

## THE CHANGES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND LIFE CONDITIONS IN ROMANIAN CITIES

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### Introduction

Oradea, is located on the west part of the Hungarian Lowland, in the ravine of the Crisul Repede River, at the Bihor Mountains. During the period of the socialist regime, till the 'Revolution', (the most common name for the Romanian turning-point in 1989), Oradea was a very important industrial centre. The city is a centre for aluminium metallurgy, huge machine factories and the production of building materials. Oradea was also the local administrative centre of the Bihor. Being a typical industrial city, Oradea can be used as a typical example of the systemic, economic, and social transformation process. Nowadays, Oradea has more than 200 thousand citizens and is one of the biggest 'level-2' city centres in the Romanian hierarchy of cities (Territorial planning of National Territory 1991). Considering the above information, either regarding the size or other features, the city is representative of the seven centres, which have super-regional meaning<sup>1</sup>. It is also typical of the set of seventy-four 'level-2' cities (Ianoş, Talanga 1994, Wendt 2003 b). Considering the various ethnic structures - similar in four of the seven historical-geographical regions that make up modern Romania, we can present an analysis of the modification of social structure in various ethnic structures (Pop 1991, Ilieş 1998), and some changes of chosen features of the transformation process.

The processes that took place in Oradea has a typical run, characteristic for multi - ethnic cities of former Hungary. Oradea's border location is conducive to the intermingling of ideas, people, capital and the western style of life, which makes the rate of the change faster in comparison to the rest of Romanian cities such as Crişana and Transilvania (Benedek, Nagy 2003). The trans-border location of the city lying on the Hungarian-Romanian border in the Bihor region (Hajdu Bihar) influences the development of international co-operation in the area (Wendt 2003 a); an area in which the city functions in two euro-regions<sup>2</sup> with its own active input (Ilieş, Horga 2001). In comparison to another Romanian cities, the process of systemic transformation and the perception of the democratic system moving more quickly (Wendt 2002, 2003).

The characteristic of variations in social structure was made by analysing structural changes: ethnic, religious and linguistic among the citizens of Oradea, while also trying to penetrate the reasons behind the processes. The changes in personal structures in Oradea appear to have run a similar course, common for the majority of Romanian cities in the Crişana, Transilvania, Maramureş and Banat regions. However, it has been noticed that there is a very special scale and rate of the change which take place in Oradea in comparison to the rest of the cities in North, West and Central Romania e.g.: in Baia Mare, Timişoara, Cluj-Napoca. The studied social structure changes, negative rate of birth, negative migration balance, re-emigration linked with the Hungarian capital stock have influenced the series of phenomenon taking place in the cities of the mentioned regions.

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<sup>1</sup> In the hierarchic Romanian city layout, the capital is on the level "0", and on the level "1" there are: Iasi, Brasow, Cluj -Napoca, Constanta, Craiova, Galati, and Timişoara.

<sup>2</sup> Euroregions including Oradea: "Karpaty", "Dunarea-Cris-Mures-Tisa", and transborder co-operation of Bihor and Hajdu Bihar regions.

## **The development of the city before the Revolution**

The beginnings of the city are found in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, although there are some notes about the settlement in the region dating from the Bronze Age. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Biharia, which was in the neighbourhood of Oradea, became the centre of Menumoruta. The city co-operated with Byzantium and accepted Orthodox Christianity. Oradea adopted Biharia's functions in time of the Hungarian Kingdom, which at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century took the possession of parts of present-day Romania; Crisana and part of Transilvania, making Oradea a Roman-Catholic bishopric. The episcopate began activities to Christianise the people in Roman-Catholic church. The first written information about the city comes from 1113, when Varadinum (Romanian - Oradea; Hungarian - Nagy Varad; Polish - Wielki Waradyn) was presented as the region's largest settlement, which succeeded the function of the main centre from Biharia which was in ruins. At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the Middle Ages, Oradea, which is located between Transilvania and ethnic areas of the Hungarian Kingdom, became an important trade centre. Furthermore, a citadel was built there to protect the citizens of Oradea. The short period of Turkish rule in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, ended by the Austro-Hungarian incorporation of the region, brought several changes to Oradea. After joining Hungary, Oradea became the largest Catholic centre in modern Romanian territory and was developing thanks to its convenient trade location. The city enjoyed its most prosperous period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when many city manors came into existence and the city reached its present urban and architectonic shape. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city had its first street lights, a new Town Hall and a power plant were built and a tramline was started.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Oradea Mare (the Great Oradea) consisted of Oradea-Olosig, Oradea-Orasul Nou, Oradea-Subcetate and Oradea-Velenta was a multi-cultural city, which had approximately 18 thousand citizens. There were not only Hungarian minorities but also Romanian, Saxons and Jews. Oradea became either a significant industry (mining industry) or financial and trade centre due to Hungarian and German investments. At the same time, the city appears to have been a crucial educational, cultural and art centre and also a popular health resort, famous for Baile Felix (Felix Spa) located near-by. For the Habsburg Europe of that time, Oradea was a kind of a gate leading to the East, to the Black Sea. After the First World War, Oradea became a part of the Romanian Kingdom and for a very short time came back to Hungary when the Second World War ended. In socialist Romania, until the Revolution of 1989, Oradea was an administrative centre of the Bihor region and developed similarly to other socialist cities.

The period of central economy in Romanian cities shows that development in the cities of the region was typical for the towns of socialist Europe (Domański 1997). The main features of post-socialist cities in Romania, when comparing them to similar Polish centres which differ from market economy cities, are: industrial employment, full centralisation of administration, accidental social structure of settled people and politics depending on capital. Furthermore, architectonic monotony and disrespectful value of the area are observed (Węclawowicz 1996). We often find a dominance of huge accommodation complexes often devoid of accurate service infrastructure in the functional structure of Romanian cities in comparison to Polish towns. Unfortunately, the deprivation of old districts is also noticed and typical for many Romanian cities. The deprivation is connected with the problem of still unregulated estate property law either of the town's area or its buildings. The very complicated past of the region strongly left its impression on the social structure changes leaving the region ethnically different with a more restrictive totalitarian system.

## **The changes of ethnical, religion and language structures in Oradea after the year 1990**

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Romanian cities. In 2003, Oradea had 206,5 thousand citizens which was one third of the județ. The modification of the social structure including ethnic, religious and linguistic structures of the city are the most important changes during the transformation period in Oradea and the rest Romanian cities. In 2003, Oradea had 206,5 thousand citizens which was one third of the județ (province) Bihor population and 72% of the population of the cities in the region. Typically for the cities of such size, with dominant administrative, education and service functions, the rate of femininity is 110% while 52,4% is the participation of women in the whole population<sup>3</sup>. The average rates of occupancy, where the area is 111,2 km<sup>2</sup>, was 1857 people per km<sup>2</sup> which was down in comparison to the year 1992 by about 7,2%. The decrease of citizens in the social structure of the cities seems to be the most important change. In 2002, the number of births was 2289, the number of deaths was 1875 and it appears to have a decreased value equalling 414, which makes the rate of birth -2. Additionally, the balance of migration goes together with the decline in the birth and high death rate. The phenomenon is connected with the great number of departures of Romanian Hungarians, Germans and Jews. However, the dominant influence on the migration has the Hungarian minority. In 2002, the number of refugees was 1909, while the number of emigrants was 1665, which gives a negative migration balance of 244 people. In one year, together with the negative rate of birth, the population of Oradea declined by about 658 people which is 3,2% and during the examined period of time (i.e. 1992-2002) declined by 17,3 thousand which is 8%.

While analysing the data presented above, it should be remembered that the facts only illustrate a kind of "numeric dimension" which, in fact, without additional, more detailed research, is very difficult to analyse. Without information about the number of births and deaths (for instance:

**Tab. 1.** Changes at ethnical structure of Oradea populations

Ethnical groups	2002 (%)	1992 (%)	2002/1992 (%)
Gypsies	1,19	0,95	125,26
Romanians	70,35	64,43	109,19
Slovaks	0,18	0,21	85,71
Hungarians	27,51	33,58	81,92
Germans	0,27	0,43	62,79
Jews	0,08	0,13	61,53
Bulgarian	0,01	0,02	50,00
Others	0,41	0,25	160,00

Source: Own data based on: *Direcția Județeană de Statistică Bihor*, 2002, Oradea.

Gypsies and Romanians), it is very difficult to say in which part of the table the increase of Gypsies in Oradea is a result of the birth rate, and in which part it is the result of migration. Despite such problems, the information about the size of the absolute changes illustrates, to some extent, the city's power of interaction on a chosen ethnic group.

During the period being analysed, the number of citizens decreased from 223,8 thousand in 1992 to 206,5 thousand in 2002. The biggest changes in ethnic structure took place among the German, Jewish and Bulgarian minorities. The Romanian Germans was the largest minority considering the number of emigrants. From the whole amount of the German citizens, 40% left for Germany, mainly for economic reasons (Benedek, Schreiber 2001). The same situation applies to the Romanian Jews from Oradea who emigrated to Israel or the United States.

<sup>3</sup> The following data are based on: *Direcția Județeană de Statistică Bihor*, 2002, Oradea

Additionally it should be remembered that Oradea was the biggest centre of Romanian Jews as well as a strong financial centre. The properties can still be admired in the city's architecture including the synagogue.

The migration process of the Romanian Hungarians is very similar to those mentioned above but on the larger scale and is particularly prevalent among the youth and people with higher education. The last survey taken in Oradea and Cluj-Napoca showed that nearly 45% of Hungarian youth plans to leave Romania for Hungary either permanently or to study. However, the economic motivation, in this case is less meaningful than in the Romanian Hungarians' case which distinguishes them from the Romanian Germans. The Romanian Hungarians place the greatest emphasis on family connections, which are very strong in this region, making the adaptation process easier (Benedek, Nagy 2003). An additional factor which makes the Hungarian more attractive is the pro-Hungarian politics, created by the Prime Minister V. Orban, which was institutional in its character and was a reason for much interpolation in the Hungarian and Romanian Parliament.<sup>1</sup> Even when, at the end of the 90s, the lessening of Romanian-Hungarian migration was understood (Horga, Brie 2001). This is not connected with the fact that the migration tendency is weakening but rather with the fact that the groups of emigrants are getting smaller and smaller. The clear progress of the city's 'Romanianization' causes similar changes in the ethnic structure throughout the region of Crișany and Transilvania (Benedek, Nagy 2003)

The essential outflow of the Hungarian and German population is balanced by the process of migration to Oradea, which includes mainly Romanian people coming from rural regions and Gypsies. The percentage of Gypsies among the city population increased by approximately 0.7% and 15.4% and enlarged the total amount of Oradea's population by about 1400. City functions had a significant influence on the city's migration; that is, the shift from being a dominant industrial and military centre to a city of services with an educational, tourist and medical character. We should emphasise the special educational function of the city, which has four universities. More than 30 thousand students attend to the largest of them, which is a state university. Many of the students travel great distances to attend university in Oradea. It is absolutely understood that the Oradea University plays a significant regional role encircling its influence on the North and Northwest of the country because the nearest universities are only in Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara.

**Tab. 2.** Changes at maternal language structure of Oradea populations

Ethnic groups	2002(%)	1992(%)	2002/1992(%)
Gypsy language	0,52	0,47	110,63
Romanian	70,68	64,82	109,04
Slovak	0,18	0,21	85,71
Hungarian	28,10	33,59	83,65
German	0,17	0,28	60,71
Others languages	0,35	0,63	55,56

Source: Own data based on:  *Direcția Județeană de Statistică Bihor*, 2002, Oradea.

The variations in the linguistic and religious structures are a result of migration processes where the dependence is proportional. When we compare the data presenting the ethnic origin and language differences we see that the group which is the most linked with its own language are Slovaks and Greeks (Bențe 2001). At the same time we can observe many, approximately 1.2 thousand Hungarian and 0.7 thousand Romanian, language differences in relation to the number of people declaring their ethnic membership. To put it another way, it inevitably makes

the Romanian language more attractive as a formal language than Hungarian language, which may be the result of the increase in ethnic conscious among people who come from mixed marriages (Muresan 1999).

When we compare the number of people who declare their ethnic and linguistic membership we will notice that the strongest ethnic group in Oradea which assimilates the best is the German group and the Gypsies. In the case of the Germans, in 1992, 67% of the population declared German as the mother tongue while ten years later only 63% did. In the case of Romanian Gypsies, the number decreased in a similar way, from 50% in 1992, to 46% in 2002. But for the hermetic population of the Gypsies, it is typical to use and declare the language which is used as a mother tongue. All in all, in the territories inhabited by the Romanian or Hungarian Gypsies, Romanian or Hungarian are declared as mother tongues.

The crucial factor in social changes, though difficult to present in statistics, is the democratisation of lifestyles and the beginnings of civic society. Thanks to this change, some people of Hungarian origin, who previously declared Romanian as their mother tongue, now declare Hungarian (Horga, Brie 2001). What is more, knowing Hungarian helps to find legal or even illegal work in Hungary in the case of migration (Balașco 2003).

However, when we compare ethnic, religious and linguistic modifications must remember that the deepest changes took place in the sphere of religion. Additionally we have to say that the pressure of the system on the religious sphere was the strongest. It was the demonstration in Timișoara, to protect the Hungarian Vicar Laszlo Tokes, which started the Romanian Revolution. When we look at the problem of religious attachment in a traditional way, after making some simplification, it can be said that, positively, the majority of Romanian ethnic people is Orthodox or Greek-Catholic (Damsa 1994), Hungarian and German ethnic people are Roman-Catholic or Calvinist (Zamfirescu 1992). According to the data presented in the table above, the deepest changes took place only in these three religious groups.

Among the six churches, which had more than one thousand members in the year 1992, such as Orthodox, Calvinist, Roman-Catholic, Pentecostal, Greek Catholic, Baptist, only the Pentecostals and Baptists have consolidated their position. The Calvinist and Roman-Catholic churches had the serious losses considering the number of members, which dropped from 10.5 thousand to 6.5 thousand in the examined time. When comparing the percentage of the partic-

**Tab. 3.** Changes at religion structure of Oradea populations

Ethnical groups	2002(%)	1992(%)	2002/1992(%)
Evangelic CA	0,17	0,10	170,00
Adventist	0,30	0,18	167,67
Pentecostal	4,66	3,56	130,90
Atheism (as an idea)	0,11	0,09	122,22
Baptist	3,58	3,04	117,76
Evangelic PS	0,14	0,12	116,67
Orthodox	58,94	55,02	107,12
Greek-catholic	3,38	3,40	99,41
Roman-catholic	11,26	13,28	84,79
Calvin	16,15	19,60	82,40
Unitarian	0,11	0,14	78,57
Mozaic	0,08	0,13	61,54
Without religion	1,12	1,34	83,58

Source: Own data based on:  *Direcția Județeană de Statistică Bihor, 2002, Oradea.*

ipation of the ethnic and religious groups in 2002 it is possible to say, that the numbers of Roman-Catholic and Calvinist church members are similar to the percentage of the Hungarian minority. However, when we consider that there is 70% of the city's population is Romanian, we must notice that only 62% declared Orthodox and Greek-Catholic membership. In the last case, i.e. considering the Greek-Catholic church as well as the Orthodox Church, we should indicate that mission activities are very visible especially in the Pentecostal, Evangelic CA and Adventist churches.

Even so, looking at the weakening of the Orthodox Church, we can notice a kind of development of young churches in Romania, like: Adventist, Evangelic CA, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Evangelic PS. Each of the mentioned churches strengthened its number of members in the described time by approximately 7% for the Evangelic PS, to even 50% in the case of the Adventists. Truly speaking, if we overlook the Pentecostal and Baptists churches, we are actually dealing with groups numbering less than one thousand members, and we must add that the number of conversions may be alarming in the Orthodox Church.

When we consider the changes in the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic churches, we notice that the changes in the Roman-Catholic and Calvinist churches are easier to explain. The decrease of worshippers is strictly linked with the emigration processes of Hungarian and German peoples and the unfavourable demographic and ethnic structure of those groups. It is observed that usually only young people emigrate, and the old ones alternatively limit the number of worshippers, which is, excluding the migration processes, connected with the natural process of human change.

Regarding the correlation between the ethnic groups and the religion declared among Romanian, Hungarian and German citizens, we must say that the analyses of the Gypsy populations seem to be very interesting. In general, the Gypsies declare themselves to belong to the dominating religious community in the given region in which they live. For instance the Gypsies who live among the Romanians very often declare themselves to be Orthodox and those who live among the Hungarians declare themselves to be Roman-Catholic (Zamfir, Zamfir 1993). Such a situation may be connected with the strong attempt to avoid the possibility of conflicts which could eventually come from a classic native-versus-outsiders relation. The situation of the Gypsies, who live in a sub-standard district of the city, is different. They mainly described themselves as a people without any religion.

## **Changes at the life conditions in Oradea**

Oradea is a city which, probably, benefited the most thanks to the political and economic changes after the Revolution. The Democratic Party (DP) governs the city together with the party representing the Hungarian minority (HDUR). Both parties are in opposition to the party which currently governs the country. The co-operation of these two parties (the DP and the HDUR) is positively seen as a power, which creates the basis of a civic society and differs from other cities where the parties have a national character (e.g. the party in Cluj-Napoca). New work places, mainly in the services, were created thanks to cross-border co-operation and funds coming from Hungarians and Italians. Together, the political transformation, the liberal politics of the city's authority and the economic development let the state arrange and regulate, to a larger degree than in other cities. Earlier, before 1996, properties were mostly owned by the city or the state. However, the rise of people's wealth led to the situation in which most of the city properties (90%) were purchased by private owners who started to invest in many buildings. Two new districts of detached have been built, which may be a sign of a differing geographical structure in the city which is slowly beginning to have a layout typical for free economies.

Nearly all the service branches were privatised, from education (three private universities) to the health services (19 private surgeries) and whole chains of stores. The Hungarian and Italian capital made the medium and small factories dominant in the economic structure of the city and

caused the level of unemployment to drop in Oradea, making the rate of unemployment the lowest in the country. In Oradea 97.5 thousand people are employed: 2.1% work in agriculture, 48.5% in industry, 15.6% in trade, 8.9% in transport, 6.1% in medical care, 6.05% in education, 2.1% in administration and 10.7% in the remaining services. Clear changes took place in public and private transport. Many activities were undertaken to improve the standard of tram networks (124 trams) and bus networks (91 buses). Many roads were renovated and the number of registered cars, especially from Hungary and Italy, has increased.

Among the most rapidly developing services, first place goes to education, culture and tourism. There are 46 primary and secondary schools in Oradea. After 1996, three new private high schools were opened, one of them run by the Baptist church. Six theatres (one of them with a strong Hungarian character) and five cinemas offer a wide variety of culture. The wide range of accommodation - wholly renovated buildings - offer nearly one thousand places to sleep, and furthermore, the city plans to enlarge its hotel base. Oradea is attractive to tourists thanks to the location, architecture, convenient transport and hot-springs. Baile Felix (Felix Spa) was a health resort in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, since 1998, its infrastructure has been modernised. Many new, small family-run hotels have been built and the old socialist ones have been privatised. The new owners improved the tourist base and made their offers more attractive. Now there are many foreign tourists from Western Europe, especially from Germany, who come to relax in the warm water.

Despite the fact that Oradea is one of the cities with the highest standard of living, it still copes with many problems. The most important issue is pollution of the environment, improving and developing the transportation infrastructure and the development of education. However, if the indicated tasks are to be realised, the city needs to have financial means. The only alarming thing is the situation in which most of the decisions, especially in the area of public service, have a central character.

## Conclusions

In the scientific analysis of the Oradea social structure, it can be seen that some crucial changes of ethnic, linguistic and religious structures have taken place in the city. The range of the changes, together with the previously existing processes seem to be deepening. For one, the process of Hungarian, German and Jewish minority migration is easily observed. The negative rate of birth and the negative balance of external migration only barely contribute to the equalisation of internal migration, which, in this case, includes mainly Romanians and Gypsies. When we take into account the multi-ethnic city societies we can find a confirmation of the changes which are modified tendencies of the declared language and religious structures.

After the revolution, the city has been forced to function in a cross-border area and reaps many benefits as a result. The new investments, mainly through exterior capital allow the city to develop and make the standard of living higher. Appropriate city politics concerning euroregion co-operation allows Oradea to receive a series of investments, which are also common for the Hungarian side and allows the city to better develop. Furthermore, we should recognise educational improvements, thanks to which the city has become the most important and the largest educational centre in the Northern and-Western part of the country.

A very crucial change took place in the industry and service branches. The percentage of the workers employed in the mining and energy companies decreased and the percentage of workers employed in education, tourism and trade has increased. The very convenient location, at the crossing of transport routes, make the city an important communications centre. That is why Oradea appears to be a kind of a gateway for the distribution of ideas, people and goods for regions like Maramureș, Crisana as well as Transilvania, which is separated on the South and East by the Carpathian Mountains.

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