans, with municipal, regional and –less frequently– regional influence, thus setting ground for the local associational movement.

The origins of this movement (which in Hungary is related to the urbanisation process) can be linked to the Hungarian Reform Era, when, mostly in Saxon towns, but also in Pest, Pressburg and other towns, several caritative, economic, scientific, cultural, sports associations and casinos were created, following Austrian and English models. Nonetheless, the real “golden era” of the Hungarian associational movement occurred after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. This spontaneous social process was drastically interrupted in some areas by the outbreak of the First World War and by the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. After the Trianon Treaty, a significant part of these associations, activating in territories separated from Hungary which were unable to retain the same level of modernisation, have died out.

By the end of the 19th Century, Temesvár became one of the biggest towns with the most dynamic industrial development in Hungary, while its peculiar social componence ensured a very specific urban development process. The rapid changes, along with the multi-ethnic population – where the Hungarian minority represented the political power- facilitated the development of a new type of institution (the association)¹, which is typically urban and which is closely linked to the process of urban development.

One of the main goals of this thesis is to map the local, county and regional associations active in the royal free town of Temesvár during the Austro-Hungarian Compromise period.

¹ Throughout this document, the terms “(civil) association” and “(civil) organisation” are used interchangeably
An additional goal is to perform a classification of associations according to their stated purpose and field of activity, and to perform a monographic study based on several approaches. Further on, the study also aims to highlight the catalysing effect of associations on the regional social development, and the fertile ground that the local public sphere offered to the development of the town’s civil organisations.

The study examines what local social expectations have determined the emergence of various types of civil organisations; in other words, what social, economic, cultural needs had the inhabitants of Temesvár in the last quarter of the 19th Century, before the War, which required civil organisation in order to be satisfied.

When applying the social history method of study to the associational life, several aspects must be analysed: the role of civil associations during the urbanisation process, their intermediating role between State and the local society, i.e. to what extent the associations were able to substitute for the deficient system of state institutions. In addition, it is of interest to investigate the associations’ role in the build-up of local identity, and how strong was the effect of ethnic and social segregation on (associative) group making in a multi-ethnic town like Temesvár.

The thesis employs the comparative method of study. Therefore, where the sources allow, it performs comparisons with a similar association from a town with equivalent level of development to Temesvár’s, or with associations from the capital city of Budapest. In the same time, it makes comparisons between associations with different activities, in order to highlight the types of associations of interest for the population of Temesvár. Last but not least, it unveils the interferences that can be noted between members of different associations.
SOURCES, STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The starting point for the study of associations resides in the analysis of their operating statutes, which were preserved to a large extent. The statutes voted by the founding members during the inaugural sessions were firstly submitted to the local Town Halls, and the local authority then forwarded the statutes (in the majority of cases with the Mayor’s signature) to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, from where they were further transmitted to the respective Ministries.

Documents relative to the activity of the Temesvár associations can be found at two main institutions: the National Archives of Hungary, where the approved statutes of the various associations are kept, within the general fund of documents belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (K-150). On the other hand, similar statutes are stored by the Temesvár subsidiary of the National Archives of Romania. Unfortunately, there we could not find archive funds grouped by association, as is the case with many towns in Hungary, but they were scattered among the documents of the Temesvár Town Hall, which significantly hindered the research work.

Among the general acts of the Ministry of Interior stored at the National Archives of Hungary, we have found a total of 120 documents related to Temesvár associations, and after a preliminary screening, we could employ 108 of these for the research. They generally contain association statutes, registration requests to the Town Hall, registration minutes. My research has been also facilitated by the publishing, in 2005, of the Hungarian Associations Database, which can be accessed online (http://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/polgari-kori-egyesuletek).

At the Temesvár subsidiary of the National Archives of Romania, in the Town Hall’s fund, I have found no less than 207 association statutes, among which certainly there were also statutes of the same association, but from different years. After sorting, 178 statues could be employed for this research.

Besides the two archival funds, I have also used the statistics made by Vargha Gyula (1878), Koczányi Béla (1899), Geml József (1898), and Pór Edit’s database of Hungarian associations.
Therefore, after processing the aforementioned sources, with the implicit corrections of overlaps, I have prepared a personal cadastre, which includes 281 associations for the period analysed.

The activity of associations is tightly linked to the public sphere. The organisations based on the principle of voluntary participation have recurrently reported towards the public about their activity, their organisational changes, their financial situation, their membership, through either ad-hoc or regular own publications. These publications represent primary sources of research, and provide concrete information about the associations’ activity, internal organisation, financial statements, and also their links with the local authority and with other associations. For our study, some of these publications were preserved, but they are relatively few in comparison to the number of surviving statutes. For example, we researched the Természettudományi füzetek (The Nature Science Files), the publication of the Nature Science Association of Southern Hungary, the Magyar méh (The Bee), the publication of the Association of Beekeepers from Southern Hungary, Az Utazó (The Traveller), the publication of the Association of Commercial Travellers from Southern Hungary, etc.

We can also find useful information in books that detail several years of an association’s activity. For instance, Jelentés a Temesvári Néphivatal Tevékenységéről, 1904-1907, a Temesvári Zenekedvelő Egyesület Története, 1871-1896, a Délmagyarországi Természettudományi Társulat Története, A társulat 25 éves fennállásának ünnepére, az Asociația Voluntară „Salvarea” din Timișoara. 50 de ani de activitate, a Dél-Kárpátok etc.

Another source that gives important insight into the real activity of associations was the local press of the time. By publishing in the press, the associations were informing the public about their activity, and they were also trying to attract paying members of donors.

After a brief introduction (Chapter 1), the Second chapter sets up the theoretic perimeter of this work, by presenting previous research on associations (Hungarian and international), as
well as the chronology of legal regulations affecting the functioning of associations in Hungary. Further on, the starting points in the historical analysis of the topic is the clear differentiation of the analysed type of institution (the association) from the multitude of other forms of group organisation specific to the 19th Century. Therefore, based on the Hungarian bibliography used, I provide my own definition of the Hungarian association during the Austro-Hungarian compromise period. Then, the research develops a typology of associations, which is also important, as their diverse activity, along with their multi-levelled organisation, face the researcher with a difficult task. Finally, statistics of the period are used in order to document the dynamic growth of associations in Temesvár.

The largest part of the thesis consists of a monography of the most important associations of the period in Temesvár. In Chapter 3, the main cultural and educative associations were split into three categories; firstly I analyse the scientific associations, then I separately cover the associations of public education and finally I study the associations linked to Temesvár’s musical life.

Chapter 4 examines the town’s and the larger region’s economic life and the associations active in this field. These associations represented the different social levels and demographic strata active in agriculture and in other components of the regional economy. In the Fifth Chapter, the attention turns to discussing the touristic and sports culture associations in Temesvár. Chapter 6 details the organisations that served the public and social interest.

Chapter 7 provides an insight into the life of Temesvár’s written press. The public sphere organisations, the associations and the written press have been closely tied and influenced each other. The associations’ social openness was expressed not only through their own publications, but also by the intermediation of the written press. The press represented an equally efficient instrument in the hand of the authorities for influencing the municipal political trends. Chapter 8 concludes by presenting the key findings of this research.
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS
The associative life in Temesvár at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century mostly fits the general (national) evolution of the associational movement in Hungary. However, the specific geographic position, the historical evolution which differed from the rest of the country since the end of the Middle Ages, as well as the diverse ethnic componence, have undoubtedly been conducive to the creation of a specific collective mentality and to the development of a specific public sphere in this area. Usually, the circles of power have tried to use the public sphere – mostly mass media, but also the activity of the associations – in order to enforce their politic discourse. Thus, one of the peculiarities of the associational movement in Temesvár consisted in the strengthening of its local identity.

In Bánság, the national identity had different meanings for the local nationalities. With the spread of the nationalist historical discourse in the 19th Century, the four main ethnic groups have included the region’s historical past in their national history, thus resulting 4 different interpretations of the region’s historical evolution, each approach emphasising the historical period that was marked by their own political domination of the region.

In general, the activity of the analysed associations complies with the majority of criteria listed in the own, new definition of an association that is provided in the second chapter of the thesis. One of the main principles of functioning for these organisations was their independence from the economic market, and their autonomy from the state institutions. However, in case of a large part of Temesvár associations, we can prove that these were practically incapable of reaching the goals stated in their statutes without intervention from the county’s authorities. I demonstrate that, in case of some associations, there were large delays with the payment of the membership fees, which induced dependence on financial aid coming from the county’s authorities. The indispensable aid coming from the authorities had a price: the authorities often intervened in the associations’ activity, thus limiting their autonomy, by asking for modification of the goals voted in the statutes, modifications which often swerved radically from the original goals. As a consequence, by the end of the 19th Century, there were few associations (irrespective of their statute goals, be they scientific, sports or charity) who did not also mention the goal of “promoting the national ideal”, which was, in fact, the focal concept of Budapest’s politics.
Therefore, a specific feature of the associational movement in Hungary during the Austro-Hungarian compromise period was its dependence on the State, meaning that one of the civil associations’ most important operating criteria, the autonomy from the State, was not fully ensured. As mentioned, the county authorities’ control over the associations was mostly exerted by the means of financial aid.

Besides the particular goal of socialisation, the associations’ importance in the organisation of the local society cannot be overstated. If we only emphasize the associations’ role in promoting culture, we must mention that, in absence of the Theatrical Association, there would not have been theatre life in Temesvár. The History Society and the Natural Sciences Association have contributed enormously to the development of the scientific life. The reading clubs have promoted literacy among the population, while their libraries set the foundations for the State Public Library. Likewise, the Singing Associations (zenekedvelők) have set the ground for the creation of the State Philharmonic of Temesvár. Areas such as the ambulance or the firefighting services, fields of science and culture, and not lastly the social charities, were all set-up and controlled by the civil organisation, thus contributing to the society’s modernisation. Within the period studied, the state did not yet fully take over the control over these fields, but in all cases it somehow controlled the activity of these civil associations.

Besides the development of the cultural life, the associations have also contributed significantly to the development of the sports life in Temesvár, but also to the institutional tourism in the Bánság Mountains. Not least, the public space, mass media and the associations have accelerated the women’s emancipation movement. During the 1880’s, after participating in charity and choir associations, women started being accepted as members in cultural-scientific and also sports associations.

Throughout the research I endeavoured to present a segment of Temesvár’s public sphere, the bourgeoisie’s activity of social self-organisation. Thanks to various socio-economic factors, the German model of bourgeois development took over, thus producing its specific type of associations during the 19th Century. By the end of the 19th Century, the very same
associations have appropriated the characteristics of the Hungarian (mostly Budapest’s) associational life, inducing the local social modernisation. The process of ‘state Magyarisation’ of the associational life went in parallel with the magyarisation of the ethnic German and Jewish bourgeoisie, process that can be observed for certain associations. As noted in the study, the German associations started by translating their official name into Hungarian in their statutes, while the German language used in their bilingual publications was gradually replaced by Hungarian only. The same process was observed by Elena Mannová within the last two decades of the 19th Century in the multi-ethnic Pressburg.

Besides enforcing the national identity, another main role of the bourgeois associations was to substitute for the deficiencies of the State’s institutional system. Thus, beyond their socialising role, the associations also provided opportunities for professional integration, reinforcing the idea that their members belong to a specific professional group. Collective social strategies were outlined by different professional groups, such as the scientific area, the social charity area, the prevention of fire and natural disasters, the ambulance service, etc. These strategies, or a variety of social self-organization identities of interest could be located at different levels within the institutions. Besides their publicly exposed goals, the associations’ affiliation could also reside on ethnic, religious or professional belonging.

The classification of associations based solely on structural principles is not sufficient, as these entities could also be formed based on individual competences, or on specific motivations and interests. Beyond the fulfilment of the association’s objectives, the social prestige played an important role in the desire to accede an association. At the top of the ‘prestige hierarchy’ stood the 3-5 members of the Board, followed by the Caucus Committee, usually consisting of 15-30 members. A larger authority within the association belonged to the founding members, due to paying a higher membership tax than the regular members, although the latter took more part in the associations’ daily life. With a considerably higher material contribution, the founding members ensured the financial operation of the organisations, therefore the enhanced prestige they enjoyed. Larger prestige was also obtained through participating in more associations simultaneously, while at the top of the prestige hierarchy stood the Associations’ Presidents and Secretaries,
respectively the limited group of individuals who were Presidents and Secretaries to more than one association.

The mechanism of social prestige reciprocated between the association’s institutional fame and the names of the members that held important social status. In other words, membership in an important association increased the individual’s social reputation, his fame increasing proportionally with the function held in the organisation and with the size of his financial contribution – which in turn determined the type of membership and therefore the rights within the organisation. Likewise, a large number of influential members not only ensured the financial stability of the organisation, but also determined its increased attraction of other influential community members, thus contributing to the association’s enhanced socio-institutional prestige.

It is not always easy to determine the social structure of an association’s membership. In cases when an association played an important role in the town’s life, and it deemed important to maintain its image in the public space, it published yearbooks where it presented regularly the degree of realisation of its objectives, its financial situation and the membership’s data. The membership lists represent one of the most important historical sources for a researcher. Ideally, this list contains the member’s name, occupation, address, and the date of adherence to the association. When this list was published regularly, time section analysis can be performed, which can provide historical information. As adherence was not conditional on religious denomination, the associations did not collect this type of information. Thus, religious affiliation cannot be established, due to a lack of proper sources.

In less fortunate instances, the association did not publish any additional information besides the member names. In such cases, the historian must use indirect sources for identifying part of the membership. Moreover, for most associations, no membership list survived, which considerably hinders the researcher’s work, who is constrained to use various mass media publications of the period, address books of the time (similar to the phone books), which used to publish lists with the leadership of the most important associations of the time. The membership’s size, and the membership fee ensured the main financial incomes. A new member could apply only with the recommendation of one or
more existing members. The undesired social groups could thus be kept at bay through a high membership fee. The membership fee, therefore, can be perceived as an indicator of the association's social openness.

We can argue that the formation of a new association was often the result of the will of an important personality. Also, the successful activity of an association was almost always due to the personality, intense work or the social position of its President or Secretary. A relevant example is the case of the Prefect Ormós Zsigmond, who was the protector, the president or the founding member of many cultural and scientific associations, while also being the most stable pillar, for over 3 decades, of Temesvar’s associational life. With his nomination as Prefect, Ormós became the most influential authority at County level, and through him Temesvár’s civil organisations moved under centralised state authority control: the associations being set up at the time were legally bound to send to him their statutes for further approval by the Ministry of Interior.

Besides Ormós, each associational area had its own active and charismatic personality: important roles were played by Baron Ambrózy Béla and Abbot Blaskovics Ferenc in the agricultural life, by August Pummer in the musical life, by Petheő János in the development of touristic life, by the economist Neumann György in the institutionalisation of the ambulance service etc.

By the end of the last decade of the 19th Century, the associations became the civil tools used by the governmental circles for assimilation. Although the associations’ statutes claimed the irrelevance of members’ ethnicity, the cultivation of the national idea was, nevertheless, a goal contained in the majority of statutes. Thus, besides the associations’ activity of cultivation and propagation of the Hungarian language and of popular education, most associations had, in addition to their professional goals, also the goal of instilling patriotism and the national idea. Moreover, for tactical reasons, even the associations belonging to the ethnic minorities were declaring their loyalty to the Hungarian State and the Hungarian national idea. There were associations adhered to by the German bourgeoisie, because the associations’ goals coincided with its desire for professional socialisation. The Germans were open to cooperate with the Hungarian bourgeoisie within
the framework of the local socio-cultural institutions, given the fact that the Hungarians were the social group protected by the authorities. The Germans thus constituted a large part of the associational life.

Although in smaller numbers, representatives of the less numerous ethnic groups were also attracted by some of the Hungarian associations. We refer to the Romanian and Serbian communities, who were mainly motivated economically to cooperate with the county’s leadership. Still, in these cases we mostly observe an organisation based on ethnic and religious criteria, and their goals were less focused on the municipal community, but rather to promote the interests and the socio-cultural development of their own ethnic group. Because of this dualism, certain fields of the associational life were mostly atomised (for example, the social charity and the musical life were mostly organised on ethnic and religious grounds). On the other hand, until 1903, when the town’s walls were demolished, the areas outside the wall quasi represented a ‘corpus separatum’ in the town’s administration, as opposed to the intra-mural zone. The three areas of the town (Inner City on one hand, Jozsefváros and Gyárváros on the other) had their own associations, a phenomenon fairly similar to the distribution of the association in the capital city of Budapest.

Among the goals of this research was also the analysis of the development of the associational culture during the period. Thus, I have examined the associations’ precise role in the organisation of the Temesvár society and their effect on the socio-economic-cultural life, namely the way they substituted for state institutions that were missing at the time.

The economic boom after 1880 has generated major demographic changes. A massive concentration of population in the town of Temesvár influenced the rhythm of associations’ creation. The beginning of state modernisation resulted in the emergence of numerous associations meant to contribute to the appropriate State functioning. From the study it transpires what types of civil associations were generated by the urbanisation process during the period analysed. The monographic analysis indicates that mostly the economic, cultural and social areas required the creation and the intervention of civil associations. The casinos and the social circles also reflected the society’s need for sociability. In Temesvár, this need
was extremely high, the town hosting the largest number of such organisations after the capital city of Budapest during the period of study.

Performing an analysis of the associations’ dynamic with the help of the cadastre can provide an answer to the question of how big was the desire of association and what type of associations were preferred by the residents of Temesvár. The historian Sándor Bősze has estimated that the average number of adherents to associations in the Somogy County was 20-50. It is true that his values covers all types of settlements, not only towns. By comparison, this number is considerably larger in Temesvár. This statement is supported by official statistics: according to Vargha Gyula’s census of 1878, the average number of association adherents was 363. However, if we exclude the mutual financial aid associations (which comprised more than 5000 members), their number decreases to 190. The statistics made by the future Town Mayor Geml József show an average of 186, but these values do not fully reflect the truth, as we know that in this period there were many smaller or bigger association groups which only existed ‘on paper’, or barely had members, and which were excluded from these censuses.

The most significant part of the Temesvár associational life concentrated in the hands of the Hungarian and the assimilated elites. As mentioned above, the effective working of an association often depended on the relations, the wealth, or the presence of a charismatic leader from the local elite, who could attract in his gravitational area other elite members, until the coagulation of a forming group of local prestige. In general, civil organisations, beside their intrinsic goals, were attractive as long as they could add to the social prestige of their members who acted in the public sphere.

The dismantlement of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy halted the development of the process of civil organisation of Hungarian extract in Temesvár. After the redesign of the region’s borders, the new national states regarded with distrust these institutions related to the old regimes, therefore all the civil associations created during the Compromise period were dissolved. However, some civil organisations that were not necessarily related to the Hungarian ethnic group, like those organised on ethnic ground (other than Hungarian), such
as charity, choir or the agrarian society linked to the German ethnicity, after a period of reorganisation, could continue unhindered their activity in during the Interwar period.

If the new State power could be assured of the political loyalty of the civil organisations, it could put to use their decades of experience. In some fields there was no longer a need for the associations’ activity, as they were taken over by the state directly. An eloquent example is the case of the Fire Brigade or the case of the Southern Hungary’s Museum Association of History and Archaeology, where the museum was separated from the rest of the association, nationalised and later became the Bánság Museum. An interesting case was the Arany János Association: during the Compromise period one of its goals was the cultural ‘magyarisation’ of Temesvár’s minorities. After the town migrated to the Romanian Kingdom and after the relief of the political climate, following a reorganisation, the association could pursue its activity as the most important cultural forum of the Hungarian (now) minority.

In my study I have presented a part of the public sphere – the development of associational life in Temesvár during 1867-1919. The Temesvár associational movement mostly fits the general process of Hungarian associational live development. However, it is proven that it differs in many aspects from the national trends and tendencies. The differences originate from the separate development of the region’s political and demographic history. The minority of Hungarians, who nevertheless represented the state authority, have influenced in certain ways the direction and the movement of the civil associations. Besides, the contribution of the associational life to the town’s modernisation is evident. I am convinced that, beyond the local specificities –which limited the autonomy of these civil institutions from the local state authority–, in absence of these civil organisations, Temesvár’s “American style” development during the Austro-Hungarian Empire period would have been unconceivable.
PUBLICATIONS IN THE DISSERTATION’S AREA OF INTEREST

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