



ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ  
SCOSAAR

*Annexe no. 6*

## **SUMMARY OF THE HABILITATION THESIS\***

**TITLE: Press, Elites, and Society in Transylvania (1867-1953): Cultural Education, Interethnic Representations, and Propaganda**

Field of specialisation: **HISTORY**

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\*If the thesis will be written in a foreign language, the text in Romanian will be adapted

The habilitation thesis “Press, Elites and Society in Transylvania (1867-1953): Cultural Education, Interethnic Representations and Propaganda” aims to detail the scientific work conducted after defending the doctoral thesis “*Transylvania Magazine: editorial programme, historiographical and bibliological content (1868-1919)*”, on 24 September 2015, at the Doctoral School of History at the “1 Decembrie 1918” University in Alba Iulia (the title of doctor was confirmed by Order of the Minister of National Education No. 5,954 of 7 December 2015). Based on the experience gained during my doctoral studies, over the past ten years, I have diversified and strengthened my expertise in issues relating to the history of the press in Transylvania, the history of the Transylvanian elites, and the history of interethnic relations, with particular attention to cultural education, identity representations, and the transformations of the press amidst political regime changes.

My scientific activity has led to the publication of two volumes (*Revista Transilvania: program editorial și conținut istoriografic (1868-1919)* [Transylvania Magazine: Editorial Programme and Historiographical Content (1868-1919)], Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2018, 246 p. and *Universul bibliologic în paginile revistei Transilvania 1868-1918* [The Bibliological Universe in the Pages of Transylvania Magazine 1868-1918], Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, 258 p.), 49 studies and articles (including six in Web of Science indexed journals and 18 in Scopus), 19 reviews, and participation in 20 international and 42 national conferences. I have led two projects as director (one postdoctoral and one team project), and participated as a member in six other national or international projects. The results of my postdoctoral research will be published in two volumes: one dedicated to cultural education in the Transylvanian press (1867-1918) and another on the image of the Saxons in the same press. Building on the knowledge gained during this period, I undertook several analyses of Romanian political elites during the interwar period, as well as of periodicals that appeared between the two world wars. This research provided me with a comparative perspective on how the press functioned under three distinct political regimes (the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Greater Romania, and Romania during the implementation of the communist regime). Leading and participating in eight national and international research projects enabled me to collaborate in interdisciplinary teams with Romanian and foreign researchers, developing essential skills across various areas, from practical project management and dissemination of results in diverse academic contexts to organising scientific events and developing competitive funding proposals. This comprehensive experience provides a solid foundation for developing new research initiatives and for coordinating and supervising doctoral projects in press history and culture in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The outcomes of my research have also been shared with the general public through public lectures, press interviews, and participation in debates organised on the occasion of thematic exhibitions or book launches.

The first part of my habilitation thesis outlines the main research directions that emerged after completing my doctoral studies, as well as the achievement and dissemination of my key scientific accomplishments. It also provides an overview of my professional activities, which are essential not only for developing new research topics or designing research projects but especially for coordinating doctoral projects.

The second part of the thesis presents postdoctoral research organised into three main directions, each contributing to understanding how the press served as an instrument of cultural education, information, and mobilisation in Transylvania during a century marked by significant transformations.

The initial phase of my research evolved from a specific case study, an analysis of the *Transilvania* magazine (1868-1918), carried out during my doctoral studies, to a broader examination of the entire Romanian journalistic landscape in Transylvania. Through the two projects I led as project

director, one postdoctoral and the other a team project, I expanded my research scope to include both the major publications of the Transylvanian Romanians (*Transilvania, Familia, Gazeta Transilvaniei, Tribuna*, etc.) and those dedicated to the majority of the rural population, studying the most significant folk gazettes [gazete populare] (*Şezătoarea, Cărţile Săteanului Român, Foaia Poporului, Libertatea, Țara Noastră*, etc.). This new trajectory signified a shift from a traditional, institutional, and content-analysis approach towards a perspective that emphasises the widespread dissemination of educational and informational messages, increased editorial independence from institutional constraints, and readers' active reception and choices.

The research aimed to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of the cultural education process, as documented in Romanian publications in Transylvania between 1867 and 1918. It was organised on three levels: the institutional and legislative framework for their appearance, operation, and dissemination; their impact on the target population; and their function as a communication channel between the elites and the majority. The approach focused on examining articles promoting cultural education, addressing topics such as economic knowledge, hygiene, combating superstitions, alcoholism, emigration, and other socio-economic issues.

The period between 1867 and 1918 is significant because it marks the height of the written press. During this time, the press concentrated more on cultural issues, avoiding political topics due to restrictive legislation following the 1848 Revolution. Throughout this period, the Romanian press in Transylvania intensified its cultural propaganda, drawing inspiration from its Saxon and Hungarian neighbours. In fulfilling their cultural role, periodicals had an advantage over the school system because they could be read in groups, allowing information to reach even the illiterate; therefore, the ideas conveyed had a wider audience.

The importance of the research lies in its being the first systematic examination of the press in Transylvania, focusing on the analysis of cultural education as a means of raising educational standards and emphasising the involvement of Romanian elites in the cultural-educational process. The transnational perspective employed identified both the common themes of cultural education within the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the mutual influences between practices in Transylvania and other parts of the Empire.

As part of the team project, we examined the typology of Transylvanian folk gazettes. This kind of press occupied a position between specialised and mass publications, with educational functions adapted to a rural context. Our analysis was based on a systematic study of representative gazettes (*Şezătoarea, Cărţile Săteanului Român, Foaia Poporului, Opincea, Gazeta Economului*). It enabled us to outline the editorial typology and demonstrate that Romanian folk newspapers in Transylvania during the second half of the 19th century were halfway between European newspapers dedicated to specific socio-professional categories and the press dedicated to large audiences, such as *penny magazines*, in terms of editorial style. The research employed a transnational comparative perspective, analysing the popular newspapers of Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons in Transylvania. The approach uncovered both key similarities and differences. The comparative study showed that, despite the challenges posed by the lack of state support, limited financial resources, and a less literate, poorer readership, Romanian folk gazettes succeeded in creating a viable and sustainable model.

One of the main challenges of the research was to demonstrate the actual, measurable impact of the messages conveyed. By utilising available sources, such as readers' letters published in the press, reports from *Astra* and its branches, memoirs of contemporary figures, and official statistics on the adoption of modern practices, and by analysing them, I was able to construct a picture of the genuine impact of education through the press.

The evidence shows that the Romanian press in Transylvania had a real and significant influence. It helped promote modern agricultural practices, improve hygiene and public health, develop financial education (such as establishing agricultural cooperatives and people's banks), and foster national consciousness and civic mobilisation. The influence was not consistent – stronger in urban areas and in communes with active local elites, and weaker in isolated and poorly literate regions – but it was nonetheless considerable and measurable. It could be linked to the spread of the press in those areas.

While the first direction of postdoctoral research laid the foundations of cultural education through the press in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the subsequent phase expanded the analysis to the interwar period (1919-1930), exploring how the press continued or altered its educational functions in the context of the new Romanian state. The research demonstrated how, against the backdrop of rising literacy levels and significant political changes, the press's message shifted from an academic discourse to one more accessible to the general people, and also how it evolved from a primarily educational and cultural role to a more politicised and partisan one.

Through a systematic analysis of how the press in the first interwar decade reported on the Union of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania with the Old Kingdom, we found that all the periodicals analysed shared several points in common: the unequivocal declaration of the eternity of the Union, the description of commemorative events, and the publication of the Union Resolutions. However, the comparative analysis revealed that while on the first anniversary (1919) the discourse was unanimously triumphalist and emotional, on the fifth anniversary (1923) critical notes emerged regarding the extent to which the promises of 1918 had or had not been fulfilled, and on the tenth anniversary (1928), the discourse became deeply politicised and partisan. This evolution demonstrates the mechanisms of constructing modern national memory, highlighting that a founding event can be unanimously sacralised at the declarative level. At the same time, its interpretations remain heavily politicised, with each party claiming the Union's legacy to justify its contemporary political objectives.

The analysis of the interwar press was continued with a case study dedicated to the publication *Țărânișmului* (1925-1927). This provided a valuable perspective on the functional transformation of the press dedicated to the rural environment in the interwar period. The publication evolved from an initial educational-cultural profile, similar to the popular newspapers of the Austro-Hungarian era, to a predominantly political one after the establishment of the National Peasant Party in 1926. This transformation reflects broader shifts, such as political democratisation, increased literacy, and the politicisation of the rural world, as well as the fact that the expanding state school system gradually assumed the educational role previously played by popular newspapers, while political mobilisation became dominant.

Using press coverage as documentary evidence, we conducted a prosopography analysis of the members of the Romanian National Party/National Party between 1919 and 1926. The research focused on the party elite at the level of the governing bodies, particularly the Executive Committee, as well as the party's parliamentary elite. The analysis revealed that throughout the period 1919-1926, the P.N.R./P.N. remained a party of the intellectual elites, dominated by those in liberal professions, especially lawyers. However, there was an intention to gradually diversify its social base. This structure had direct consequences on the party press, which gradually shifted from elite cultural press to more accessible publications aimed at the electoral mobilisation of the masses.

The research on the 1926 elections aimed to answer the question: Can the press be a credible source in the historiographical analysis of political elections? The examination of the election campaign in the press of various parties offered a fascinating picture of the tactics and strategies used to mobilise voters. Comparing information from the press with prefects' reports, electoral office minutes, and participants' memoirs generally confirms the factual accuracy of press reports. However,

interpretations vary significantly depending on the publications' political bias. The study demonstrated that, with proper methodological precautions, the press can be a valuable resource for understanding electoral processes during the interwar period. Simultaneously, the press is not merely a passive source but an active participant in the electoral process, utilised to mobilise voters, influence opinions, and legitimise or undermine results.

The third main area of research examined the evolution of the *Frontul Plugarilor* [Ploughmen Front] newspaper during the implementation of the communist regime (1945-1953). The *Frontul Plugarilor* party was founded in 1933, with Petru Groza as its leader. However, it became a significant political force only after forming a coalition with the Romanian Communist Party in 1945, when it became the primary outlet for disseminating communist messages among rural communities. My research highlighted the main propaganda themes of the group's press organ. From a methodological perspective, I analysed issues of the *Frontul Plugarilor* newspaper from 1945 to 1953 and categorised the propaganda articles within. The newspaper's editorial style changed markedly over time. Until 1948, it offered a diverse range of content, focusing on topics related to agriculture, health, and combating superstition – without using communist clichés or slogans – and could be regarded as a newspaper aimed at peasants from the interwar period. The year 1948 marked a turning point, when political and propaganda articles began to appear. From 1949 onwards, the *Frontul Plugarilor* adopted entirely communist ideas and slogans, transforming into a propaganda tool, with official communist messages now omnipresent.

The comparison with the Soviet model is relevant. Research into the Soviet press focusing on the rural environment in the 1920s and 1930s (*Krestianskaia Gazeta*, *Bednota*) uncovers notable structural and stylistic similarities with the *Frontul Plugarilor* from 1948 to 1953: the same standardised vocabulary, narrative structures, and rhetorical techniques. Documents from the archives of the former Romanian Communist Party indicate that Soviet advisers influenced the Romanian communist press, and articles were frequently translations or adaptations of material from the Soviet press.

Research into the three main areas – information and cultural education during the Austro-Hungarian period (1867-1918), the development of the press in the interwar period (1919-1930), and the evolution of the press in the early communist era (1945-1953) – has revealed the presence of constants in educational and political communication strategies, along with notable adaptations and flaws caused by different political contexts.

The long-term comparative analysis identified four structural dimensions that go beyond the political periods evaluated.

The first dimension emphasised the ongoing tension between the press's educational and political roles aimed at the general public. During the Austro-Hungarian era, education predominated, yet it also served as covert political resistance. In the interwar years, the political aspect became explicit, while civic education remained accepted. In the early communist period, the political function entirely overshadowed the educational one, turning it into a tool of totalitarian propaganda.

The second dimension revealed the role of the press in national and state-building processes, evident across all three periods analysed, though with varying emphases. During the Austro-Hungarian period, the Romanian press played a key role in shaping and strengthening national identity in opposition to Magyarisation pressures. In the interwar period, publications contributed to debates over the organisational model of the new state. During the communist era, the press became a tool for constructing the socialist "new man".

The third dimension reflected how discourse constantly adapted to the public's receptive capacity, demonstrating that elites recognised that effective communication depends on message accessibility. From the academic discourse of *Transilvania* magazine to the simplified language of



*Șezătoarea*, and from interwar peasantry to the communist *Frontul Plugarilor*, this ongoing change involved notable differences in the content and purpose of the press.

The fourth dimension highlighted the significance of distribution infrastructure and collective reading in magnifying the press's influence during the period studied. *Astra*'s system of mobile libraries, public readings at gatherings or in taverns, distribution through priests and teachers, or through communist cultural centres, all served as mechanisms that enabled a limited number of copies to reach a much broader audience.

We can state that the research has introduced new information into the scientific discourse through a systematic review of over 20 publications covering their entire publication span. Many of these, particularly the folk gazettes, have been overlooked or treated superficially by historiography. More importantly, it offers a long-term perspective (1867-1953) on the development of communication in Romania, pinpointing structural mechanisms that go beyond the traditional divisions between the Austro-Hungarian, interwar, and communist periods.

The third section of the thesis outlines my career development plan. This plan is based on the research and professional experience I have gathered so far and details the main scientific goals I aim to achieve in the short, medium, and long-term. The achievements outlined in the first part of my habilitation thesis underpin my future career strategies, which are organised into three key areas: 1. Scientific career development; 2. Academic career development; and 3. Professional career development.

#### 1. Scientific career development

My research activity for the upcoming period is founded on the experience I have accumulated over the past thirteen years through my consistent involvement in national and international research projects and grants, participation in specialised scientific events, and the publication of my findings in prestigious journals and collective volumes published by renowned publishers both in Romania and abroad.

Intending to pursue a scientific career, I plan to deepen the research areas established to date and simultaneously explore new avenues of scientific inquiry. In this regard, the future approach will be based on three main research axes:

- The history of the Romanian press during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, focusing on the mechanisms of informing, educating, and cultivating readers, without neglecting the ways of influencing public opinion. I will analyse the history of the Romanian press in Transylvania across three dimensions that shaped its development: marginalisation (during the Austro-Hungarian period), integration (during the interwar period), and standardisation (during the early communist period). The research will illustrate the transformation of the Romanian press and society, highlighting how the interwar Romanian state sought to develop coherent policies to integrate the Transylvanian press, and how the communist regime systematically abolished any form of media pluralism.

- The history of the Romanian elites in Transylvania during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, focusing on how they engaged with new realities, developed, and interacted with the majority population, as well as their role in supporting and shaping messages disseminated through the press. The research will examine how these elites addressed the needs of Romanians in Transylvania across three periods (the Austro-Hungarian Empire, interwar Romania, and the early communist era), highlighting the main methods they used to communicate with the majority and the impact of state policies on these efforts. Additionally, the activities of the “fellow travellers” during the communist period, such as those of Petru Groza and the *Frontul Plugarilor*, alongside the

forms of resistance exhibited by the Transylvanian elites against centralist policies and the nascent communist regime, will also be explored.

– The history of relations between Romanians and Saxons in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, highlighting transnational influences and how these relations evolved across three distinct periods and political-social contexts, as described by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Greater Romania, and Communist Romania. The research will be organised into three levels: the organisation and mechanisms of political collaboration; the development of economic relations and competition between the two nationalities; and cooperation or conflict in social and cultural spheres. The analysis will demonstrate how the coexistence of Saxons and Romanians has fostered enduring mentalities and ethno-stereotypes that persist in contemporary Romanian society.

## 2. Academic career development

My research activities, participation in numerous national and international conferences, and involvement in research projects provide strong evidence that the proposed objectives are achievable. At the same time, I intend to engage in a series of scientific activities to enhance my existing skills and acquire new ones.

To this end, the individual dimension involves continuous knowledge updating through participation in courses and workshops on academic management and innovative research methodologies, as well as through the identification of new documentary sources at both national and international levels. The priority is to enhance academic and international visibility through collaborations with researchers and institutions in other countries, participation in mobility programmes (such as internships in archives, visiting fellowships, doctoral schools), submitting applications for international grants (like Horizon Europe and Fulbright), presenting results at conferences, workshops, and interdisciplinary meetings, and building a public academic profile through various channels (including participation in summer schools, media interventions as a historical expert, academic communication on social networks, and contributions to museum projects and exhibitions).

Regarding the institutional dimension, it aims to develop within the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Sibiu of the Romanian Academy through editorial activities in the Institute's journals (*Historia Urbana*, *The Yearbook of the Institute*, *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde*), peer reviews, participation in competition committees for promotion or employment, as well as in doctoral committees. A key aim is to establish and develop partnerships with research institutes, universities, and cultural organisations at both national and international levels, and to contribute to the development of educational policies and research strategies.

Teaching and mentoring will take place within the Doctoral School of History of the School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy (SCOSAAR). It will include recruiting and guiding doctoral students in selecting research topics; providing methodological guidance (choosing appropriate methodologies, processing historical data, adhering to research ethics principles); offering logistical support for the successful development and completion of doctoral theses; integrating doctoral students into the Institute's projects for their training in collaborative research; supporting scholarship and grant applications; encouraging participation in scientific conferences and workshops; assisting with publication; and developing doctoral courses on sources and methods of research in the history of the press, the history of elites, and the history of Romanian-Saxon relations in Transylvania.

## 3. Professional career development

Developing an academic career involves the coherent integration of scientific research with teaching activities, active participation in the academic community, and meaningful contributions to society. The medium and long-term strategy is organised around key priority areas. The first priority is to continue, complete, and leverage current research projects through impactful publications,

presentations at prestigious conferences, and practical applications; as well as to initiate new avenues of innovative research that broaden and diversify the research portfolio. These initiatives will be supported by strengthening and expanding scientific collaborations with international researchers and research centres, aiming to integrate into networks of excellence and enhance academic visibility. I also plan to develop my editorial profile: as editor or co-editor of book collections at international academic publishers; as a member of editorial boards of journals listed in international databases; in coordinating special thematic issues; and in peer-reviewing for high-quality academic publications.

The three areas of research: the history of the press, the history of the elites, and the history of Romanian-Saxon relations, provide a comprehensive view of the transformations of Transylvanian society (1867–1953). The research findings show that the Romanian press in Transylvania was much more than a mere source of information; it served as a strategic tool that shaped public opinion, collective identities, and values, educated and supported societal modernisation, and actively engaged in democratic political competition during the interwar period. However, it also evolved into an instrument of totalitarian propaganda during the communist era. Recognising these mechanisms remains significant for understanding current phenomena of media manipulation and the construction of collective memory.

The proposed career plan aims not only to generate new knowledge but also to guide a new generation of researchers through doctoral supervision, to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities Sibiu, and to develop international collaboration networks.