

**THE CHANGES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND LIFE
CONDITIONS IN ROMANIAN CITIES
(CASE STUDY OF ORADEA)**

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Summary: During the period of the socialist regime Oradea played the role of an important industrial and administrative centre. Nowadays, Oradea, with its over 200 thousand citizens can be a good example of the system, in terms of the economic and social transformation process. The processes, which take place in Oradea, had a typical run, characteristic for multi – ethnic cities. The border location of Oradea is conducive to an intermingling of ideas, people, capital and the western style of life, which triggers faster changes compared to the other Romanian cities of Banat, Crișana, Maramures and Transylvania. This paper attempts to analyze the changes in terms of ethnicity, language, religion within the city and show the process of social structural changes of Oradea. The range

of changes along with the process existing before seems to deepen. On the one hand, the process of Hungarian, German and Jewish minorities' migration is clearly seen. The negative rate of birth and the negative balance of the external migration equalise the internal migration only to a small extent, which in this case includes mainly the Romanians and the Roma population. The new investments, mainly with external capital allowed the city to develop widespread and increase the life standard. A proper city policy in terms of euro-regional co-operation allows Oradea to engage in many investments, which are also common for the Hungarian side and triggers a better development of the city. We should also take into consideration an educational improvement thanks to which the city became the most important and the largest study centre in the north-western part of the country. A very crucial alternation took place in the industry and service branches. The percentage of workers employed in mining activities and power companies decreased and the percentage of workers employed in education, tourism and trade has increased. The very convenient location of the communication ways, at the junction of transport roads, make the city an important communications' centre as well.

Keywords: process of transformation, linguistic structure, ethnic structure, religious structure, life quality, migration, social structure, economical changes.

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Introduction

Oradea is a city located on the western part of the Hungarian Lowland, in the ravine of the Crisul Repede River, in the Bihor Mountains. During the period of the socialist regime, till the Revolution, this is the most common name for the Romanian turning point, in 1989, Oradea played the role of a very important industrial centre. Aluminium metallurgy, huge machine factories and production of building materials existed there. Oradea WAS a local administrative centre of the Bihor county as well. Being a typical industrial city, Oradea can be a good example of the system, economical, and social transformation process. Nowadays, Oradea has more than 200 thousand citizens and is one of the biggest city centres of the second level in the Romanian cities hierarchic layout (Territorial Planning of National Territory 1991). Considering

the above information, either regarding the size or other features, the city is representative for the seven probabil regions, which have over-regional meaning.¹ It is typical as well for the set of seventy-four cities from the second hierarchic level (Ianoş, Talanga 1994, Wendt 2003b). Considering the various ethnic structures (similar to four from the seven historical geographical regions which the modern Romania consists of) we can present an analysis of social structure's modification of various ethnic structures (Pop 1991, Ilieş 1998), and some changes of certain features of the transformation process.

The processes which take place in Oradea have a typical run, characteristic for multi – ethnic cities of former Hungary. The border location of Oradea is conducive to an intermingling of ideas, people, capital and the western style of life, which accelerates the changes compared to the other Romanian cities of Crişana and Transylvania (Benedek, Nagy 2003). The transborder location of the city, divided by the Hungarian Romanian border in Bihor – Hajdu Bihar region has an impact on the development of international co-operation in the area (Wendt 2003a), where the city functions in two euroregions² with own active input (Ilieş, Horga 2001). Compared to other Romanian cities, the process of the system's transformation and perception of democracy goes quicker (Wendt 2002, 2003).

The characteristic of the social structure variations was made by analysing the structure changes: ethnic, religion and language among the citizens of Oradea also trying to penetrate the reasons of the processes. The changes in the structure of the population in Oradea appear to have a similar run, common for the most Romanian cities in Crişana, Transylvania, Maramureş and Banat region. However, it is noticed that there is a very special scale and rate of changes which take place in Oradea in comparison to the rest of the cities in northern, western and central Romania e.g.: in Baia

¹ 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 Timisoara.

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

Mare, Timisoara, Cluj-Napoca. The researched social structure changes, negative rate of birth, negative migration balance, re-emigration linked with the Hungarian capital stock have an influence on the phenomena taking place in the cities of the mentioned regions.

The development of the city before the Revolution

The city's roots can be traced at the beginning of the 10th century, although some notes about settlements in the region come from the Bronze Age. In the 10th century, Biharia, which is in the neighbourhood of Oradea, became a centre of Menumorut's country. The city co-operated with the Byzantine Empire and its inhabitants became Orthodox Christians. The present Oradea adopted Biharia functions in Hungarian Kingdom time, which at the end of 11th century took possession of parts of present Romania; Crisana and part of Transylvania, making Oradea a Roman-Catholic bishopric. The episcopate began an action to convert the people to Roman-Catholic religion. The first written information about the city comes from 1113, when Varadinum (Rom. Oradea; Hun. Nagy Varad; Pol. Wielki Waradyn) was presented as the largest settlement of the region, which took over the functions of the main centre in ruin, i.e. Biharia. At the beginning of the 13th century, in the Middle Ages, Oradea-located between Transylvania and ethnic areas of the Hungarian Kingdom-became an important trade centre. Also a citadel was built there to protect Oradea's citizens. The short period of Turkish rule in the 17th century ended with the Austro-Hungarian incorporation of the region and brought many changes to Oradea. The latter, after joining Hungary, became the largest Catholic centre in at that time in Romanian territory and was developing thanks to its convenient trade location. The city had its economic boom in 19th century when a lot of city manors emerged and the city reached its present urban and architectonic shape. At the beginning of 20th century the city had first lanterns, a new Town Hall, electric power installations and a tramline.

In the middle of 19th century, Oradea Mare (the Great Oradea) consisted of Oradea – Olosig, Oradea – Orasul Nou, Oradea – Subcetate and Oradea Velenta and was a multicultural city, which had about 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 thanks to Hungarian and German investments. Furthermore, in the same time, the city appeared to be a crucial educational, cultural and art centre and also a popular health resort famous for Baile Felix (Felix Spa) located nearby. 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 was developing in a typical way for socialist cities.

The period of the central planning economy in Romanian cities unfolded in a very similar way to other cities of the region which was typical for the towns of socialist Europe (Domański 1997). The main features of post-socialist cities of Romania – versus similar Polish centres which differ from the viewpoint of the market economy ones – are: industrial employment, full centralisation of administration, accidental social structure of settled people and politics depending on the capital. What is more, architectonic monotony and disrespectful value of the area are observed (Węclawowicz 1996). There is a clearly seen supremacy of the huge accommodation complexes often devoid of accurate service infrastructure in the functional structure of Romanian cities in comparison to Polish towns. Unfortunately, the decay of old districts is also noticed and typical for many Romanian cities. The decay is connected with the problem of the still not regulated estate property law either of the town's area or its buildings. The very complicated past of the region strongly left its impress 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

The modification of the social structure including ethnic, religious and linguistic elements stands out as the most important changes during the transformation period in Oradea and the remaining Romanian cities. In 2003, Oradea

had 206,5 thousand citizens which was one third of Bihor county's population and 72% population of the cities in the region. What is typical for the cities of such extent, with dominant administrative, educational and service functions, is the rate of feminism with 110% while 52,4% is the participation of women in the whole number of citizens³.

Tab.1. Changes in the ethnical structure of Oradea's populations

Ethnical groups	2002 (%)	1992 (%)	2002/1992 (%)
Roma population	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
News	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 Directia Judeteana de Statistica Bihor, 2002, Oradea.

The average rate of occupancy- where the area is 111,2 sq. km - was 1857 people per sq. km and lessened in comparison to the year 1992 at 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 of 2289, the number of deaths was of 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 of birth and high death rate. The phenomenon is connected with the great number of departures of Romanian Hungarians, Germans and Jewish. However, the dominant impact on migration refers to the Hungarian minority. In 2002, the number of refugees was of 1909 people, while the number of emigrants was of 1665 which gives a negative (minus) balance of migration equalled 244 people. In one year, together with the regressive birth rate, the population of Oradea

³ The following data are based on: Directia Judeteana de Statistica Bihor, 2002, Oradea

declined at about 658 people which is 3,2% and during the examined period of time-which means the years 1992-2002-declined at 17,3 thousand which is 8%.

While analyzing the above presented data it should be considered that the facts illustrate only a kind of “numerical dimension” which, in fact, without additional, more detailed researches is very difficult to analyze. Without the information about the number of births and deaths (for instance: Roma population, Romanians), it is very difficult to say in which part of the table, the increment of Roma population in Oradea is a result of a positive birth rate, and in which part it is the result of migration. Despite the above problems, only the information about the size of other changes illustrates – only in a way – the city’s power of interaction on a chosen ethnic group.

During the time of investigation, the number of citizens decreased from 223,8 thousand in 1992 to 206,5 thousand in 2002. The biggest changes in ethnical structure took place among the German, Jewish and Bulgarian minorities. The Romanian Germans was the biggest minority considering the number of emigrants. From the whole number of German citizens, 40% left for Germany, mainly due to economical reasons (Benedek, Schreiber 2001). The same situations focus to the Romanian Jewish from Oradea who emigrated to Israel or the United States. Additionally it should be remembered that Oradea was the biggest centre of Romanian Jews and a strong financial centre also. We can still admire its heritage by looking at the city’s architecture including the synagogue.

The migration process of the Romanian Hungarians unfolds in a very similar way to the one mentioned above but on a larger scale and is particularly well observed among the youth and people with higher education. The last survey taken in Oradea and Cluj-Napoca showed that nearly 45% of Hungarian youth is going to leave Romania for Hungary for good or for studying. However, the economical motivation -in this case-has a lesser meaning than in the Romanian Hungarians’ case which differentiates them from the Romanian Germans. The Romanian Hungarians put on the first place family connections which are very strong in this region making the adaptation process easier (Benedek, Nagy 2003). The additional factor which makes the Hungarian more attractive is- created by the Prime Minister V. Orban – pro-

Hungarian politics which was institutional in its character and was a reason of many interpolations in the Hungarian and Romanian Parliament.⁴ Nonetheless at the end of 90s a decrease of Romanian-Hungarian migration is observed (Horga, Brie 2001). It is not connected with the decreasing migratory tendency but rather with the groups of emigrants getting smaller and smaller. The clear progress of the city Romanizing causes the changes in ethnic structure similarly in all the region of Crișana and Transylvania (Benedek, Nagy 2003).

The essential outflow of Hungarian and German population is balanced by the process of migration to Oradea, which includes mainly the Romanian people coming from rural regions and the Roma population. As we can observe, at present, the percentage of the Roma population among the city's population was enlarged at about 0.7% and 15.4%, enlarging the total amount of Oradea's population at about 1400. The significant influence on the city migration changed the city functions, which made Oradea – from a dominant industrial and also military centre to a service-oriented city with educational, tourist and medical character. We should emphasize the special educational function of the city, which has four universities. More than 30 thousand students attend the largest of them, which is a state university. Many of the students come from remote places of Oradea. It comes as natural as the University of Oradea plays a regional role encircling its influence on the northern and north-western part of the country because the closest universities are only in Cluj-Napoca and Timisoara.

The variations in the linguistic and religious structure are a result of the migration process where the dependence is proportional. When comparing the data presenting the ethnical origin and language differences we can observe that the group which is the most linked with their own language are the Slovaks and the Greeks (Bențe 2001). At the same time we can observe many – about 1.2 thousand considering Hungarian and 0.7 thousand considering Romanian language

⁴ The Hungarian government accepted the financial support for Romanian citizens who are going to study or work in Hungary what met diplomatic intervention of Romanian government.

supplementary differences in relation to the number of people declaring their ethnic membership. To put it in another way, it inevitably makes the Romanian language more attractive as a formal language and Hungarian language, which can be the effect of the increase of ethnic conscious among the people who come from mixed marriages (Muresan 1999).

Tab.2. Changes in the structure of the maternal language referring to Oradea's population

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

Source: Own data based on Directia Judeteana de Statistica Bihor, 2002, Oradea.

When we compare the number of people who declare their ethnic and language membership we shall notice that the strongest ethnic group in Oradea which is best assimilated is the German group and the Roma population. In the case of Germans, in the year 1992, 67% of people declared German as the mother tongue while ten years later only 63% did. In the case of the Roma population the number was lessening in similar way, from 50% in 1992 to 46% in 2002. But for the hermetic population of the Roma population, using and declaring the language, which is around as a mother tongue is typical. All in all, on the territories inhabited by the Romanian or Hungarian Roma population, Romanian or Hungarian languages are declared as mother tongues.

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

However, when we compare the ethnic, religious and linguistic modification we have to notice that the deepest changes took place in the religious sphere. Additionally we have to say that the pressure of the system on the religious sphere was the strongest. It was the demonstration in Timisoara – meant 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 are Orthodox or Greek-catholic (Damsa 1994), Hungarian and German ethnic people are Roman-catholic or Calvin (Zamfirescu 1992). According to the data presented in the above table, the greatest changes took place just in the three religious groups.

Tab.3. Changes in the religious structure of Oradea's population

Ethnic 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
Alvin	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 Directia Judeteana de Statistica Bihor, 2002, Oradea.

Among the six churches which have more than one thousand members in the year 1992 like Orthodox, Calvin, Roman-catholic, Pentecostal, Greek Catholic, Baptist, only the Pentecostal and Baptists consolidated their position. The Calvin and Roman-catholic churches had serious losses considering the number of churches' members, which lessened

from 10.5 thousand to 6.5 thousand in the examined time. Compared to the participation percentage of the ethnic group and religious group in 2002, we may assert, that the numbers of Roman-catholic and Calvin church members is similar to the percentage of the Hungarian minority. However, when we consider that 70% of the people in the city are Romanian, we can notice that only 62% declared Orthodox and Greek-catholic membership. In the latter case- I mean considering the Greek-catholic church – and similarly Orthodox Church, we should state that mission activities are very visible especially in Pentecostal, Evangelic CA and Adventist church.

Even so, looking at the weakening Orthodox Church we can notice a kind of young development in Romanian churches like: Adventist, Evangelic CA, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Evangelic PS. Each of the mentioned churches increased its number of members in the described time at about 7% of Evangelic PS, to even 50% of Adventist. Truly speaking, when we consider the Pentecostal and Baptist churches we deal with groups counting less than one thousand members and we have to add that the number of conversion can be alarming in the Orthodox Church.

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

Regarding the correlation between ethnic groups and religion declared by Romanian, Hungarian and German citizens we have to say that the researches made for the Roma population seems to be very interesting. In general, the Roma population declares to belong to the religious community, which is dominant in the region they live. For instance the Roma population, who lives among the Romanians, very often declare to be Orthodox and those who live among the Hungarians declare to be Roman-Catholic (Zamfir, Zamfir 1993). Such situation may be seen in the light of attempting to

avoid possibilities of any conflicts which could eventually come from a classic relation; we-the strangers. The situation of the Roma population, who live in a sub-standard district of the city, is different. They mainly described themselves as a people without any religion.

Changes in the life conditions in Oradea

Oradea is a city which probably mostly benefitted from political and economical changes after the Revolution. Democratic Party (DP) governs the city, together with the party representing the Hungarian minority (HDUR). Both parties are in opposition to the party, which governs the country. The party's co-operation (DP, HDUR) is positively seen as a power, which creates the bases 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 sector were created thanks to the transborder co-operation and investments coming from the Hungarians and Italians. The political transformation, the liberal politics of the city's authority and the economical development let the estate arrange and regulate, in a larger scale than in other cities. Earlier, before the year 1996 there was mostly national and city estate. However, the rise of people's wealth led to the situation in which most of the city areas (90%) were taken by private owners who started to invest in many buildings. Two new districts of detached houses came to life which can be a sign of a different geographical structure of the city which is slowly getting the outlook of a typical layout for the free market economy.

Nearly all the service branches were privatised, from the education (three private universities) to the health service (19 private surgeries) and whole chain stores. The Hungarian and Italian capital stock made the middle and small factories dominant in the economical structure of the city and hence the unemployment rate decreased in Oradea making it the lowest in the country. There are employed 97.5 thousand people: 2.1% work in agriculture, 48.5% in the industry, 15.6% in the trade, 8.9% in transport, 6.1% in medical care, 6.05% in the education, 2.1% in the administration and 10.7% in the rest of services. Clear changes took place in the public and private transport. A lot of activities were made to improve the

standard of tram nets (124 trams) and bus net (91 buses). Many roads were renovated and the number of registered cars, especially from Hungary and Italy has increased.

Among the most developed services the first place is occupied by education, culture and tourism. There are 46 primary and secondary schools in Oradea. After the year 1996 three new private high schools were opened, one of them run by the Baptist church. Six theatres (one of them of a strong Hungarian character) and five cinemas give a very good cultural offer. The wide range of accommodation – wholly renovated - offers nearly one thousand places to sleep and what is more the city plans to enlarge the hotel basis. Oradea has its typical tourist attractiveness thanks to the location, architecture, convenient transport and lying nearby the warm waters. Baile Felix (Felix Spa) was a health resort in the Austro-Hungarian times and since the year 1998 its infrastructure has been modernised. A lot of new, small family and friendly guest houses were built and the old socialistic ones were privatised. The new owners improved the tourist base and made the tourists offers more attractive. We can notice many foreign tourists from Western Europe, especially from Germany, who rest within the warm water.

Despite the fact that Oradea belongs to the cities with the highest life standard, it still has to cope with many problems. The most important issue is environmental pollution, improving and developing the transport infrastructure and the education development. However, if the indicated tasks are to be accomplished, the city needs to have financial means. The only alarming thing is the situation in which most of the decision-making areas – especially in the area of public service – have a central character.

Conclusions

In the scientific researches of Oradea social structure it can be noticed that some crucial changes of ethnic, linguistic and religious structures took place in the city. The range of the changes together with the before existing process seems to deepen. For one, the process of Hungarian, German and Jewish minorities' migration is obvious. The negative rate of birth and the negative balance of external migration only in a little way equalise the internal migration, which in this case

includes mainly the Romanians and the Roma population. When we take into the account the multi-ethnic city societies we can find out a confirmation of the changes which are the modification tendencies of the declared language and religion structure.

After the revolution, the city functions in a transborder sphere and therefore it benefits much. The new investments, mainly with the external capital stock let the city developed widespread and make the life standard higher. A proper city policy in the euroregions' co-operation allows Oradea to take on a series of investments, which are also common for the Hungarian side and makes the city's development better. We should also admit the existence of an educational improvement thanks to which the city became the most important and the largest study centre in the northern and eastern part of the country.

A very crucial alternation took place in the industry and service branches. The percentage of the workers employed in the mining and energetic companies lessened and the percentage of the workers employed in education, tourism and trade has increased. The very convenient location of the communication ways, at the crossing of transport roads, make the city an important communication centre. That is way Oradea appears to be a kind of a gate for ideas, human and good diffusion for the regions like Maramures, Crisana and also for Transilvania, separated in the South and East by the Carpathian Mountains.

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