

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

Title: The Political and Social Weekly *Máramaros* (1865): Its Founding, Early History, and Role in Shaping the Regional Public Sphere

Keywords: press history, provincial press, regional public sphere, locality, regional identity, Máramaros County, nineteenth century, readers' letters, women's writing, writing practices.

Synthesis: The dissertation examines the founding of the political and social weekly *Máramaros*, its early history, and its role in shaping the regional public sphere of Máramaros County. Launched in Máramarossziget (now Sighetu Marmației) in 1865, it was the region's first regularly issued periodical. Its significance lies not only in the establishment of a new print medium but also in its rapid emergence as a key site for articulating local social, economic, and cultural concerns and shaping regional self-understanding. The dissertation proceeds from the premise that the provincial weekly operated according to a logic distinct from that of metropolitan newspapers with national reach: its institutional embeddedness, material and relational resources, circle of contributors, and modes of public intervention differed in important respects from those of the metropolitan press. In both Hungarian and international scholarship, the study of local and regional newspapers has generally been confined to the domain of local history; such newspapers have only rarely been examined as sites of social practice and cultural meaning-making or as objects of press-historical inquiry in their own right. Against this background, the present study approaches *Máramaros* not simply as a source for local history, but as a medium through which regional society, cultural practices, and forms of regional publicness can be analysed together. The dissertation contributes to a richer understanding of the region and its cultural practices, to a more differentiated view of the nineteenth-century Hungarian provincial press, and, more broadly, to a more comprehensive account of nineteenth-century press history and periodical culture.

The primary source base of the dissertation consists of the surviving runs of *Máramaros*, with particular emphasis on the first nine annual volumes published between 1865 and 1873. This material was examined systematically, issue by issue, and organized into a database that formed the basis for the subsequent case studies. Later volumes were consulted selectively through targeted searches and thematic filtering, in line with the specific questions addressed in each part of the analysis. Alongside the newspaper itself, the

dissertation draws on other contemporary periodicals, archival documents, private correspondence, and memoirs and other autobiographical writings. Administrative records relating to the authorization of the weekly were especially important for reconstructing the circumstances of its founding and early history, while the surviving correspondence of István Szilágyi and Klára Lövei helped clarify the personal relationships and networks underpinning the newspaper, even though these materials preserve only fragmentary evidence concerning editorial practice and day-to-day collaboration. Methodologically, the dissertation combines systematic source analysis with close reading, qualitative content analysis, and contextual interpretation.

The dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter sets out the research questions, presents the source base and methodology, and situates the inquiry within the relevant theoretical and historiographical debates, with particular attention to press history, locality and regionality, and the study of the provincial press. The second chapter reconstructs the sociohistorical context of the founding of *Máramaros*: it examines the county's demographic, confessional, and cultural setting, the history of printing in Máramarossziget, the political and legal conditions governing newspaper publication during the Provisorium, the local circumstances in which the weekly was established, the authorization process, and the material, human, and institutional resources that made its early operation possible. The third chapter turns to the paper's representations of the county and its inhabitants, analysing how its news items and feuilleton texts constructed an image of the region, framed its social and ethnic diversity, and articulated representations of rural culture and the peasantry. The fourth chapter examines readers' letters to explore the functioning of the regional public sphere, focusing on forms of participation, the social and geographical profile of correspondents, and the mediating role of editorial practice. The fifth chapter explores women's writing in the public sphere through the case of Klára Lövei, tracing her writing practices, authorial positions, and the relationship between private correspondence and published texts. The sixth and final chapter brings these lines of inquiry together in a synthesis of the dissertation's main findings.

The principal conclusions of the dissertation may be summarized as follows:

1. The founding of *Máramaros* was not the outcome of the personal initiative of a single editor or publisher, but the product of a complex regional constellation shaped by the political circumstances of the Provisorium, the county's internal power relations, and the human, social, and institutional resources available locally.

2. The circumstances surrounding the weekly's founding suggest that, under certain circumstances, the periphery could offer more favourable conditions for launching and sustaining a political and social newspaper than were available in the capital.
3. For the local intelligentsia, *Máramaros* functioned as a space in which public writing could be learned, practised, and refined. This helps explain both the sustained involvement of contributors and the large number of manuscripts submitted to the editorial office.
4. The texts through which the weekly represented the county and its inhabitants performed a dual function: inwardly, they strengthened local identity and a sense of shared belonging; outwardly, they articulated and defended county interests within a broader public sphere.
5. Although the newspaper drew on stereotypes inherited from earlier travel writing and ethnographic description, it reworked them in accordance with local interests. Negative characterizations were softened, reinterpreted, or given more positive meanings. At the same time, the most consequential division in these texts was not simply that between nationalities, but that between the educated strata aligned with the Hungarian national idea and the rural population they described.
6. The analysis of readers' letters shows that, in the nineteenth-century provincial press, the letter did not function as a narrowly delimited genre, but rather as a capacious discursive frame. Reports, polemics, declarations, and self-justificatory texts could all appear in epistolary form, and this flexibility made the letter particularly well suited to accommodating diverse forms of public participation.
7. Although the correspondence published in *Máramaros* came from across the county, the social profile of its contributors indicates that access to the public sphere remained limited. Most correspondents came from educated local milieus and, even when speaking in the name of "the people," reproduced the social and symbolic distance between the intelligentsia and the rural population.
8. Editorial interventions show that the newspaper functioned as a controlled public sphere. The paper provided space for polemic and the exchange of views, but it also regulated participation by setting limits on tone, content, and acceptable forms of public positioning.
9. The dissertation makes a substantial contribution to the reconstruction of Klára Lövei's public and private writing practices. It identifies nearly two hundred letters written by or addressed to her, as well as 270 texts published in periodicals,

approximately eighty per cent of which appeared in *Máramaros*. This body of material makes it possible to situate her much more precisely within both the regional and the wider public sphere.

10. Klára Lövei's texts published in the regional paper are structured around two distinct but related modes: reportage and recollection. When read alongside her private correspondence, these texts show that memory functioned as a means of local anchoring, self-legitimation, and the production of locality.
11. The weekly was one of the principal media through which locality was produced. Through its regular rhythm of publication, its selection of news and themes, and its recurrent forms of self-description, *Máramaros* constructed a coherent spatial and social horizon within which the region emerged as a shared frame of reference.
12. The case of *Máramaros* shows that the nineteenth-century provincial press cannot be regarded as marginal. Its modes of operation, editorial practices, and public functions make it indispensable to a more nuanced understanding of nineteenth-century press history as a whole.