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**THE TRANSYLVANIAN ECONOMIC ELITE IN
THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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Kolozsvár

2016

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Abstract

Keywords: *Transylvania, Oradea, dualistic era, economic and political elites, multiculturalism, urbanization, industrialization, architecture, Rimanóczy family, entrepreneurs and managers*

One of the recurring themes of *contemporary historiography* is that of the elite and especially the economic elite. Consequently, the present study is aimed at offering a detailed analysis of the role of the elites in the economic life of Transylvania at the beginning of the 20th century.

Transylvania has experienced an accelerated development in the last two decades of the 19th century, and this economic and social momentum has naturally prompted the formation of a more or less wealthy social class that has very much left its mark on the economic, the political, and the social development of this region.

Hence, it is my conviction that an analysis of the role of this economic elite within the developmental context is relevant and beneficial for the recognition of a Transylvanian developmental model, and that such a study based on an interdisciplinary approach can offer a new perspective on the topic under discussion.

The researched time period, i.e. the beginning of the 20th century, is a most appropriate one for this investigation, since it is at the height of the relative economic maturity and political as well as social stability of the city of Oradea and its region.

In addition, I wish to elucidate the position and the role of these economic elites and their possibilities for influence on the development of Transylvania. Thus, my aim is to define, characterize, and study the economic elite of Transylvania at the beginning of the 19th century and its dynamics within the context of local development.

Generally, the economic elite has played an important role in the cultural and political life of Transylvanian cities. Therefore, I propose for the purposes of a case study a city which has had a distinct developmental trajectory within the development of this region. Preliminary analyses show that the most spectacular development has been made by the city of Oradea in the period between 1890 and 1910, which has led to its rapid rise to the level of the developed cities of this region.

I believe that the analysis of the economic elite of Oradea, as a case study within the context of its development, will offer us a clear picture of the elite and its role in the development of the city. At the same time, I wish to present, as a specific case study, the Rimanóczy family, which belongs to this elite category and has contributed to the development of the city at the beginning of the 20th century.

The structure of the study

- *In the first chapter*, Methodology and theoretical background, I propose a reassessment of the scholarly literature, the disciplinary delimitation of the research subject, and a presentation of the research theories on the elites in general and on special (economic, cultural, and multi-positional) elites. In this first chapter, I also present the sources, research methods, questions, and hypotheses.

Methodology and theoretical background. Due to its complexity, the present research needs first a detailed reading of the studies published so far and the establishment of a new system for the evaluation and analysis of the methods used and proposed by other authors.

According to its specific character, the research topic needs a multidisciplinary approach. In this case, the various methods used by each discipline can offer important partial contributions to answering the questions raised within my thesis.

Research questions and hypotheses. My scholarly aim is to determine the composition, as well as the role and the position of these economic elites, along with their capacity for influence on the development of Transylvania, taking as a starting point the research of György Lengyel. Additionally, I also wish to answer the question whether these elites are in a multi-positional situation within the decision hierarchy.

The disciplinary delimitation of the subject. The researched subject is located within a multidisciplinary area of the history of the 20th century,

within which the study of social, political, cultural, and economic phenomena is undertaken from a historical as well as sociological perspective.

The historical context and the socio-economic analysis can offer a general framework for the study of social phenomena through identifying or creating research models which can present an image as clear as possible of the economic elite at the beginning of the 20th century in Transylvania.

Defining the problem. Currently, Transylvanian historiography presents us with very few researches on the economic elites of this region in the discussed period. Thus, the present research is aimed at offering a complete analysis by using the methodology developed within contemporary historiography. At the same time, this study is also directed at defining the economic elite of Transylvania and at analysing the economic elite of a specific city, as well as at presenting a specific family which has contributed to the development of the local economy for several decades.

A reassessment of the scholarly literature. The chosen field of research allows the use of different approaches specific for the domain of this research, through which we can obtain relevant information and research tools, and on the basis of which the formulation of hypotheses can be scientifically validated.

Accordingly, I propose the examination of the written works of renowned scholars like Mattei Dogan, Vilfredo Pareto, Laswell Harold D. și Abraham Kaplan, Lengyel György, C. Wright Mills, and Robert Putman

In the second chapter, The economic and social situation of Transylvania at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, I

wish to briefly present the society of Transylvania from the perspective of its development and of regional inequality. Simultaneously, I put a special emphasis on the multicultural character of this region, on the characteristics of Transylvanian society, and on the specifics of the economic life of Transylvania at the beginning of the 20th century.

In the third chapter, , An elite model. Oradea's economic, cultural, and social elites at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century I present the elements and factors of urban development from the perspective of political and economic life, along with the social changes which have taken place in the researched period.

The subchapter entitled, *The influences of Oradea's economic elites in the political and social life principally aimed at confirming the statements and hypotheses of the research and also presents the local elite of Oradea from the viewpoint of their birthplace, functions fulfilled, and economic role.* At the same time, I have also tried to offer an answer to the question whether we can speak of a multi-positional elite within the city of Oradea at the beginning of the 20th century.

The subchapter entitled *The Rimanóczy family. The place and the role of Rimanóczy's in the political, economic and social life of Transylvania at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and also deal with themes such as the family and its role within the economic development of the city, competition politics – a model for successful businesses, the implementation and finishing of a project, the testament of a successful entrepreneur, a successful business, and the economic situation of the family at the beginning of the 20th century.*

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