



**International Conference**

**Integrating the Rural World.  
Economy, Society and Politics  
in Central and Eastern Europe,  
1848-1939**

**Sibiu, Romania | November 2nd - 5th, 2023**

**PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS**

## Thursday, 2 November 2023

### **17.00.-17.30 Opening remarks**

**17.30-18.00 Sorin Radu** (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu), Presentation of the project *Subjects or Citizens? Between Census and Universal Suffrage: the Political Integration of Peasants in Romania (1859-1940)*

**18.00-19.00 Keynote: Maria Bucur** (Indiana University Bloomington), *The Unbearable Invisibility of Disability in Interwar Rural Romania: Directions for Research*

**19.00 Dinner**

## Friday, 3 November 2023

**9.00-10.00 Keynote: Eric Vanhaute** (Ghent University), *Reforming the Land and the Peasant after 1800: How to Make National Peasantries*

### **10.10-11.50 Panel 1 - *Studying the Peasantry, 1900-1945***

**Chair: Constantin Iordachi** (Central European University)

**Roland Clark** (University of Liverpool), **Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy** (Romanian Academy - Cluj Napoca Branch, George Barițiu History Institute), *Listening to Rural Voices: Why Bother?*

**Nigel Swain** (University of Liverpool), *Ferenc Erdei's Differentiated Peasant Society*

**Daniel Brett** (University College London - School of Slavonic and East European Studies), *A Problem of the Countryside? Agrarian Politics in Romania, Ireland and France between the Two World Wars*

**Corina Doboș** (University of Bucharest/ Romanian Academy – National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism), *From the Interwar Eastern Europe to the Postwar Global South: The Office of Population Research (Princeton University) and the Construction of Rural Overpopulation*

**11.50-12.10 Coffee break**

### **12.10-13.30 Panel 2 - *Perceptions about the Peasantry***

**Chair: Ramona Besoiu** (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu)

**Ivan Smiljanić** (Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana), **Žarko Lazarević** (Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana), *Narratives and Perceptions of Peasantry in Slovene Lands Between the 1860s and 1930s*

**Lilija Wedel** (University of Bielefeld), *The Print Media of German Settlers in the Russian Empire: Between Traditions, Adaption and Integration, 1870s–1914*

**Valer Cosma** (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu), *Peasantry and the Building of the Romanian Nation in the Inter-imperial Context*

**13.30.-15.00 Lunch break**

### **15.00-17.00 Panel 3 - *Peasantry and Political Integration***

**Chair: Andrei Florin Sora** (University of Bucharest)

**Ovidiu Iudean** (Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Czech Academy of Science, Prague), *Nation-building during the Electoral Campaign: Elites Mobilising Rural Voters in Dualist Hungary (late 19th century- early 20th century)*

**Vlad Popovici** (Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca), *Voters in Transylvanian Villages during the Dual Monarchy (1867–1918)*

**Branko Ostajmer** (Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb), *The National Party and the Role of the Peasantry in Croatian Political Life (1883-1906)*

**Milan Řepa** (Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences – Brno Branch), *Czech, Germans, or Simply Peasants? Politicisation of Peasants in Bohemian Lands and their Collective Awareness at the Turn of the 20th Century*

**Ovidiu Buruiană** (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași), **Constantin Iordachi** (Central European University), *The Romanian Peasants and Universal Voting. The Parliamentary Elections in the Rural Space of Old Kingdom in the First Decade after the War*

**17.00-17.20** Coffee break

### **17.20-19.00 Panel 4 - *Agrarian Reforms and State Policies***

**Chair: Anca Mândru** (University of Birmingham)

**Dietmar Müller** (University of Leipzig), *Peasants into Farmers and Citizens. Economic and Political Tensions after the Interwar Agrarian Reforms in East Central and South Eastern Europe*

**George Gassias** (FORTH-Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Rethymno), *Agrarian Reform, Agronomic Innovation, and State Intervention in Interwar Greece*

**Lucian George** (Oxford University), *“The Peasant Class” and “the Agricultural Estate”:* Agrarian Populism and its Social Subjects in Interwar Galicia and Bohemia

**Marek Wierzbicki** (Institute of National Remembrance/John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin), *The Policy of the Polish and Soviet State towards Peasants (1918-1939)*

**19.00** Dinner

## Saturday, 4 November 2023

**9.00-10.00 Keynote: Marius Turda** (Oxford Brookes University), *Rural Biology and the Nation's Eugenic Welfare in Interwar Romania*

### **10.10-11.30 Panel 5 - Rural Economy**

**Chair: Ovidiu Buruiană** (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași)

**Arina Fedorova** (European University Institute, Florence), *How Peasants Went to the Bank: An Introduction to the "Educational" Activities of the Peasants' Land Bank in the Late Russian Empire*

**Anca Mândru** (University of Birmingham), *Degrees of Crisis: The Romanian Countryside during the Great Depression*

**Jelena Rafailović** (Institute for Recent History of Serbia, Belgrade), *Peasants-workers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia - the Road to Modernisation and Urbanisation*

**11.30-11.50** Coffee break

### **11.50-13.30 Panel 6 - Peasant Mobilization and National Integration**

**Chair: Nigel Swain** (University of Liverpool)

**Harald Heppner** (University of Graz), *Peasants as Helpers in Need. The Engagement of Village Society during the World War I*

**Dimitris Angelis-Dimakis** (University of Crete/ Autonomous University of Madrid), *Mobilizing and Politicising the Peasants: Agrarian Associations and their Impact on the Rural Society of Greece during the First Decades of the 20th Century*

**Anders Blomqvist** (The Hugo Valentin Centre - Uppsala University/ Dalarna University), *Peasants, Mobilisation and Ethnic Politics in the Hungarian-Romanian Borderlands*

**Claudiu Crăciun** (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest), *Peasants and State-building in 19th and 20th Century Romania. Resistance vs. Incorporation*

**13.30.-15.00** Lunch break

### **15.00-16.40 Panel 7 - Political Campaigns, Elections, and Peasant MPs**

**Chair: Dietmar Müller** (University of Leipzig)

**Andrea Pokludová** (University of Ostrava), *The Role of Intelligentsia and Provincial Deputies*

**Wiktoria Marzec** (University of Warsaw, Poland/ The Robert Zajonc Institute for Social Studies), *From Rural Tumult to Parliamentary Questions and Back. Emergent Rural Contention in Poland between Empire and the Nation-State 1907-1921*

**Daniela Mârza** (Romanian Academy - Cluj Napoca Branch/ Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague), *Roots and Routes: How Members of Parliament with a Rural Background Attained and Wielded Power in Interwar Transylvania*

**Sorin Radu** (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu), **Andrei Florin Sora** (University of Bucharest), *Persuading Peasants: Campaign Promises in Countryside Romania under Universal Suffrage (1919-1937)*

**16.40-17.00** Coffee break

**17.00 -18.40 Panel 8 - *Nation-building Policies, Populism and Education***

**Chair: Sorin Radu** (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu)

**Teodoritschka Gotovska-Henze** (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - Institute for Historical Studies, Sofia), *Bulgarian National Leaders and Agricultural Know-how Spreading (1850s-1860s)*

**Andrzej Michalczyk** (Ruhr University Bochum), *Peasants' Social Mobility and National Identities in the Making in a Post-Serfdom Society: Upper Silesia 1850-1939*

**Wilfried Göttlicher** (University of Graz - Institut of Education Research and Teacher Education), *Having it Both Ways – Preserving an Idyllic Rural Universe and Overcoming Backwardness by the 'Right' School-Education*

**Cătălin Botoșineanu** (Romanian National Archives – Iași Branch), *Primary Education as an Agent of Transformation of The Rural World: A Case Study of the Regional School Inspectorate of Iași*

**19.00** Dinner

**Sunday, 5 November 2023**

**9.00-10.00** Round table: *Conclusions and Future Projects. Discussions about the collective volume*

## Panel 1 - *Studying the Peasantry, 1900-1945*

Chair: Constantin Iordachi (Central European University)

### Listening to Rural Voices: Why Bother?

**Roland Clark**

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**Iulia Cindrea-Nagy**

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Building on a recent symposium at the New Europe College, this paper discusses the challenges associated with using “rural voices” as a category of analysis. It asks to what extent it is possible to speak about “the rural” as a category in modern Romania distinct from the urban or the transnational, and whether rural actors have anything to tell researchers that we cannot learn by listening to the politicians, public officials, sociologists, folklorists, and poets who have described rural Romania in such detail already. Rejecting the idea that there can be any single representative of the rural, it identifies the variety of voices accessible to historians and anthropologists and demonstrates how dependent what rural actors have to say is on socio-political circumstances, technology, patronage networks, gender, age, and the circumstances in which their utterances are recorded. The paper further discusses the variety of disciplinary approaches used to engage with rural actors, including oral history interviews, participant observation, archival research, material culture, religious studies, environmental history, ethnomusicology, gender studies, and memory studies. As such, the paper establishes future research agendas and defines the methodological parameters associated with integrating the rural world.

### Ferenc Erdei’s Differentiated Peasant Society

**Nigel Swain**

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It is part of the accepted wisdom of peasant analysts, since the publication of Mitrany’s *Marx Against the Peasant*<sup>1</sup> if not before, that Marx got the peasantry ‘wrong’, as did his pupil Lenin. But the fate of the overtly peasant parties of Central and Eastern Europe suggests that they did not get the peasants ‘right’ either. As Seton-Watson put it eight decades ago, ‘Everywhere in Eastern Europe much had been expected of the Peasant Parties, and everywhere these expectations were disappointed.’ They were either suppressed, decayed or ‘came under the control of the urban bourgeoisie (Czechoslovakia) or of nationalist intellectuals (Croatia).’<sup>2</sup> This paper locates that failure in a belief in the myth of a single peasant interest and contrasts

<sup>1</sup> David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism*, New York: Collier Books, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918-1941*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967 [originally published 1945], p.257.

it with the empirical observations of Ferenc Erdei who, in the interwar years, presented Hungarian Peasant Society in all its complexity. Erdei has become the object of much speculation in Hungary (relatively) recently, but most of this relates to his various roles under socialism. Much less attention has been paid to the details of his analysis of the interwar peasantry. His account offers far greater differentiation than the Marxist three-class model or the notion of a unified peasantry. Interwar Central and Eastern Europe was the crucible for much of modern rural sociology. Poles, such as Znaniecki, are perhaps best remembered in the Anglo-Saxon world, and the Romanians under Gusti, with the support of King Carol, were perhaps the most systematic, but Erdei might be seen to stand out in terms of sophistication and nuance.

## **A Problem of the Countryside? Agrarian Politics in Romania, Ireland and France between the Two World Wars**

**Daniel Brett**

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This paper explores the fate of attempts to establish Agrarian parties in Europe after 1918. To do so it takes a historical-sociological approach to understanding rural politics and how the countryside impacted on the Agrarian parties.

The three cases represent states that were majority agrarian in 1918. Adopting an asymmetrical comparative framework concentrates on Ireland and Romania, while France functions as a *mise-en-scene* as an established democracy providing a control case, helping to identify critical causal threads, commonalities and variations.

Ireland and Romania sit at either end of the European periphery. In the aftermath of World War One, Ireland gained independence and Romania unified. Both were predominantly agrarian, their economies were locked into imperial economic systems, and their societies had deep ethnic, social and economic cleavages. In both prior to World War One, nationalists had advocated independence as the panacea to the problems facing rural society. According to nationalists, once freed from the imperial yoke, a countryside governed from Dublin or Bucharest would be a countryside governed by the people for the people. However, despite universal male suffrage the numerical dominance of rural society did not translate as expected into Agrarian domination of electoral politics.

This paper argues, contrary to traditional analyses that have emphasized external forces hampering the Agrarians, that it was the countryside itself and its socio-economic and political structures that were the greatest barrier to the development and effective functioning of Agrarian Parties. Rural society was heterogenous and in conflict over economic, political and social issues. These divisions were exacerbated by the rapid political, economic and social transformation of rural society and were unreconcilable for the movements attempting to represent the countryside.

The task of reconciling and representing rural interests was made more difficult by the continuing emphasis on majoritarian numerical democracy. This discourse had been central to the claims to power by the national movements in Imperial politics. Reproduced in claims for Agrarian political domination, numerical claims to power resulted in the articulation of a conception of a monolithic, homogenous countryside. This

approach to politics by Agrarian elites that denied rural pluralism served to undermined the parties from within and helps to explain their fate.

***From the Interwar Eastern Europe to the Postwar Global South:  
The Office of Population Research (Princeton University)  
and the Construction of Rural Overpopulation***

**Corina Doboș**

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In the general developmental framework of the first postwar decades, demographic knowledge, tools and projections came to play a pivotal place in developmental projects across the world. Under the growing influence of American demography, the epistemological ‘orthodoxy’ of the postwar demography was built throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and was rooted in a modified version of the demographic transition theory (DTT), a theoretical model originally created in the 1930s. DTT received full recognition only after 1945, with the contribution of Frank Notestein, the head of the Office of Population Research of Princeton University, who gained a prominent position in the international network of population research and policy making, and transformed DTT in a universal key of assessing the ‘modernity’ of the reproductive patterns of different societies.

Given the prominent role that the Princeton Population Research group played in the formation of the postwar orthodox demographic epistemologies that led to the definition of ‘overpopulation’ as the main problem of the emerging Global South, I propose an examination of the most important studies dealing with population and development that were elaborated by the Princeton Population Research Office in the 1940s, all of them articulating the problem of agricultural overpopulation of the “backward” East-Central Europe (the study *Future population of Europe and the Soviet Union. Population projections, 1940-1970* edited by Frank Notestein (1944), Wilbert E. Moore’s *Economic Demography of Eastern and Southern Europe* (1945) and Dudley Kirk’s *Europe’s Population in the Interwar years* (1946)).

I argue that the post-war demographic arguments used to assess the negative impact a growing population had on the economic development of the Global South countries were previously formulated and tested against East-Central Europe’s interwar demographic dynamics, when it was considered that the relative overpopulation of the new (agricultural) nation states in Eastern Europe represented an impediment for their economic development.



## **Panel 2 - *Perceptions about the Peasantry***

**Chair:** Ramona Besoiu (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu)

### **Narratives and Perceptions of Peasantry in Slovene Lands Between the 1860s and 1930s**

**Ivan Smiljanić**

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Peasants in Slovene lands have constituted the majority of the population throughout the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, so they were considered an integral part in any political, nationalist or modernisation project of the elites. Even though Slovene liberals, while mostly focused on the interests of the upper classes, tried to address the peasantry and its needs, they weren't successful because the focus was put on attempts to swiftly modernize the traditions rooted among the peasants. At the same time, not a lot of attempts were made to understand in depth the troubles with which the Slovene countryside was dealing with, such as indebtedness and division of land among heirs which led to low production. The conservative parties, especially the most influential Slovene People's Party, understood the difficult situation better and were capable of addressing peasants in a manner with which they felt understood, and also helped the peasants with establishing institutions which softened the inclusion and transition of the agrarian society into capitalism. The views of different political parties were reflected in both the newspapers and works of literary fiction. A particularly well developed literary genre was peasant stories, written mostly by conservative writers, which celebrated hardworking people of the countryside, their self-reliance, strong morals and proudly Slovene national identity. In this context, process of modernization is often presented as a threat or at least as a force which can disrupt the established order. Idyllic picture of the countryside, painted in earlier works, eventually withdrew and more pessimistic depictions of effects of economic crises, poverty, alcoholism and disease in the countryside appeared. The image of peasants in Slovene public perception was therefore divided among them being seen as both freedom-loving staunch Slovenes and a disgruntled or backward group which refuses modernization and integration.

## **The Print Media of German Settlers in the Russian Empire: Between Traditions, Adaption and Integration, 1870s–1914**

**Lilija Wedel**

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German-speaking media in the Russian Empire as a source for the analysis of the ethno-national understanding of German settlers (colonists) referring intellectual, spiritual, political and economic categories in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Russian Empire have not been researched sufficiently apart from some exceptions. Thereby, these sources also enable the reconstruction of activities, integration processes and communication networks of this ethnic group in the age of industrialization, trade globalization and formation of nation-states. The focus on the Russian-Germans is primarily related to the specific position and economic contribution of the Germans (i. a. entrepreneurs) in the Russian Empire.

The key data are due to the effects of the reforms of the 1860s and the turning points in the press business around 1870 itself, and to the outbreak of the First World War 1914. From that date, the public activities of the Germans in the Empire came to a standstill.

Different print media (press, calendars, advertising) of the Germans were committed not only to the conservation of the own cultural and religious traditions or to the exchange within their diaspora. The investigated media have to be considered as an important instrument in the communication with administration and representatives of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the media served as a platform within the German-speaking networks in the Eastern Europe and as a cross-border network as such. Not least, the previously disregarded perspectives of the cultural history on Russian-German advertising are suitable for the analysis of the Russian-German contribution to agricultural and infrastructural modernization in the Tsarist Empire.

What role did the German press and advertising for products and services of Russian-German entrepreneurs play with regard to industrialization processes, but also mobility and exchange of ideas beyond the lokal settlement? What do the investigated media tell about the German observing the Empire's politics as well as adaption and integration processes? In turn, it is of relevance to ask, how were the Germans settlers perceived by the Russian officials and the representatives of other nationalities?

## Peasantry and the Building of the Romanian Nation in the Inter-imperial Context

Valer Simion Cosma

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Based on the concept of inter-imperiality theorized by Laura Doyle<sup>1</sup>, Anca Pârvulescu and Manuela Boatcă<sup>2</sup> have developed a framework of analysis for regions that during the pre-modern and modern eras were under the control of several colonial and imperial powers. In their view, the political, cultural and economic legacies of inter-imperial conflicts have profoundly marked both the forms of socio-economic organization and the self-definition/conceptualization of social groups, placing them in a different relationship with Western Europe than in the case of former colonies in the Americas. If colonial *difference* was deeply marked by the racial, ethnic and class hierarchies developed in the colonies, less explicitly racial, more ethnically and class hierarchies can be observed in the case of imperial *difference* among European empires and their former subjects. Part of “epigonic” and backward Europe, Moldova and Wallachia have a history marked by their inter-imperial condition.

This paper argues that nation-building and state-building processes are to a large extent also the result of this regime of inter-imperiality that intensified in the 19th century. On the cultural and ideological level, on the other hand, the direct Western influence, through the young noblemen who went to study in the West, or indirect, through the Russians<sup>3</sup> gradually increased until it became hegemonic in the second half of the 19th century. On the other hand, at the institutional and administrative level, the various forms of constitutionality, the union of 1859, the achievement of independence, the transition to a monarchical regime, the building of institutions and a series of reforms resulted from or were strongly influenced by the dynamics of inter-imperiality and the influence exerted by the great imperial powers.

In this context, the fate of the peasant population is implicitly affected by this inter-imperial condition, both on a concrete level, in terms of living conditions and the events that periodically upset it, and on a cultural and ideological level, in terms of the representations and stereotypes of the 'peasant' as the quintessential exponent of the nation, which are constructed and consolidated during this period.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Doyle, “Modernist Studies and Inter-imperiality in the Longue Durée”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, edited by Mark Wollaeger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 669-696,

<sup>2</sup> Anca Pârvulescu, Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture: Literacy and the Development of National Identity*, Londra-New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006.

## **Panel 3 - *Peasantry and Political Integration***

**Chair:** Andrei Florin Sora (University of Bucharest)

### **Nation-building during the electoral campaign: elites mobilizing rural voters in Dualist Hungary (late 19th century- early 20th century)**

**Ovidiu-Emil Iudean**

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From the point of view of Romanian political life in Transleithania, the entire dualist period was marked by disputes between passivists and activists over the tactic most favourable to the interests of the Romanian nation. In the early 1880s, the proponents of passivism won the day, and it was adopted in part, then in general. Despite the assumption that Romanian voters would abstain from voting in what was described as 'national solidarity', the reality was different. The press of the time, confirmed by archival sources and memoirs, abound with information about the turnout of Romanian voters in the Hungarian counties they inhabited. A large part of them, probably even the majority, came from rural areas, being part of the small landowner class.

This work aims to capture precisely the mobilization of rural Romanians entitled to vote during the electoral campaigns and parliamentary elections in Hungary at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Drawing on a variety of sources (correspondence and campaign diaries of electoral actors, the press of the time, memoirs) we will try to answer a few questions: what were the reasons why rural Romanian voters chose to disregard the directives imposed by their political leaders and take part in the electoral process? What was the role played by Romanian rural elites (priests, teachers, small civil servants) in mobilizing Romanian voters in the villages of Transylvania, Banat and Eastern Hungarian counties? How did rural voters manifest themselves during electoral campaigns and parliamentary elections? How much did it matter that in some cases Romanians had the option of voting for a candidate from their own nation, who had the support of the ruling Hungarian party?

## **Voters in Transylvanian Villages during the Dual Monarchy (1867–1918)**

**Vlad Popovici**

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Most studies of the electoral process in Hungary and Transylvania before 1918 are either collections of parliamentary election results, prosopographies of MPs, or local case studies, micro-historical at best. Little attention has been paid to the most numerous actors in the electoral process, i.e. the voters – mostly peasants. My presentation aims to explore the possibilities of analyzing the body of voters in Transylvania during the dualist period, starting from a category of sources that has been hardly dealt with: lists of voters. At the time, these were the main tool for voter registration, and the document on the basis of which voters could exercise their franchise rights for both parliamentary and county elections. A large number of them have been preserved, in fairly complete collections, and their longitudinal analysis makes it possible to map the geographical and social evolution of the right to vote in the Transylvanian countryside between 1867 and 1918, to correlate the right to vote with indicators such as profession, denomination, age, or the illiteracy ratio in a community, and to track changes in the legal basis of the right to vote, as well as in the composition of the body of voters (i.e., turnover rate among voters). In combination with other types of longitudinal sources, such as parish registers, or with narrative sources such as election brochures and newspaper articles, voter lists can even offer a glimpse into the relationship between the electoral process and family or occupational clusters. Even if such research cannot be currently carried out at regional level, mainly because of the large amount of information to be processed (i.e., digitized), exploring and testing potential directions of analysis can prove fruitful in arousing the interest of researchers in finding the best methodological and technical solutions to address the topic.

## **The National Party and the Role of the Peasantry in Croatian Political Life (1883-1906)**

**Branko Ostajmer**

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At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the peasantry made up the vast majority of the population of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia (Banal Croatia), but it was barely visible in political life. There were many reasons for this, and in addition to the extremely high proportion of illiterates in the population, the electoral system that limited the right to vote to a thin layer of the educated and wealthy (about 2% of the total population) should be emphasized. Such a system suited the ruling political circles in Budapest and Zagreb, which supported the maintenance of the dualistic arrangement of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the extension of the eight-century-long Croatian-Hungarian union within the Monarchy. Only in 1904, the brothers Stjepan and Antun Radić founded the Croatian People's Peasant Party, which would place the peasantry at the center of its political program and work, and gradually, in changed political circumstances (after 1918), the Radić brothers made the peasantry a key factor in political life.

At that time, in 1904, the long-term rule of the National Party, which advocated the maintenance of the union with Hungary, was coming to an end. Twenty years in the history of that party (1883-1903) were marked by the person of Dragutin Khuen-Héderváry, who in that period held the position of ban (governor) and was also the informal leader of the party. The National Party primarily relied on the aristocracy, landowners, high-class citizens and the clergy, and only occasionally tried to expand its organization and influence among the broadest strata of the population (one example is the launch of the people's newspaper *Pravi prijatelj naroda* in 1891). In any case, what is indisputable is that the overwhelming majority of the peasantry were anti-Hungarian, which is why the National Party was the main opponent of the idea of extending the right to vote.

The aim of the presentation is to examine the attitude of the National Party towards the role of the peasantry in Croatian political life, and in particular to establish the presence of peasants in the party's structure (including members of parliament and representatives at the levels of counties and municipalities).

## **Czech, Germans, or Simply Peasants? Politicisation of Peasants in Bohemian Lands and their Collective Awareness at the Turn of the 20th Century**

**Milan Řepa**

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The development of political life and civil society in Bohemia and Moravia was complicated by the co-existence of two national identities, Czechs and Germans. The paper will outline the process of involvement of the rural population in public life of the Bohemian lands from 1860 to 1914 and will identify its essential factors. It will consider, on the one hand, the extent to which the nationalist movement contributed to the politicisation of the countryside, and how much, on the other hand, this politicisation relied also on the initiative of the villagers and the needs of the peasants themselves. It will be observed how the hierarchy of collective identities, such as the identity of belonging to the state, nation, region, class or Church, had transformed. For comparative purposes, the analysis will emphasize how the Czech rural environment differed from the German one.

## **The Romanian Peasants and Universal Voting. The Parliamentary Elections in the Rural Space of Old Kingdom Moldova in the First Decade after the War**

**Ovidiu Buruiană**

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**Constantin Iordachi**

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In our presentation, we analyze the way in which the Romanian peasants viewed the political situation after 1918. In the interwar period, the political and cultural elites valued the peasantry for the role it played in the recent conflict. The peasant and the rural world were seen as essential for the new society and placed at the center of the public space's transformation process. He was imagined as the one citizen capable of changing Romania's politics through his decisions and involvement. In this context, the parliamentary elections were designed as the school of the nation, having the role of showing the peasants the problems of society in its entirety. With a basis in the demographic situation of Greater Romania, with 80% of the population found in rural areas, the discourse of the elites made the village (*satul*, in Romanian) the epicenter of public life and the source of political legitimacy.

In Romanian historiography, the mechanisms of political socialization and those of specific or *en masse* mobilization in the rural space are not well-researched or known. Using the documents from local archives and press from the period as support, we present the way the peasants from the Old Kingdom's Moldova (especially from Iași county) participated in the parliamentary elections in the first decade of the interwar period (1919-1928). At the same time, we endeavor to analyze the peasants' representations regarding the political competition and how they viewed their own role. On the other hand, in a different register of discussion, we wish to specify the role of different actors involved in the socialization process of the peasants and their goals.

## Panel 4 - *Agrarian Reforms and State Policies*

**Chair:** Anca Mândru (University of Birmingham)

### *Peasants into Farmers and Citizens. Economic and Political Tensions after the Interwar Agrarian Reforms in East Central and South Eastern Europe*

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For the elites of the new or enlarged states in East Central and South Eastern Europe after WW I, the implementation of agrarian reforms was of utmost political, social, and symbolic importance. The redistribution of land and the reconfiguration of property rights offered an attractive chance for both raising the peasants' social and political status, and for changing power relations in multi-ethnic regions away from rural elites of the defunct empires to those of the titular nations. As the agrarian reforms were used as a central element of state and nation-building, the elites departed from the liberal model of merely guaranteeing property rights, and transformed the state into an active agent in economic matters. This was true both for the redistribution of the land itself, and for the further determination of the legal and economic property rights attached to the land. Since the elites, especially in Romania and Poland, had little confidence in the agronomic capacities of the peasants, they handed out the land with a thinned-out bundle of property rights, keeping some of them with state agencies.

As the post-imperial narratives in the region stressed the need to “right historic wrongs” by taking back lost provinces, redistribution of property to land was loaded with the additional symbolic meaning of enacting unification and reconstruction of the state piece by piece. In this respect as well, the state elites had little confidence in the national consciousness of the peasants and tried to guard agrarian reform land against familistic strategies.

With a focus on Romania and comparative perspectives towards Poland and Yugoslavia, the paper traces tensions between the national and economic frames and expectations of the agrarian reforms and its legal and administrative implementation.



## **Agrarian Reform, Agronomic Innovation, and State Intervention in Interwar Greece**

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After the series of wars that had begun in 1912 (Balkan Wars, World War I, Greco-Turkish War 1919-1922), the borders of the Greek state were stabilized in 1922. However, the catastrophic process on the Asia Minor front, led to the forced displacement of more than a million refugees in Greek territory. The urgency for their restoration required drastic action while the old practices in the functioning of the Greek economy had collapsed.

At that explosive situation, the Greek state intensified the implementation of the agrarian reform that had already been enacted in 1917. The Ministry of Agriculture was commissioned to coordinate the process of land distribution to indigenous peasant farmers and refugees. The implementation of the agrarian reform was the starting point for the redesign of the Greek countryside. But this alone was not enough. At the same time, the Greek state promoted new varieties of wheat in agricultural crops to increase agricultural production and farmers' income.

The linking of the individual links in the wheat chain, from cultivation in the field to the sale of bread in the cities, was a crucial factor in the redesign of the Greek countryside. The operation of this system was based on two pillars: a) the research of Greek agronomists and b) the operation of the Central Committee for the Protection of Domestic Wheat Production (KEPES in Greek) which linked the Greek farmer with the state services and the banking system.

My presentation will focus on, how the implementation of agrarian reform was linked to agronomic innovation and state intervention, and how resulted in the domination of a state

## **“The Peasant Class” and “the Agricultural Estate”: Agrarian Populism and its Social Subjects in Interwar Galicia and Bohemia**

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The early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of mass agrarian populist movements in both the Polish and Czech Lands. Though bound by their shared commitment to small- and medium-sized agrarian property, these movements differed in the coalitions they sought to build and the categories they used to mobilise their respective constituencies. Drawing on research into the interwar political cultures of rural South Bohemia and Central Galicia, this paper compares each movement's efforts to construct a coherent socio-political subject, the problems that rural inequalities posed for these efforts, and the extent to which the social identities of ordinary villagers matched those promoted by agrarian populists. It will be argued

that, where Polish Populists increasingly spoke to and for “the peasant class”, Czech Agrarians preferred to address a more socially ambiguous and heterogenous “agricultural estate”, shunning both the idiom of peasantry – with its peculiar connotations of landedness – and the socialist-sounding language of class. In their efforts to unify the countryside around these identities, both movements were forced to navigate and smooth over intra-village class antagonisms. A variety of occasionally opposing tactics was employed to this end: whilst efforts were made to integrate different cultivator classes, harmony between them was also maintained through institutional segregation. Nevertheless, Bohemian and Galician agrarian populists were not equally successful in generating social solidarity. In Galicia many villagers became deeply attached to peasantry as a source of socio-political identity, notwithstanding the persistence of intra-village inequalities. By contrast, the Czech Agrarians’ mission to enact rural unity encountered clear limits amongst poorer village groups: class interests and identities that Agrarians hoped to subordinate remained central to poorer villagers’ political behaviour and capable of overriding loyalties to the larger Agrarian “family”. In conclusion, this paper argues for the central importance of class – both as a structural feature of rural society and a social identity – in understanding the political dynamics of different rural contexts in interwar Europe.

## **The Policy of the Polish and Soviet State towards Peasants (1918-1939)**

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The aim of this paper is to present and compare two types of policy toward the peasantry: in Eastern Poland and the Soviet Union’s Byelorussian and Ukrainian Republics (1918-1939). Thus, the role and situation of the peasants under two different political systems (parliamentary democracy turned into authoritarianism in Poland and a totalitarian dictatorship under Stalin in the USSR) will be compared. It will embrace those states’ political systems and socio-economic and nationalities policies in relation to their peasantry. The importance of nationalities’ question will be discussed due to the region’s ethnic diversity and its connection with social issues. For example, in interwar Poland the landowners’ estates (in 84% owned by Poles) were most often surrounded by Byelorussian and Ukrainians villages which often led to ethnic and social disputes. The Polish administration pursued the Polonization policy toward Catholic, Greek-Catholic and Orthodox peasants refraining from a bolder land reform. In turn, after a period of liberal policy, the Soviets embarked on the collectivization of agriculture and Great Purge policies having exterminated the peasants on a mass scale. An interesting issue is the reaction of the multi-ethnic peasantry to the policies of the states given the ethnic and social specificity of that area where ethnic discrimination, backwardness and hunger for land became the main problem. It will be also analyzed through a closer in-sight into the Soviet occupation policy of Poland’s Eastern lands (1939-1941) treated as an epilogue to this topic. A question arises which of the states offered a better solution to the problems harassing the peasants then? To explain this complex problematic, an inter-disciplinary approach seems to be necessary in terms of utilizing the output of various disciplines of social science for that purpose e. g. sociology, anthropology and political science.

## **Panel 5 - *Rural Economy***

**Chair:** Ovidiu Buruiană (Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași)

### **How Peasants Went to the Bank: An Introduction to the “Educational” Activities of the Peasants’ Land Bank in the Late Russian Empire**

**Arina Fedorova**

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For a relatively short history of its existence (1882-1917) the Peasants’ Land Bank experienced a huge qualitative transformation from an institution, neglected by its own target audience to the largest landowner, land manager, and the main instrument of implementation of the last agrarian reform of the tsarism. This happened not only because the government reoriented the Bank to the needs of the peasantry and let it issue loans at the most favorable rates, but also because of the broad “educational” campaign that Bank’s officials implemented, trying to attract even those peasants who were considered as “illiterate” to the scope of the Bank’s clients.

My goal is to study how the Peasants’ Land Bank, using various mechanisms (both economic and “educational” in the essence), made peasants (with their so-called “mythological consciousness”), accustomed to various “capitalistic” notions and therefore, the active participants in the governmental sector of land lending. All this had a mutual effect: thus, the Bank was not only able to avoid bankruptcy at the initial stages of its existence, when the peasants did not yet have any confidence in it, but it also opened up new opportunities for the peasants themselves to change their own living strategies. I declare that the Bank has been more than an ordinary financial institution throughout its existence, and it has dramatically changed the life of the imperial peasantry. The study of his “modernizing” side of the peasants’ “mentality” is able to show how, on the territory of the vast empire, the rural actors acquired more economic (and, in general, vital) autonomy and, on the other hand, once again highlight the state narrative in which the peasants existed as “backward”, “rejecting” and “unable to understand what is the private property”.

## **Degrees of Crisis: The Romanian Countryside during the Great Depression**

**Anca Mândru**

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This paper explores the impact of the Great Depression on the Romanian rural society. While scholars agree that Romania, as a predominantly agrarian country, must have been greatly impacted by the world crisis, the dynamics of the Depression and its lived experience have seldom been subjects of inquiry. This paper attempts to fill this gap by reconstructing the stages of the Depression, determining variations in its unfolding, tracing the interventions of local and central authorities, and considering their impact on the peasantry. It argues that the experience of the Depression varied greatly according to social, regional, and institutional factors but it should nevertheless be located within a continuum of crisis typical of subsistence economies and aggravated by the post-WWI agrarian policies of the Romanian state. The Land Reform of 1921 thoroughly dismantled the large estates, without providing the new owners with viable plots, affordable credit, or means to modernize primitive agricultural methods. As a result, by the onset of the Depression most peasant households were already heavily in debt. This research builds on sociological research into village life, contemporary periodicals and especially the archives of the Chambers of Agriculture from several regions (Arad, Brasov and Ilfov) to show that ordinary people usually experienced this crisis as scarcity and insecurity, while local authorities contended with disorganization, delayed reactions, and impromptu solutions. The government's policy on the "valorization" of cereals, effectively forcing exports, put pressure on an already overstretched system. Poverty often led to a radicalization of the peasants, usually in relation to perceived outsiders, especially Jews. In addition, it also led to a reevaluation of their understanding of respectable work, as many were forced to become day laborers on larger properties or to migrate to towns seeking jobs as domestic servants or factory workers.

## **Peasants-workers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia - the Road to Modernisation and Urbanisation**

**Jelena Rafailović**

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The paper will present the basic characteristics of peasants-industrial workers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the impact of industrialization and modernization on them. The specificity of the industry of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as other Balkan countries, was the existence of the so-called peasant-workers, i.e. workers who did not break ties with agriculture and during the year had a dual job - in the field and in the factory. It was a part of social processes that influenced the slow but deep change in the social position of peasants and villages during the 20th century. The influence of the modern on them was omnipresent, and will be shown the impact of industrialization on the rural area and their gradual integration and transformation through work in factories: new consumer habits, attitudes towards free time, the changing role of women, the availability of political ideas, the stratification of rural communities...

## **Panel 6 - *Peasant Mobilization and National Integration***

**Chair:** Nigel Swain (University of Liverpool)

### **Peasants as Helpers in Need. The Engagement of Village Society during the First World War**

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The integration of the rural population into the modern functional circles of the economy, politics, and culture increased greatly in the age of industrialization and nationalization: modernization would not have been feasible without influxes of personnel into the city and factories. Behind this phenomenon were systemic processes in which the growing demand for people and skilled labor in the city was met by village society.

These systemic processes, which were condensed from the middle of the 19th century, are contrasted with situations in which the rural population gained great political weight in a spontaneous way. One example are the years of World War I, when the human and material resources of the state were insufficient and the rural people and their potentials had to step in.

This theme will be illustrated and analyzed through three case studies. In Tyrol, the front against the Italian army in 1915-1918 could not have been held if the local rural population had not engaged itself. In Carinthia, at the end of the war and afterwards (1918-1920), it was a matter of resisting the Yugoslav occupation of the southern parts of the country, and again it was mainly rural people who became active. The example on Styria (1915-1918) shows the role played by prisoners of war as agricultural laborers to reduce the manpower shortage. They came mainly from rural regions of the Tsarist Empire.

Central questions are: 1. Are there any narratives in the case of Tyrol and Carinthia that the rural population took its fate into its own hands on a case-by-case basis? 2. What was the most important motive for the politico-military action of the local population in these two crown lands? 3. Which mental structures confronted each other in Styria - carried by the locals and the prisoners of war?

## **Mobilizing and Politicising the Peasants: Agrarian Associations and their Impact on the Rural Society of Greece during the First Decades of the 20th Century**

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The evolution of the collective mobilization in the Greek rural space during the first decades of the twentieth century will be the object of this paper. Our analysis extends from the first rallies, held in the Peloponnese in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century until the imposition of Metaxas's dictatorship on 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1936, which changed completely the operation of collective organizations and political parties. We will focus on the emergence of the agrarian organizations and their influence on the identity of the collective action. The enactment of the Law on the co-operatives in 1914 represents a turning point of our period under research. In the subsequent decades, the co-operatives turned into the dominant form of collective organization and their leading figures were involved in the creation of an agrarian party. In this paper we will examine whether and to what extent the presence of the agrarian associations altered the nature of the collective action in the countryside. We will also explore if the increase of their number and dynamism led to a change of the political and electoral behaviour of the peasants. Furthermore, we will see whether and to what degree the establishment of agrarian associations meant an increasing interest of the peasants for the national politics. Did the pre-existing violent forms of protest disappear after the emergence of the collective organizations? Which were the demands of the organizers of the agricultural assemblies, conferences and rallies carried out in this period? How the voting of the land reform of 1923, outcome of the influx of refugees from the Asia Minor, affected the character of the peasant protest? These are some of the questions we will answer in our effort to investigate the different aspects of the impact of the agrarian associations and the transformations they provoked.

## **Peasants, Mobilization and Ethnic Politics in the Hungarian-Romanian Borderlands**

**Anders Blomqvist**

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Using a micro historical approach this paper investigates how peasants were mobilized and involved in elite-driven ethnic politics by looking into two case studies in the Hungarian-Romanian borderlands. It analyses areas that moved the peasants and if they were receptive to ethnic politics or indifferent. The first case is one in which the peasants were receptive to ethnic politics, while in the other peasants did live up to the expectations of their national leaders.

The first case relates to the Magyarizing of the Greek-Catholic Church and the violent reactions in the village of Moftinul Mic/ Kismajtény, near Careii-Mare/Nagy-Károly in 1913 when the new vicar general

came to inspect the village's Greek-Catholic church and school. The crowd of Romanian villagers cursed and shouted at the vicar and complained that they did not want to have a Hungarian-speaking priest. In the turmoil, the vicar general was hit in the back, and he and his companions were compelled to leave the village as the crowd threw stones at them. The event was followed by a trial which received national media attention and several of the Romanian national leaders attended it, including Vasile Lucaciu. In the trial, the accused Romanian peasants would give their testimonies and views on politics, especially ethnic politics. Their statements give an important insight into their political views, but also how the Hungarian and Romanian elite viewed the event.

The second micro case relates to the colonization in the interwar period in the Hungarian-Romanian borderlands. During the land reform land was expropriated for colonizing purposes. Around 20,000 cadastral yokes were expropriated from large Magyar landowners and re-distributed to ethnic Romanians moving to colonies and villages near the border. A colony called Lucăceni was established near the Hungarian-Romanian border with Romanians from Vasile Lucaciu's village, Șișești. The Romanians from Lucaciu's village were regarded as trustworthy from a national point of view, as they had been under the leadership of the famous national leader and priest who had passed away in 1922. They had also suffered from the Magyarizing policies during the dualist period. Colonization combined the social, economic and national ambitions of the Romanian leaders. The program was not a total success, as some Romanians became denationalized when they moved into Hungarian-speaking village, as the colonizers were unable to maintain their Romanian language.

## **Peasants and State-building in 19th and 20th Century Romania. Resistance vs. Incorporation**

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The paper proposes a framework to describe the peasant positionality toward the process of state-building in Central and Eastern Europe. Building on previous historical, sociological, comparative politics and political anthropology perspectives, the framework adapts the prevalent so-called 'bellicist' state-building research agenda in two major ways. First, it outlines the passive and active resistance of peasants against the coercive-extractive expansion of the modern state and second, it outlines the nature of cooperative responses to its incorporation and redistribution mechanisms. Why, when and how did peasants resist the state and respectively, cooperate with it? While it is necessary to present a general European perspective, the paper details the possible trajectories specific to the CEE region and Romania particularly. The paper argues that these two responses, resistance and incorporation, are built in each area of state expansion, from taxation to conscription and electoral participation. To illustrate the argument, two processes are described in more detail. First, the transition to a universally conscripted mass army in the 19th and 20th centuries, during which the incorporation of peasants in the 'national' army and their war experience significantly increased their capacity to act collectively and, in some cases, rebel. Second, the transition to mass politics, placed in relation to the fight against semi-servile conditions, shifting class alliances and the development of modern political parties. Contrary to the view that the peasants paid for the expansion of capitalism and the rise of national states (Tilly), I argue that they also resisted capitalism and used the national states to advance their collective interests.

## ***Panel 7 - Political Campaigns, Elections, and Peasant MPs***

**Chair:** Dietmar Müller (University of Leipzig)

### **The Role of Intelligentsia and Provincial Deputies**

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In the rural society of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, clergymen and teachers played a significant role in the modernization processes in agriculture. From the position of educated men in rural society, they were leading members of agricultural organizations. They disseminated modern knowledge from literature among the members of the associations and implemented them on their own farms. They were also the initiators of the establishment of financial institutions based on the principle of cooperatives; later they headed cooperatives (melioration and regulation of water docks). Deputies from rural areas elected with the support of agricultural organizations played an important role in obtaining state subsidies. On the floor of the Diet, they presented draft laws that the countryside needed to successfully transform into modern agricultural production.

### **From Rural Tumult to Parliamentary Questions and Back. Emergent Rural Contention in Poland between Empire and the Nation-State 1907-1921**

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The main aim of my paper is to map decentered field of rural unrest in the “Polish” part of the late Russian Empire. Peasants were often accused of “naïve monarchism”, passivity and disinterest in politics, widely ignoring national strives of the Polish elites. There are indeed numerous records of the Russian gendarmerie triumphally announcing that issues galvanizing the Polish public opinion did not move the rural communities. However, peasants were hardly passive observers of undergoing profound changes of rural economies and political scene. Simply, the stakes of their resistance and forms of action did escape the raster or patriotic Polish intelligentsia and Russian gendarmerie alike. Against this backdrop, the paper tries to map out rural contention directed at the state power, capitalist actors and inner conflicts of confessional or cultural character. Drawing from an extensive data set on social unrest and conflict in the Kingdom of Poland based on administrative sources from local and central Russian archives (more than 3300 entries), this paper studies struggles of the customary privileges (servitudes), conflicts with the manors and struggles over various forms of rural commons (forests, pastures, riverbanks) and on religious dissention. These conflict did not push the rural populations (peasants and land laborers) to support a more daring social revolution, allowing the Polish state to emerge amidst the international class war of 1919-1921. However,



they had their aftermath in the process of integrating the rural world into the newly emerging polity. The new Polish *Sejm* debated intensely the land reform, but on the side numerous parliamentary questions were filed by peasant parties, testifying to the ongoing acuteness of emergent conflicts, tactically took up by the parties but not bundled with their official political agendas.

## **Roots and Routes: How Members of Parliament with a Rural Background Attained and Wielded Power in Interwar Transylvania**

**Daniela Mârza**

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This paper investigates the pathways by which members of parliament with a rural background in interwar Transylvania (1918-1939) attained and exercised power. During a period of significant socio-political transformation and evolving power dynamics, rural-origin MPs emerged as influential actors in the region's political landscape. Drawing upon primary sources such as newspapers, correspondence and memoirs, this study seeks to understand the strategies employed by these MPs to ascend to power and their subsequent efforts to shape policy and resource distribution. The analysis pays particular attention to the role of rural backgrounds, education, social networks and connections to their birthplace in influencing their political trajectories.

Following topics will be emphasized:

- The strategies employed by these MPs to attain power, including leveraging social networks and connections to their birthplace;
- Examples of key rural-origin MPs and their paths to political prominence;
- The impact of rural origins and social networks on political decision-making and resource distribution;
- The role of rural backgrounds, social networks, and birthplace connections in shaping the political priorities of rural-origin MPs;
- Instances where these factors influenced legislative efforts and policy initiatives;
- The strategies employed by rural-origin MPs to maintain and consolidate power;
- The importance of social networks and birthplace connections in sustaining political influence;
- Case studies of rural-origin MPs using their networks and rural ties to maintain their political standing.

By examining the distinct experiences and approaches of rural-origin MPs, this paper aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the political, social, and economic developments in interwar Transylvania.

## **Persuading Peasants: Campaign Promises in Countryside Romania under Universal Suffrage (1919-1937)**

**Sorin Radu**

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This paper analyzes the electoral promises addressed to the rural population by the candidates in the Parliamentary elections in Greater Romania. We shall first observe the dynamics and classify the types of electoral promises addressed to the peasants in party platforms used at the national level. Moving forward, the primary approach is to follow the political elections at the local level, using three study cases, selected from among the counties in the Old Kingdom, Transylvania, and Bessarabia, to better understand how election promises evolve under universal suffrage, in which there is strict government oversight, and there are regional disparities. By inquiring on the campaign promises made to a specific community, we can easily identify goals such as the renovation or the construction of public buildings and roads, the removal of local corrupt officials, helping the community win some lawsuits and litigations, tax exemptions, and representation of local interests at the national level, etc. We chose to primarily focus on the electoral promises of the winning candidates, the majority of them government candidates. Therefore, depending on the government's duration, some electoral promises should have materialized. With regard to the sources, we will use the political programs, the speeches of the candidates as recorded by the press or the memoirs of the politicians involved in the electoral campaign, and the winner's interventions in the Parliament to advocate for local projects. This paper studies the differences according to the period, region, political formation, and who made them (whether the Governmental or the opposition candidates). In addition, despite electoral fraud and coercion, observing how rural voters react to these promises is necessary. Are these credible? Do the broken promises affect re-election? Are these promises universal for rural Romania, or are there political strategies that include adjustments, originality, and knowledge depending on who the recipients are? How much did the candidates' geographical, social origin and professional profiles make these promises to be taken into consideration?

## **Panel 8 - *Nation-building Policies, Populism and Education***

Chair: Sorin Radu (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu)

### **Bulgarian National Leaders and Agricultural Know-how Spreading (1850s-1860s)**

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The article will analyze Bulgarian national leaders role in the process of spreading of information for the agricultural development. Agricultural Modernization was a topic of social discussion within the Ottoman Empire during the 50- 60<sup>ties</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> C. and the central government considered some politics and measures in promoting this development, however Bulgarian National leaders took the initiative of their own and were engaged in spreading of information on modern agricultural know-how among their country-men. For this purpose were published newspapers, magazines and books. A national educational project was underway in order to educate young Bulgarians abroad in the field of agriculture.

### **Peasants' Social Mobility and National Identities in the Making in a Post-Serfdom Society: Upper Silesia 1850-1939**

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My contribution will focus on the adaptation to “modernity” by the ordinary people from Upper Silesia. Peasants’ liberation, in Prussia finally completed in 1850, formed the basis of personal development and caused an enormous change in economic and social structures. This epochal change was accompanied by mobility and migration. As a result, many of migrants provided a transfer of knowledge and values, developed own initiative, and acted as autonomous individuals. Through their experience and rising income, they changed hierarchies in the village, everyday life was democratized by decreasing economic dependence on the large farmers and landlords, and a new self-confidence of the village lower classes was strengthened. The dynamics of this process became socially virulent at the end of the century, before becoming politically decisive in the plebiscite on the state affiliation of Upper Silesia in 1921.

My paper will take a micro-historical, actor-centered approach and demonstrate 1. how labor migration and the opportunity for social advancement initiated processes of democratization “from below” and 2. how a sense of national identity was perceived and translated by peasants. To achieve these goals, I will first show the groundbreaking transformation in Upper Silesia around 1900 and, in the next step, look closely at a biography of Franz/Franciszek Buhl, born in a peasant, catholic, Slavic speaking environment

in 1893. As a young man, he worked at construction sites in Berlin, Westphalia, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Only the migration and how strangers perceived him made him think about his sense of belonging and pushed on his identification and politicization process.

When he came back to his village after the WWI, he started to implement all his knowledge and experience with building, registering, and establishing societies, clubs, and unions. He promptly opened a Polish library and a Polish minority school in his house. Despite his young age, he quickly became a local leader and was strongly engaged in the Polish minority movement in the region. Based on a broader analysis of socio-cultural transformation in Upper Silesia and Franz' biography, I will take up following topics from the CfP of the conference: political activism, the signs of civil society in the rural world, and a 'voice of the peasants'.

## **Having it Both Ways – Preserving an Idyllic Rural Universe and Overcoming Backwardness by the 'Right' School-Education**

**Wilfried Göttlicher**

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In my paper, I examine the discourse on the rural world and rural school-education in teacher's journals and similar literature in interwar Austria. The authors of this kind of literature were teachers or former teachers, then working in different positions in school-administration, not typical intellectuals. However, their writings mirror the discourse among intellectuals and show how it was adopted by educators.

I will argue that one core idea in these debates was that the goal of school-education was both, to preserve traditional lifestyle and time-honoured values within an idyllic rural universe *and* to overcome backwardness. Rural culture in general terms was appreciated, and modernization was regarded as a threat that should be overcome by a school-education that would reinforce traditional culture and traditional values. At the same time, authors deplored that poor hygienic standards and unhealthy conditions would prevail in rural areas, and they argued that mental backwardness would prevent peasants from adopting new agricultural techniques and increasing production. Similarly, the virtues of peasants were praised as a resource for the whole nation, while the rural population was suspected of being somewhat distanced from the state, unable to see the big picture and unwilling to subordinate their own requirements to the good of the nation. These conflicting notions can be found sometimes with the same authors.

An appropriate school-education was expected to facilitate the preservation of highly regarded traditional values *and* to tackle the problems of backwardness at the same time. This means, it was supposed to direct the process of modernization in a distinct way selecting certain elements that were regarded as desirable while holding on other elements that were regarded as a threat. I call this idea, which can be tracked up to the 1950s, selective modernization (leaning on and modifying the idea of regressive modernization).

## **Primary Education as an Agent of Transformation of The Rural World: A Case Study of the Regional School Inspectorate of Iași**

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In the interwar period schools were faced with a reality in which poverty was most students' common denominator. Major hardships, starting from logistic difficulties to high truancy rates, the parents' disinterest, all peaking with the students' precarious health summarize the marginality of educational establishments within communities. Simultaneous classes, overcrowded classrooms, afternoon schedules constituted the realities rural teachers were confronted with. The schools' administrative architecture left educational establishments at the mercy of several factors that could intervene, such as local city halls, county school committees, the students' parents. Most of the time, however, through their resources and the teacher's example alone, schools could overcome the symbolic deficit placing them in such precarious light six decades from Cuza's first primary education law.

The Romanian state attempted to balance the scales at the beginning of the inter-war period by controlling the teaching staff and establishing rural students' school itinerary. The practical skills children were supposed to learn in school from their teacher, including the new vocational schools opened in several communes could not disguise the official public policies. The complementary cycle, which supposed the acquisition of a practical skill during the three years after graduating from primary school, was not successful. Staying in the rural area, for lack of viable solutions – which ordinarily entailed access to land – essentially condemned children of rural extraction to a predictable failure. On the other hand, emancipation through schooling was their only chance to improve their circumstances. At the same time, this was one of the state's options to solve one of the recurrent problems of the rural world, that of a lack of solutions for the allotment of all peasants. The high ratio of theoretical education to the detriment of practical education was one of the inter-war period's enduring problems, forcing rural students on a predictable trajectory, academic success in urban secondary schools and the abandonment of villages.

Without a doubt, rural primary schools fitted other educational patterns, but the possibility that they “build” their own practical subjects, in the school's garden or allotment as well as in field experiments, had a long-standing impact not only on students, but particularly on the local community. Alternative solutions to primary agriculture, by caring for bee hives, growing silk worms or planting noble vines changed the agricultural dynamics of the rural world. In a similar manner, adult classes in rural schools were to instruct their exclusively peasant attendees to more easily recognize specialized knowledge, including politics, amid the publicly accepted values. The rural primary school was supposed to shape the people it opened its doors to just as a “field experiment” would.



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