

INTRODUCTION

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The history of the university and of academic life in interwar Romania and its neighboring countries are not well-known, despite the major role played by higher education and its professors on the cultural and political stages. Only in the 1990s do Romanian researchers begin to take a more keen interest in intellectual history and to shed a less festive light on the past of universities. Many of those who have made essential contributions in this field are to be found in this volume. However, the approach of this topic is in its infancy. Once the general frameworks of the history of the university are set - issues pertaining to organization, legislation and institutional evolution - we are confronted with the real dilemmas and unknowns. What is especially evident is that in the aftermath of World War I, this secular institution regularly found itself in a position to redefine its mission. As these redefinitions were seldom followed through, one can see why the university often drifted away from its mission.

One may ask, for instance, to what extent did the development of certain fields of study (or lack thereof) - inevitably bound to the ideological context - influenced the modernization of Romanian society or, on the contrary, widened the social gaps? Furthermore, what were the economic and political interests which determined the adoption of certain laws of higher education? And to what extent were these laws obeyed or bypassed? On the other hand, student movements and organizations deserve a more thorough analysis, all the more so as their activities and ideologies have turned out to transcend the simplistic left vs. right dichotomy which has dominated previous research on the topic. In addition, one cannot ignore the relations between the university and other organizations or institutions (student associations, political parties, social movements, governments, churches or the Crown) or the double identities of academic - politician / cleric / high dignitary etc. Last but not least, the development of extra-university research structures in the wake of non-functional institutions of higher education is an extremely interesting topic.

These issues can only be solved by deploying diverse methods and perspectives that combine history with anthropology, sociology, oral history and gender studies in a way that highlights the everyday realities of university life in the region and that allows the positioning of the topic in a concrete social and cultural field. This is what the current volume aims to achieve.

The book is made up of fourteen studies, grouped in three separate sections. The first section deals with political and social issue regarding the organization and functioning of higher education institutions and implicitly with the activities of their professors and students. Both Emilian Ghelase's *Who's afraid of Romanian engineers? The state and the technical body during the interwar period* and Zoltán Pálffy's *A new national elite on old academic grounds: law students of the Cluj University in the interwar period* offer two different but convergent perspectives on the way higher education was used to "Romanianize" the professional elites of the new state and to create a loyal, ethnically Romanian and especially state-dependent middle-class.

Florin Sora's article *A problematic status: the Bucharest School of Governance between 1919 and 1940* deals with the special case of an institution which although did not confer any academic titles, ensured however access to a position in the state system through the privileged relationship it had with it, as most of the professors there were politicians. This is followed by Dragoș Sdrobiș's "*The Left*" and "*the Right*": *political extremism at the University of Cluj in the 1930s*, which analyzes university life in Cluj between 1932 and 1934 through the eyes of the state, the academic staff and the students. Beyond the obvious limitation of university autonomy, it is extremely interesting to witness the students' attempt at creating an alternative to the University model proposed by the authorities, as well as the ideological diversity of the critics of the system, which tended to skew towards the far-right in the 1930s. Alina Branda's contribution, "*Works and Lives*". *On a Romanian educational project*, also addresses an alternative educational model in Cluj, dedicated to the wider Transylvanian audience: the University Extension.

It is not by chance that the second section of the volume privileges the investigation of sociological aspects. This is because the analysis of this field of research fits to a significant extent with the approaches in our academic endeavor, especially due to the way the field has evolved in the interwar years. We are referring here to the innovative research methods (the monographic method) developed by Dimitrie Gusti and his collaborators and to the intense activity undertaken not only in the academic sphere, but especially outside of it. By organizing sociological practice in interwar Romania, an original scientific

form was created in the Sociological School of Bucharest, which was solid enough to leave its mark on the cultural, academic and political landscape in the first half of the 20th century and even function as a model up to the present day. This very volume is one of the projects of our informal group, known as *The Gusti Cooperative*. The studies on interwar sociology analyze either lesser known aspects of the organization of Dimitrie Gusti's Monographic School, like Zoltán Rostás's *The formation and first crisis of the Sociological School of Bucharest*, or themes which pertain to gender and group dynamic, like Theodora Eliza Văcărescu's *No recognition of their own: women in Romanian sociology, 1925-1944*. The didactic practice from Professor Gusti's famous seminars is analyzed in Ionuț Butoi's contribution, *For a social history of didactic practices in the University: the Gusti experiences in higher education in the interwar period*. The last two contributions in this section, Irina Nastasă-Matei's, *Sociology between science and politics during the Third Reich. The German contributions to the International Congress of Sociology in Bucharest (1939)*, and Rucsandra Pop's, *Roman Jakobson's influence on Mihai Pop's thinking and career* are meant to place interwar sociology in the international scientific and academic context of the time, proving the close connections that the Bucharest Sociological School had entertained with sociologists and thinkers from around the world.

The third section contains contributions on the Polish and Bulgarian academic environment which are meant to place the subject of the volume in a broader Central and Eastern European context and to allow for the comparing of social processes pertaining to university life. The intersection between the academic environment, political life and national movements is evident in the case of Poland as Sabina Lausen and Zosia Trębacz's articles show (*Students, patriots, nationalists - Polish student fraternities and their political education in interwar Poland* and *Żydowska Strzecha Akademicka (Jewish Academic Thatch) - foundation, activity and political relations. Contribution to the history of Jewish students in interwar Warsaw* respectively). The discrimination and exclusion of women from the Bulgarian academic environment both due to their gender and, after 1944, their political and ideological affiliation, are very well depicted by Georgeta Nazarska in *Women pioneers in Bulgarian science (1920-1950s): biography triptych*, while Liana Gabalova's *The Bulgarian Theological Faculty (1923-1950) as part of Russian-Bulgarian cultural cooperation in academic scholarship and clerical vocational training* offers an interesting case study on the role religion can play in the evolution of education, science and international cooperation, a role worth more extensive research in the future.

Our volume is therefore arguing for an alternative, interdisciplinary approach to history. It wishes to overcome the discourse on modernization, evolutions and elites, as more often than not this type of historiography is less about explaining historical phenomena and more about creating historiographical paradigms and even constructing myths. We have proposed here to debate lesser known aspects of interwar university life in the idea that history should not pass judgment on the past, but analyze and pose more and more questions, offering more and more avenues of interpretation.

A Romanian version of this book, including 10 of the 14 articles contained by this volume, was published in 2016 in Romanian (Irina Nastasă-Matei, Zoltán Rostás (coord.), *Alma Mater în derivă. Aspecte alternative ale vieții universitare interbelice (Alma Mater Adrift. Alternative Aspects of the Interwar University Life)*, Cluj, Editura Școala Ardeleană / București, Eikon, 2016, ISBN 978-606-797-016-6; ISBN 978-606-711-463-8, 425 p.).

STRUCTURES UNDER PRESSURE

WHO'S AFRAID OF ROMANIAN ENGINEERS? THE STATE AND THE TECHNICAL BODY DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

World War I brought about a brand new world for the engineering community, or technical body. In its aftermath, with their technical expertise put to work and validated on the front, the local engineers pushed for the recognition of their profession. In their drive for professionalization, the technical body intermingled first and foremost with the newly created state. As post-WWI Greater Romania came to include and centralize parts of the Austro-Hungarian and Tsarist Empires¹, the engineers took up the task of uniting the newly acquired provinces under one system of reference. By that I refer to bringing the entire territory under one standard for electricity frequencies - as for instance Austria-Hungary's Transylvania electrical grid worked on a different MHz frequency than the rest of the country -, one centralized road and railroad system, one centralized telephone and radio network.

By these examples alone, engineers appear to be mirroring the State's centralizing efforts. The actions of the technical body and their organization are not only prompted by the state policies, but also by the wider and much more convoluted political languages. A brief look into the works of the engineering associations, conferences and pamphlets addressed to the public, sheds light into the shifts and turns in the language the engineers themselves were using. While the 1920 still kept remnants of last century's liberalism, the 1930s witness the radicalization of engineers' relation to the state. A strong, genuine belief in *Neuzeit*, a qualitatively new historical time, a new century of scientific management, organization, corporatism, and fascism permeated the language the engineers employed.

With the new state on the way, the technical body came to envision itself, and not the politicians or statesmen, as the literal unifiers of Greater Romania. Hence their efforts extended way beyond their own professional community,

¹ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

aiming at a deep structural transformation of the state as a whole. One of the strongest and most enduring projects that came out of the relation between state and engineers was the prospect of a technocratic society, one ruled and regulated not by the popular vote and elected politicians, but by technocrats who were to conduct their state administration tasks abiding by the laws of efficiency, rationalization, and nonetheless by the new word of the day: scientific management, be it according to Taylor, Ford or Fayol.

In this respect, this paper analyzes the intricacies between the State and the technical body by looking at the establishment of the Bucharest Polytechnic School and the role in the future scientific and non-scientific practices of their members. The first part of the paper looks into the professionalization process underwent by the engineers. For that I will look into the institutional network that the engineers helped build, control and defend, (i.e. what makes an engineer what he is and what exactly validates his right to profess, and which institutions of higher education can bestow this title upon its members; what other professions were taken as example). I follow Magali Larson's seminal work challenging the ideological orthodoxies on the sociological analysis of professionalism which saw profession as strictly "market oriented organizations attempting the intellectual and organizational domination of areas of social concern."²

The second part will explore the extensions of the technical language into the political one, based on the acquiring of a vocabulary of scientific management. It was no surprise that in light of the turmoil of the 1930s, the meaning³ assigned to "rationalization" shifted from the technical perspective to the political and even medical one. Thus, Taylor was not to be applied in factories alone, but also to the rising star of the "troubled years": eugenics, with the gruesome extension of "moral surgery"⁴, or to the nascent field of "human resource".⁵

Mihail Manoilescu, publicist, Professor of political economy at the Bucharest Polytechnic, member of the General Association of Romanian Engineers (AGIR), politician and head of the National Bank is the paradigmatic case for the journey the engineers ventured into during the interwar period. The third part of the paper presents Manoilescu's influence over the transfer of meaning from the technical vocabulary to the political one.

² Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism. A Sociological Analysis*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) p. 7.

³ From a methodological standpoint I follow Quentin Skinner's "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory*, Vol 8, No 1, (1969), pp 3-53.

⁴ I Manliu, *Taylorism, psychotechnie, eugenie, chirurgie moralizatoare*, (Bucuresti: Tipografia "Bucovina" I. E. Torutiu, 1940).

⁵ Petre A. Stefan, *Alegerea profesiei. Om potrivit la locul potrivit*, (Craiova: Scrisul Romanesc, 1941).