CZU: 930.85:323.13(498.4)"18/19" https://doi.org/10.59295/lrr2024.13

Asociaționismul cultural românesc din Transilvania și rolul lui în apărarea identității naționale (1848-1918)

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Romanian cultural associationism in Rransylvania and its role in defending national identity (1848-1918). The present study analyzes the impact of cultural associationism on Romanian national consciousness in Transylvania within the historical framework of the 19th century and the early 20th century. Romanian cultural associations and societies in Transylvania, among which ASTRA stands out prominently, played a central role in fostering Romanian culture and strengthening a sense of national belonging. These organizations facilitated broader access to education and cultural enrichment for various segments of the population, including women and the lower social classes. They emerged as crucial instruments in raising awareness of the social and political rights of Romanians in Transylvania. The various cultural initiatives undertaken by these associations contributed significantly to the emergence of an intellectual elite, which played a decisive role in shaping the subsequent political movements at the turn of the century, culminating in the memorable year of 1918. Romanian cultural associationism in Transylvania not only promoted culture and education but also served as a true catalyst for national emancipation and the modernization of Romanian society. It succeeded in bringing together diverse social groups around a common ideal, thus forging a resilient and cohesive national identity.

Keywords: culture, nation, Transylvania, conscience, identity

In psychology, associationism is a theory that prevailed in European thought between the 17th and 19th centuries, based on the idea that mental activity evolves through the association of elementary psychological states and phenomena. Due to these cumulative processes it postulates, the associationist theory has often been referred to as "psychological atomism"[1].

From a historical standpoint, associationism embodies a form of socialization and solidarity among distinct social groups, aiming to unite and harness their spiritual and material resources to elevate the standards of civilization for the members of the association[2].

1 Ion Mânzat. *Istoria psihologiei universale*. Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House. Bucharest: 2007, p. 79.
2 Vasile Dobrescu. Asociaționismul în istoria românilor transilvăneni din epoca modernă postpașoptistă. În: *Simpozion. Comunicările celui de al XIX-lea Simpozion al cercetătorilor români din Ungaria*. Giula: 2009, p. 58.

Naturally, there are notable differences between Western and Eastern European associationism. In the West, it emerged as a system designed to ameliorate the plight of those disadvantaged by the early stages of capitalism, fostering social cohesion and mutual support within specific social groups. It was essentially a swift social response to the effects of "wild" capitalism, striving to balance individual interests with communal needs. Conversely, in the East, associationism assumed an entirely distinct connotation, being perceived as a means of asserting national identity and reshaping political dynamics between coexisting ethno-national groups[3].

The origins of the associationist phenomenon can be traced back to Antiquity, notably in Greece with the renowned School of Athens. The early Middle Ages witnesses a period of intellectual stagnation in this domain, followed by a revival of associative frameworks in late 15th-century Italy. This resurgence was marked by the establishment of the Platonic Academy under the patronage of Lorenzo de Medici, with the explicit aim of republishing Plato's works. In the second half of the 16th century, another academy emerged in Florence, advocating for the development of a standardized literary language, while in Rome, a similar institution was founded with a distinct emphasis on scientific research. The 17th and especially the 18th centuries, driven by the Enlightenment, championed - alongside other progressive ideals - the right to association, marking a profound advancement for European cultural life. In the following century, France set the tone with the prestigious Académie Française. In Central Europe, the Czechs were among the first to organize associationist movements, establishing institutions aimed at systematizing historical knowledge about the Czech people and identifying the best strategies for promoting this knowledge regionally and across Europe. The Hungarians followed suit, engaging in similar initiatives before the revolutionary upheavals of 1848, fostering national consciousness and embedding the literary language within cultural frameworks[4].

Consequently, the theme of associationism, as reflected in the activities of various Saxon, Hungarian, Romanian, and Jewish cultural societies in Transylvania, aligns with a broader European cultural movement. It is also part of a wider set of cultural, educational, and intellectual endeavours primarily driven by the scholarly class. Our analysis, therefore, focuses on a far-reaching cultural movement in which the Romanian population of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș actively participated.

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[3] *Ibidem*, pp. 59-61.

[4] Liviu Maior. Asociaționismul transilvan și modernizarea societății românești (sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului XX) (hereinafter: „Asociaționismul transilvan"...). În: *Schimbare și devenire în istoria României*, Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Bolovan (coord.). Romanian Academy, Centre for Transylvanian Studies. Cluj-Napoca: 2008, pp. 11-13; Camil Mureșanu. Cu privire la asociaționism în istoria culturii. În: *Asociaționism și naționalism cultural în secolele XIX-XX*. Liviu Maior, Ioan Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan (coord.). Romanian Academy, Centre for Transylvanian Studies. Cluj-Napoca: 2011, pp. 15-17; Viorel Faur. Asociaționismul cultural transilvănean în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Considerații generale. În: *Cele trei Crișuri*, 2004. Nr. 4-6, pp. 1-2.

From the second half of the 19th century onward, associationism emerged as a visible phenomenon across Europe, redefining, among other things, the very concept of national struggle—particularly in the eastern regions of the continent[5].

The phenomenon of associationism became particularly conspicuous in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1848, as the events of 1848–1849 played a pivotal role in reshaping collective mentalities, foregrounding the issue of national identity, a fundamental "nation-building" project. This undertaking encompasses to the multifaceted process of constructing or reconstructing a national state and its institutions, while simultaneously fostering a shared sense of community among its citizens. The ultimate goal was to forge a coherent national identity, one that would provide a strong internal structure for the state, particularly in political contexts where such a national state had not yet been fully articulated in its natural political, geographical, and cultural dimensions. The process was fundamentally about cultivating a shared sense of belonging and identity among citizens, often through cultural initiatives. The concept of "nation-building" encompasses both the institutional dimension - focused on establishing a functional state apparatus capable of maintaining order and delivering essential services - and the cultural dimension, which sought to strengthen a collective identity that resonated with the state's governance practices[6].

The revolution awakened the intellectuals to the realities of their socio-political circumstances, prompting a recalibration of public discourse, which became increasingly imbued with national elements. However, such discourse could only exert a meaningful impact unless it reached a social body capable of comprehending and embracing it. From this perspective, associationism played a decisive role in the reception and internalization of national consciousness, beginning with civil and professional groups united by common interests and aspirations. Indeed, national emancipation movements across Central and Southeastern Europe incorporated culture as a central pillar of social and national cohesion, recognizing its capacity to transcend the barriers imposed by political structures[7].

In the decade following the Revolution of 1848, Transylvanian Romanian intellectuals actively sought legal avenues to consolidate national energies in service of cultural and spiritual advancement. Two major options emerged: one advocating for the founding of an "academy" (a concept also outlined in the revolutionary program of May 3/15, 1848) and another focused on establishing a "literary society" (that would address broader cultural needs in alignment with national aspirations). The first group was led by Simion Bărnuțiu and Ioan Maiorescu, while the second, spearheaded by Aaron Florian, brought together intellectuals from Brașov, Sibiu, Cluj, and Blaj. Thus, the majority of Romanian intellectuals gravitated toward the second option, favouring a cultural society with an expansive vision. The following seven years (1852–1859) were marked by deliberations, intellectual ferment,

5 A possible discussion applied to: Miroslav Hroch, *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas,* Prague: 1969.

6 See details on https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0217.xml (accessed on June 24, 2024).

7 Liviu Maior. *Asociaționism și naționalism la românii din Transilvania* (hereinafter: *Asociaționism și naționalism...)*. Școala Ardeleană Publishing House. Cluj-Napoca: 2022, pp. 16-19.

and strategic negotiations among those involved in the project. However, by spring 1860, there was a decisive shift toward concrete action. The socio-political climate of the Habsburg Monarchy had become increasingly favourable, as the neoliberal era ushered in greater freedom of action for the empire's nationalities, including the Romanians. In this auspicious environment, the year 1861 saw the founding of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People (ASTRA). Around the same period, similar initiatives aimed at creating broadly inclusive cultural associations led to the establishment of the "Association for the Culture of the Romanian People in Maramureș" (1861) and the "Arad National Association for the Culture and Advancement of the Romanian People" (1862). Alongside these institutions, numerous other associationist structures emerged, including Romanian Culture Clubs, Reading Societies, Musical Reunions, and Choral Ensembles, which were flourished across Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș. Collectively, they pursued an ambitious cultural agenda, seeking not only to enhance Romanian cultural life but also to improve overall living conditions through initiatives that anticipated broader societal progress. Furthermore, in her monographic study, Eugenia Glodariu identified no fewer than 33 Romanian cultural societies and associations, many of which were founded and led by Romanian students and young intellectuals within the borders of the Austrian Empire[8].

Certainly, "Astra" was the most significant Romanian cultural association within the Habsburg Empire. Its program, inspired by the ideals of the 1848 revolutionary movement, bore the responsibility of disseminating the most pressing political ideas of the time. This was due to a significant shift - resulting from the internal administrative structure of the empire - whereby intellectual energies were redirected from the political sphere to the cultural domain. The prevailing slogan of the period encapsulated this transition: "national culture with united forces". This cultural mission was explicitly stated in Article 2 of Astra's statutes, which outlined its fundamental objective: "the advancement of Romanian literature and the cultivation of the Romanian people in various fields through study, the creation and publication of works, as well as through awards and scholarships for different scientific and artistic disciplines". Furthermore, Astra's statutes were supplemented by the *"Proposals"* of George Barițiu, a document reflecting the journalist's vision regarding the association's objectives. These proposals emphasized the publication of schoolbooks written by Romanian teachers, the establishment and enhancement of public schools, and the study of historical past for the purpose of compiling a "comprehensive history" of Transylvania, in which "historical sources are unified with the most rigorous criticism, sparing no one and taking no sides". Other key objectives included acquiring books from "libraries within the country and abroad", organizing "scientific trips", "compiling a collection of Roman inscriptions (both published and unpublished)", and launching the periodical Transylvania, which would prioritize the publication of historical documents

[8] Eugenia Glodariu. *Asociațiile culturale ale tineretului studios român în Monarhia Habsburgică (1860-1918)*. Musei Napocensis Library. Cluj-Napoca: 1998, pp. 33-147.

in their original form and in translation. Additional initiatives included ethnographic research on traditional Romanian attire, the collection of the five finest Transylvanian Romanian ballads, a study on painting techniques, an investigation into "Romanian agricultural practices", and efforts to improve horticulture, forestry, sericulture, apiculture, and livestock breeding[9].

It is only natural that other nationalities within the empire pursued similar cultural initiatives to consolidate their ethnic identities and national values. A striking example is provided by the Slavic communities, which established cultural associations under the generic title "matiča". The Serbs founded Matica Srpska[10] in 1864, while the Croats established Matiča Ilirska in Zagreb, later succeeded by Matiča Hrvatska, which, after 1874, became a true standard-bearer for the Croatian national movement. Likewise, the Slovaks undertook similar efforts, advocating for the same forms of cultural expression immediately after the 1848 revolutions, ultimately forming Matica Slovenská in 1863 under the leadership of Štefan Moyses, a prominent figure in the Slovak national movement. The cultural activities of this matiča were, however, suppressed by the Hungarian government, which abolished it in 1875 in order to accelerate the denationalization process of the Slovaks[11].

Obviously, Romanian associationism in Transylvania took on a different character compared to that of the Old Kingdom. Here, it became a "repository of modernization on all levels, as a non-governmental initiative"[12].

Historians studying this phenomenon have identified two major phases in the development of Transylvanian associationism:

1. The cultural phase/ stage – extending until 1860;

2. The stage / phase of modernization in all fields which represented a clear direction for defining national identity from the mid-19th century to the first two decades of the 20th century.

Initially, *culture* was the primary focus of the associative movement. However, as the number of associations grew and their objectives became more defined, the

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9 V. Curticăpeanu. *Mișcarea culturală românească pentru unirea din 1918*. Științifică Publishing House. Bucharest: 1968, pp. 59-71; For further details see also Ioan Bolovan. Cultură și politică în activitatea Asociației naționale Arădene pentru cultura poporului român. În: *Cultură și societate în epoca modernă*. Dacia Publishing House. Cluj-Napoca: 1990; Idem. *Asociația națională Arădeană pentru cultura poporului român 1863-1918. Contribuții monografice*. Dacia Publishing House. Cluj-Napoca: 2011.

10 Matiča Srpska is the oldest and most distinguished cultural and scientific institution of the Serbs. It was founded in Budapest in 1826 and later moved to Novi Sad in 1864. The main founders were Jovan Hadzic, Petar Rajic, Andrija Rozmirovic, Gavrilo Bozitovac, Jovan Demetrovic, Josif Milovuk, and Djordje Stankovic. Matiča gathered all Serbs around the idea of preserving and developing Serbian culture, promoting this cultural project to other European nations. It initiated intensive cultural activities, including the establishment of libraries and reading rooms, encouragement of Serbian literature, and promotion of literary language, history, and national consciousness. See V. Curticăpeanu. *Op.cit.*, p. 13; https://novisad.travel/en/culture-single/matica-srpska/ (accessed on May 16, 2024).

11 Viorel Faur. *Op.cit.,* p. 3; V. Curticăpeanu. *Op.cit.,* p. 13-14. Matiča Ilirska was founded on February 10, 1842, as one of the oldest cultural institutions in Croatia. It was established in Zagreb by Count Janko Drašković in collaboration with other key figures of the Illyrian movement, aiming to promote Croatian culture and national identity through literature and education. Its official publication, *Kolo* (1842-1850), popularized various cultural activities. This Matica played a decisive role in the formation of the future Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts. See also https://povijest.hr/nadanasnjidan/osnovana-matica-ilirska-1842/ (accessed on May 16, 2024).

12 Gergely Lorand. *Procesul de nation building și asociaționismul universitar din Europa Est-Centrală*, on http://boocks.google.ro/boocks. (accessed on April 7, 2022).

lower social classes also contributed their own ideas, leading to a reassessment and expansion of action programs.

Politically, especially after 1867, Romanians in Transylvania achieved little, prompting Romanian political leaders to focus on adjacent areas such as culture and economy, hoping that progress in these fields would eventually yield political benefits. Romanian intellectuals skilfully leveraged a "loophole" in Austro-Hungarian legislation (specifically, the Nationalities Law of 1868) which granted all ethnic groups the right to form associations.

As a result, the associative movement heightened awareness of political and cultural realities, exposing the acute lack of socio-political rights and fostering the development of strategies for change. Historian Liviu Maior referred to this approach as "extra-parliamentary action materialized through associationism"[13].

Therefore, the solution of individual associationism, based on voluntarism, had greater chances of success during that period than direct political struggle against state authority. It was a commitment undertaken by each individual, an individual risk invested in the process of national emancipation and societal modernization.

Consequently, in Transylvania, one can speak of a cultural-national associationism that had positive influences on political life as well. Moreover, the *activism-passivism* dispute favoured associationism, as there was complete unity of thought in the realm of cultural activity. Last but not least, Romanian associationism strengthened the intellectual class and the middle social category, forming a foundation for future political actions[14].

Throughout the modern era, Romanian cultural associationism in Bihor integrated into the broader Transylvanian movement, built upon three fundamental principles:

1. Democratization;
2. National identity;
3. Social progress.

The first aspect can be identified in the way members of associations or gatherings were selected. There were no social, financial, or other restrictions. Essentially, anyone could become a member of *Astra*'s branches or various professional, choral, and other reunions These included both urban and rural intellectuals, teachers, clergy, lawyers, bank clerks, as well as ordinary people who regularly participated in general assemblies and various cultural events. Gradually, we also see the presence of women among the members, proving that the feminist movement[15] was gaining strength in Transylvania, especially after 1850. Another important factor is the psychological aspect concerning how ordinary people perceived their role in a cultural association. By voting for the leaders of the association or cultural gathering, they began to understand democratic mechanisms, realizing that they could both vote and be elected. As a result, it was only natural that the fol-

[13] Liviu Maior. *Asociaționism și nationalism…,* pp. 123-126.
[14] Vasile Dobrescu. *Op.cit.,* pp. 63-65.
[15] See in this regard Simona Ştiger. Mişcarea feministă din Transilvania. Constituirea şi evoluţia reuniunilor de femei. În: *Crisia,* 1989, pp. 439-454.

lowing question would arise: "If I can become a member here without restrictions, if I can elect the desired leaders, why shouldn't I be able to do the same in the political sphere?". From this thought process emerges an awareness of the importance of voting and free elections. Through voting, the peasant could determine his own political fate, both as an individual and as part of a nation. Thus, his participation in an association was, in fact, an introduction to democratic life. Moreover, by 1914, "Astra", had managed to establish 87 branches throughout Transylvania, with over 10,000 members. This meant a significant number of people were engaged in practicing liberal and democratic mechanisms, even if only on a micro-cultural level[16].

The second key aspect was strongly reflected in cultural activities (from literary and artistic gatherings to conferences, lectures, theatre performances, pedagogical circles, musical programs, journalistic and philanthropic initiatives, etc) organized by Transylvanian cultural associations and reunions[17].

Finally, social progress also focused on the need for professional development, both individually and collectively. Emphasis was placed on strengthening confessional education in Romanian, rewarding teachers for outstanding extracurricular activities, supporting those who organized village choirs and brass bands, and recognizing achievements in fields such as "horticulture and fruit growing". All these efforts highlight a strong interest in cultural and intellectual advancement on both individual and collective levels.

Of course, the general state of Romanian society in Transylvania during the modern era faced major challenges: a high rate of illiteracy, with culture largely restricted to the elite. However, there was hope, as Romanians in the region demonstrated a strong sense of identity and a desire for socialization and solidarity.

Considering these realities, the Romanian intelligentsia was compelled to structure its discourse on two clearly distinct levels both during the modern era and after the Great Union:

1. A theoretical one, addressed to the elites;

2. One closer to the understanding of the masses, with simple, direct messages, conveyed in accessible language, referencing everyday life.

Moreover, the intellectual class took it upon itself to implement modernizing ideas in the predominantly rural world, using varied and appropriate forms, with the goal of fostering socio-economic and cultural progress[18].

Through these characteristics, Romanian cultural associationism in Transylvania - prior to the Great Union - led to visible transformations within society, which opened itself to new ideas, to modernity, the printed word, a reconsideration of

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16 *Revoluțiile europene din secolul al XIX-lea, asociaționismul și democrația*. www.junimea.pitesteana.ro (accessed on June 15, 2024).

17 For more details see Viorel Faur. *Cultura românilor din Bihor 1849-1918.* „Cele trei Crișuri" Cultural Foundation, Oradea: 1992.

18 Vasile Dobrescu. *Op. cit.,* p. 62. For more details on this topic see Constantin Bărbulescu, Vlad Popovici. *Modernizarea lumii rurale din România în a doua jumătate a secolului XIX și la începutul secolului al XX. Contribuții,* Accent Publishing House. Cluj-Napoca: 2005.

the book's role in society, and a redefinition of the intelligentsia's role as the central pillar of modernization[19].

The national criterion remained a common denominator of Romanian cultural associationism. The main objectives of cultural associations were all subordinated to the national idea, which was a decisive factor in cultural life. Essentially, these objectives aimed at asserting national culture.

Through "Astra", the *national* concept became embedded in village life and continued in the interwar cultural associational movement. Thus, peasants named the cultural institutions founded by various cultural associations *Case Naționale* (*National Houses*), a term later adopted by Dimitrie Gusti and transformed into *Cămin Cultural* (*Cultural Home*). In this context, it acted as a true catalyst for the ethnocultural osmosis of Romanians in Transylvania.

Most associations primarily addressed the rural world, aiming to raise the educational level of the peasantry and, through this, transform them into conscious and socially active citizens.

One of the most pressing issues throughout the 19th century, and especially after 1918, was combating illiteracy. Teachers, members of various cultural associations, and intellectuals played an active role in this effort. Cultural associations and gatherings were seen as key instruments for uniting the Romanian intellectual elite in their mission to educate both children and adults.

Numerous reports in the press of the time regarding the cultural activities initiated by these cultural associations helped shape public opinion in favour of the Romanian population's educational policies in Transylvania.

The essential merit of cultural associations and gatherings was their understanding that meaningful change could only come through solid education, and they acted accordingly. At the same time, the role of the nation in preserving traditions, symbols, and national identity cannot be overlooked, since only by relating to these elements could the consolidation of the nation be achieved[20].

Thus, gradually, through these associations, there was a shift from cultural activism focused on the ideal of political unity to one centred on modernization and openness, on cultural reforms aimed at broadly integrating society and establishing a "social culture"[21].

In this way, an organic process of acculturation took shape, softening the rigidity of social hierarchies. In rural areas, it fostered a kind of peasant encyclopedism that connected peasants and intellectuals through these cultural associations. This type of connection encouraged peasants to overcome mental barriers, as they saw that the "gentlemen" were on their side, offering both advice and financial support. In turn, intellectuals remained connected to the world they often came from, preventing them from becoming detached and from getting used to the idea of

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19 Liviu Maior. *Asociaționismul transilvan...*, p. 98; Vasile Dobrescu. *Op. cit.,* pp. 62-63.

20 Anne-Marie Thiesse. *Crearea identităţilor naţionale în Europa. Secolele XVIII-XX.* Iași: Polirom Publishing House, 2000, p. 116.

21 *** *Cultură şi societate în epoca modernă.* Dacia Publishing House. Cluj-Napoca: 1990, p. 273.

addressing an abstract audience. In reality, this was a model of interaction that maintained a beneficial proximity between aristocrats and peasants[22].

As a result, contact points between villages and cities multiplied, promoting a closer bond between the peasant soul and the intellectual spirit. This led to the formation of individuals with a well-defined national consciousness, capable of successfully opposing any tendencies that could harm national interests, while also rekindling the Romanian peasantry's engagement with culture and progress.

Of course, the urban intelligentsia faced scepticism from the Transylvanian villages, which harboured distrust towards city representatives. This was fully justified, as politicians often visited the peasants only during parliamentary elections, targeting them with demagogic speeches aimed solely at short-term political success. Political disputes and demagogy introduced disorder and immorality into the rural world[23]. It was, in essence, the natural distrust of the peasantry toward anything external to their traditional way of life, which followed different rules and principles.

Moreover, cultural associations proposed ways to modernize village life, especially as significant social transformations were on the horizon. They sought to present village life as a unified whole, where community members played a decisive role. In this regard, they aimed to balance the natural tendency of the rural world toward renewal with the preservation and modernization of tradition. Cultural initiatives were meant to foster a way of life where the community made space for individual agency, while the individual, in turn, embraced the rural norms that ensured cohesion and solidarity within the entire community[24].

New educational methods were also introduced to elevate the level of civilization and culture in Romanian villages. The results became evident in shifting mentalities, which gradually moved away from rigid traditionalism, making room for a new form of tradition (one that preserved memory while fostering openness to change) and encouraging peasant initiative. Consequently, the energy of rural inhabitants was directed both toward cultural development and the integration of modern elements into their lives[25].

Romanian cultural associations in Transylvania played a crucial role in the broader transition from a passive national identity to an active one (what Mircea Platon referred to as "national personality"). This shift moved from an inherited ethnic identity to a consciously assumed national character, continuing the process of national awakening even after 1918 by mobilizing all available energies that would particularly motivate the Romanians to assert their national identity.

These associations stood as a living example of initiative, an expression of freedom on a human scale, and an effective way to embody a cultural idea within a community. The cultural-associative movement sought to align its educational and cultural initiatives with the specific realities of Romanian rural life, fully aware

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22 Mircea Platon. *Op.cit.,* p. 255.

23 Gheorghe Tulbure. *De vorbă cu satele.* Diecezană Publishing House. Oradea: 1932, p. 4.

24 Alexandru Darie, Filip Stanciu. *Educația adulților din mediul rural. Experiențe românești interbelice*. Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House. Bucharest: 1997, p. 23.

25 Alexandru Dima. Şcolile ţărăneşti ale Astrei. În: *Familia,* 1938. Nr. 8, pp. 100-101.

of the organic nature of the peasant world. They did not invent the nation, they structured it[26].

The means through which their culturalizing action was manifested were predominantly oral, with conferences holding the greatest weight, followed by other forms of cultural expression.

Few associations had the funds for printed materials, which is why those that published books and periodicals were far fewer in number compared to those focused on conferences. Only the strongest ones, such as "Astra," were able to consciously and programmatically take on editorial responsibilities.

The truth is that not all cultural associations that operated in Transylvania until the Great Union of 1918 can be considered equal. Some had a more superficial activity, while others were "more cultural," influencing the deeper layers of society. If cultural associationism often proved to be a challenging endeavour that required great tenacity and self-sacrifice, political circumstances - especially after 1867 - confessional differences, and inadequate funding were frequently blamed for these difficulties.

Additionally, it is necessary to outline an overall picture of how Romanians perceived the role of culture and the transformations in collective mentality regarding the importance of knowledge. To better understand these nuances, a deeper explanation and comprehension of the Romanian associational movement are required, as it gained momentum in Romanian society with its opening toward European universities. It is also necessary to identify the main factors of associationism, the role of each, and the characteristics of this phenomenon at both the national and European levels.

Of course, the identification of new archival documentary sources could implicitly lead to new conclusions on the addressed issue.

Finally, alongside well-established cultural associations and gatherings with a clear legal status, a series of cultural entities also operated during the specified period, which cannot be strictly categorized within a particular associational framework. These entities supported culture, even if they did so through various means: providing financial support, involvement in promoting written or musical cultural values, granting scholarships to assist talented students who lacked sufficient material resources, and so on. These societies did not represent the interests of specific socio-professional categories, but through their cultural activities, they addressed a broad range of beneficiaries.

Ultimately, Transylvanian cultural associationism played a decisive role in developing the cultural and social identity of the Romanian community in this region. It was characterized by the establishment of numerous cultural societies that aimed to promote and develop the national language and culture. These organizations were essential in cultivating a sense of identity among Transylvanian Romanians, contributing to the formation of a true intellectual elite. Furthermore, education was a central pillar of cultural associationism, which was also

[26] Mircea Platon. *Op. cit.,* p. 53.

supported by the Church. The Church, in turn, played a crucial role in preserving and promoting Romanian culture and its educational component.

Additionally, the concept of "creative localism" was present in all regions of Transylvania, promoting a programmatic platform for the development of local culture by creating a favourable environment for the dissemination of national cultural values while maintaining interest in local creativity and supporting young generations of cultural elites. This dynamic led to the stimulation of regional historical and cultural research, reflecting a desire to affirm local identity. As a result, regional historiography, within the aforementioned associational framework, proved to be a necessary exercise for reconstructing local history and revitalizing various documentary sources, emphasizing the importance of studying regional history as an integral part of national history.

All these concluding statements aim to highlight the complexity and significance of Transylvanian cultural associationism between 1849 and 1918 in shaping a strong national and regional identity, with a lasting impact on the Romanian community in this part of the country.