

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF TRANSYLVANIA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR*

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ABSTRACT:

WORLD WAR I IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN BOTH WORLD HISTORY AND LOCAL HISTORY. TRANSYLVANIA IS ONE OF THE TERRITORIES THAT HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY ITS CONSEQUENCES. THE POPULATION OF THIS REGION SUFFERED IN ALL THE AREAS OF THEIR LIVES. FROM THE DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES (NAMELY, THE CHANGES RECORDED AT A STATISTICAL LEVEL), TO THE IMPACT AT A SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVEL, TO CULTURAL ISSUES, WE CAN AFFIRM THAT NOT ALL THESE ISSUES HAVE SPARKED AN EQUALLY GREAT INTEREST IN SPECIALIZED HISTORIOGRAPHY. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH IN SOME CASES THE SOURCES WERE NOT VERY GENEROUS WITH THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, I WAS ABLE TO SHAPE A CLEARER GENERAL PICTURE OF THE SITUATION IN TRANSYLVANIA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

KEYWORDS: WORLD WAR I, TRANSYLVANIA, DEMOGRAPHY, SOCIO-ECONOMIC, CIVILIAN POPULATION

INTRODUCTION

As everyone knows, the early twentieth century witnessed the overwhelming impact of the First World War, a military conflict that left its mark on the entirety of society. We can say that there are two categories in terms of population: those who directly experienced war on the frontlines, (the soldiers), and those who "fought" behind the trenches, doing the work of the civilians who had been mobilized.

The outbreak of World War I, as any other state of belligerency, created a general feeling of unease, one that is perfectly normal, since any military conflict is a harbinger of suffering, in particular through the deaths of those who leave to fight. Nevertheless, a sense of patriotic duty played an important part. The first mobilization orders were received relatively quietly because people thought that it was to be a short war and that soon, those who had departed would return to their homes.

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The situation was not much different in Transylvania. The sentiment of loyalty to the Emperor had important consequences, as the first mobilization was accompanied by the voluntary enlistment of many men able to fight. This feeling was so strong that some of those who had left to live beyond the borders returned home for the sole reason of enlisting, although, naturally, this example cannot be generalized.

Time passed and everyone expected for the war to end, but instead of ending, it gained momentum, its scope became wider. The number of countries involved and, consequently, that of the civilians who were to suffer because of the conflict only grew, and thus the duration of the war was prolonged, ultimately amounting to that of four long, hard years¹. Over time, even those behind the frontlines began to feel the effects, as they experienced difficulties that gave a bitter feel to their lives back home. There was speculation that led to a huge increase in prices, the number of requisitions also grew considerably, and thus the lack of requirements for an adequate nutrition and a decent living began to be keenly felt. The situation only worsened with each month the war raged on. However, we cannot affirm that the State remained passive to what was happening to the civilian population- its influence was felt through the price control concerning the basic necessities, that is to say by establishing maximum prices for commodities.² But because the extension of the war meant a greater consumption of various raw materials and consumer products, the State was forced to raise requisitions for the army and establish rations for each person, a situation which worsened to the point that, by the end of the war, it almost reached the survival limit. Consequently, the population steadily grew unhappier.

DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS

The first and most obvious consequence of World War I was at the demographic level, as it affected the population from a statistical perspective. In the following section, we will look at the evolution of the three most important components of the natural movement of population: birth rates, marriage rates and mortality .

Concerning the birth rates, we can observe a decrease in the number of births as follows: in 1914 there were 102,555 births, in 1915 the number decreased to 70 099 births, in 1916 there were 47 391 births, in 1917 there were 44 452 newborns, and in 1918, the lowest number of births was recorded- only 42,336.³ Based on the data presented we can see a considerable decline in the birth rate during the war, a phenomenon not seen since 1914, because this year had witnessed the births of those conceived at the end of 1913 or beginning of 1914, a time when most of the world was still at peace. At the beginning of 1915 there were still babies conceived in the Spring and Summer of 1914, ergo before the outbreak of war. Therefore, the war's true impact on fertility could be seen only from the second half of 1915.

On the other hand, one must bear in mind the fact that during that time, newborns were, to a certain extent, perceived negatively by society. They were viewed as an additional burden, especially to the families of those who had left for the frontlines, thus

¹ Mihai I. Culu, *Treceți batalioane române Carpații!(din cronica luptelor duse de armata română în Războiul pentru Întregirea Neamului)* (București: Editura Militară, 1993) 5.

² Ioana Elena Ignat, „Civili în război: controlul prețului la alimente în Transilvania în primul război mondial (reflexat în presa românească)” în *De la lume adunate... Lucrările Conferinței Naționale Viață cotidiană, familie, alimentație și populație în secolele XVIII-XXI, Cluj-Napoca, 18-19 martie 2011*, coordonat de Baciu Crucea-Loredana et. al. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2011) 424-425.

³ Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, „Mutații demografice în Transilvania în anii primului război mondial” în *Mișcări de populație și aspecte demografice în România în prima jumătate a secolului XX*, coord.: Sorina P. Bolovan et. al. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2007) 74; Magyar Statisztikay Közlemények. Új sorozat, Budapesta, vol. 50, 70.

leaving them on their own. Very small children were in need of attention, care and a special diet, which meant reducing the time needed for other types of housework and an increase in expenses, something that was not possible in every case, and thus these children would come to be viewed as an extra care for their families. This mentality led to a form of preventive behavior in some situations, and in others it even meant reacting with indifference at the death of a child.⁴

One could distinguish between the birth rates recorded in the rural setting, and those recorded in the urban one. The result would be the discovery of a more pronounced decrease of births in rural areas. One reason is the differentiation in terms of recruitment. Thus, because of the fact that the workload of a man from a village could be easily replaced by those remaining at home, without any need for special training to carry out the activities pertaining to such a household, the majority of new recruits were selected from villages. Regarding the urban area, the very seat of industry and services, it naturally demanded a qualified type of workforce, one previously specialized in a certain activity, which made replacing those fitting this description that more difficult. It was for this reason that in urban areas were reported several instances in which men were exempted from the front because they were indispensable at work. Thus, the number of men of the right age to procreate was lower in villages than in urban areas, leading to a differentiation in birth rates according to setting, as shown above.

Regarding the marriage rates in Transylvania, from a statistical perspective, one can observe that in 1914 there was a total of 19,929 marriages, in 1915 this was followed by a large decrease leading to a total of 9,351 marriages, in 1916 this decline continued, although not as pronounced, leading to a number of 8,046 marriages, in 1917 there was a slight increase in the number of marriages, which reached 9466 and as for the final year, 1918, it witnessed a rapid growth in the number of marriages, totaling 15,289.⁵ The type of behavior recorded during wartime is normal, since most men of the right age for marrying were mobilized, and because those left behind were reluctant to start a family during such a time, and thus decided to wait for the war to end. The huge increase in the number of marriages concluded in the war's final year certainly marks the end of the year and was due to the end of the conflict and the men's homecoming. At that time, both women and men were eager to start families and silently take comfort in them, as they were overwhelmed by the happiness of seeing each other once again, of the knowledge that the war was finally over and they could return to their normal lives.

Finally, in terms of the death rate during the First World War we have the following statistics : from a total of 73 718 deaths in 1914, to 83 065 deaths in 1915, 65 285 deaths in 1916, 59 918 deaths for 1917 and for the final year, 1918 there is a total of 70 307 deaths.⁶ When we talk about mortality we must not forget the important role of the infant mortality rate- in Transylvania, records show a rate of 19.7% in 1914, 26.4% in 1915, 21.8% in 1916 , 21.6 % in 1917 , and 21.7% in 1918 , according to Kovacs Alajos.⁷

Based on these figures it can be seen that the peak was reached in 1915, the first full year of the war, and the minimum was recorded in 1917, the penultimate year of the war. Thus, unlike the other 2 abovementioned components of the natural movement of

⁴ Ioana Elena Ignat, „Familia transilvăneană în primul război mondial”, în *În căutarea fericirii. Viața familială în spațiul românesc în sec. XVIII–XX* (supliment al RJPS), coord.: Ioan Bolovan et. al. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010) 314.

⁵ Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, „Mutații demografice în Transilvania în anii primului război mondial”..., 74; Magyar Statisztikay Közlemények. Új sorozat, Budapest, vol. 50, 70.

⁶ Ibid, 74; Magyar Statisztikay Közlemények. Új sorozat, Budapest, vol. 50, 70.

⁷ Pakot Levente, „Populația comitatului Odorhei în perioada primului război mondial” în *Mișcări de populație și aspecte demografice în România în prima jumătate a secolului XX*, ... 121.

population, which witnessed quite a fall in the numbers that were recorded, unsurprisingly, the same cannot be said about mortality. What is surprising is that the number of deaths not only fluctuates, but even decreases. A possible explanation for this unexpected situation would be the fact that the official figures taken into consideration here do not indicate the number of deaths on the frontlines.⁸

The information outlined up to this point paints a picture of the statistical demographic data concerning Transylvania during the First World War. However, this information is not sufficient for a very clear general image. To better understand the situation during the war in Transylvania, additional information from other research fields is required, as we will discuss in the following section.

SOCIO –ECONOMIC ASPECTS

The family is the basic cell of society, therefore it is here that the effects of war were most painfully felt- to better understand what happened with society, we had to stop and consider the implications at a cellular level (the family), in order to outline an overview.⁹

Each member of the family, from the husband, or father, who is directly involved in the conflict by his being sent to the frontlines, to the wife, or mother, who has no choice but that of taking on the responsibilities of her husband, each individual is important to society. Last but not least, we must also mention the children, because they too had to endure the merciless consequences of being involved in such a large-scale military conflict. The life of these families was not an easy one, as they felt the impact of the war both statistically, as shown above, and from a socio-economic perspective, as we will presently demonstrate.

Regarding Transylvania, its agriculture and industry, two of the most important economic sectors, suffered a great deal because of the war, the same as everywhere else. The first of these mentioned economic sectors had to contend with shortages of workforce, as the women, children, the elderly and disabled who had been left at home failed to fully compensate for the lack of men who had left for the frontlines, which led to a decrease in agricultural production from year to year. As a result, the end of the war witnessed a decrease of 36 % in potato crops, 42 % in grain yield, and even 48 % in maize crops, according to some sources.¹⁰

Over time, the wants and needs that were not met only multiplied. " [...] Dozens and hundreds of houses in each village were left without help and support, which not only completely destabilized the mental balance, peace and good will in the hearts of the people, but also disturbed the balance of economy, of organized work and of wages, leaving a state of great uncertainty, a fear of tomorrow and wants and misery to dwell in its place."¹¹ - this quote describes very well the overall condition of the time, concerning the economics of the Transylvanian peasant household. Towards the end of the war "thousands of hectares remained uncultivated "¹², due to the lack of those who would have undertaken this occupation.

⁸ Sorina Paula Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, „Mutații demografice în Transilvania în anii primului război mondial”..., 77.

⁹ Ioana Elena Ignat, „Familia transilvăneană în primul război mondial”..., 307.

¹⁰ Ștefan Pascu, et. al. „Unele aspecte ale problemei agrare în monarhia austro-ungară la începutul secolului al XX-lea (1900-1918)” în *Destrămarea monarhiei austro-ungare. 1900-1918. Comunicări prezentate la Conferința istoricilor din 4-9 mai 1964 de la Budapesta*, coord. C. Daicoviciu et. al. (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964) 67.

¹¹ *Revista economică*, Sibiu, 1915, nr. 43.

¹² Pascu, Unele aspecte ale problemei agrare în monarhia austro-ungară la începutul secolului al XX-lea (1900-1918), 67.

Annual agricultural production obtained in Transylvania during the war did not follow the development pattern of cultivated areas, but the trend is the same for almost all types of cereals. Thus the maximum output is obtained for each crop in 1915, with the following figures: 13 897 q of corn, wheat 10,914 q, 3.241 q oats, barley 1.591 q and only 1.215 q rye.¹³ Regarding the minimum output, this was also recorded in the case of cereals, in 1918, as the following figures indicate: 6758 q corn, wheat 6,049 q, 1.806 q oats, barley 700 q and 985 q rye.¹⁴ According to this data, the peak of production per hectare of major crops was in 1915, and 12.2 q / ha wheat, 12.1 q / ha rye, 11.6 q / ha and 11.4 q barley / ha oats, except for maize, which recorded 16 q / ha in 1914.¹⁵ Concerning the minimum is recorded by all types of cultures in the same year, that is, the final year of the war, when maize production was 7.9 tons / ha, the rye of 7.2 q / ha, the wheat 6.8 q / ha, barley reached 6.7 q / ha and oats just 6.5 q / ha.¹⁶

The largest cultivated area was recorded in 1916, with the exception of wheat, which was cultivated the most in 1915. Thus, the maximum cultivated areas this year were of 962 ha of maize, 148 ha 303 ha barley and oats, in 1916, and rye occupied an area of 113 ha in 1914 and an area of 895 ha wheat in 1915.¹⁷ Regarding the year with the lowest cultivated area, this was 1917, excepting the barley crops, which reached a minimum in 1915 and never went in the other years below the value recorded in 1914. The smallest cultivated areas were of 780 ha, for wheat, 829 ha for maize, 275 ha for barley and only 74 ha for rye.¹⁸

By analyzing this data, we can see that the years in which the maximum and minimum of crop production were recorded do not coincide with the minimum and maximum of the cultivated areas. The minimum of cultivated areas was achieved in 1917, while the minimum of production was reached in 1918, whereas the maximum of cultivated areas was in 1916 and the maximum production was recorded in 1915 for all crops.

The situation of the Romanian peasants of Transylvania was worsened by the 'Law L' of 1914, which gave the government and its legal representatives the right of interfering in the issues concerning production, sales, pricing and even labor organization. All these measures aimed at keeping a steady level of agricultural production, despite the fact that the men who usually worked in agriculture were now on the battlefield, a fact that even led to situations in which those left behind were subjected to forced labor that was beyond their powers. But even this was not enough, as households had to deal with a large number of requisitions of draught animals that were a part of the basic structure of households, and the requisitions of agricultural production, which only grew from year to year. Towards the end of the war there were even situations in which requisitions were made with help from the army, since the peasants, who were poor to begin with, were suffering because of the effects of famine, and consequently refused to hand their harvests over to the authorities which continued to take the very last of their provisions. It is quite understandable why these measures ignited even more hatred for the authorities and for those who were implementing their orders.¹⁹

¹³Victor Axenciu, *Evoluția Economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1850-1947*, vol. II Agricultura (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1996) 521.

¹⁴ Axenciu, *Evoluția Economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1850-1947*, vol. II

¹⁵ Axenciu, *Evoluția Economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1850-1947*, vol. II, 525.

¹⁶ Axenciu, *Evoluția Economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1850-1947*, vol. II.

¹⁷ Axenciu, *Evoluția Economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1850-1947*, vol. II, 514.

¹⁸ Axenciu, *Evoluția Economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1850-1947*, vol. II

¹⁹ Pascu, Unele aspecte ale problemei agrare în monarhia austro-ungară la începutul secolului al XX-lea (1900-1918), 76.

Regarding the industry, we must emphasize that its development in Transylvania did not keep up with other regions of the Austro - Hungarian Empire, as there was a negative bias towards it, which was certainly not the case with the areas traditionally tied to the Empire. Despite all that, Transylvania did manage to take small steps towards progress. The most important factors that contributed to the industrialization of Transylvania were: the existence of energy resources, the wealth of raw materials, and consumption demands. For each resource, industries were developed in areas rich in natural gas, coal, various minerals, wood, agricultural products, animals and so on, and in accordance with the available resources, industries which could profitably use all of them made steady and significant progress.²⁰ From an industrial point of view, in Transylvania of that period there were manufactories, miller's trade, exploitation and processing of underground deposits, textile industry, food industry, building materials, glass, wood, etc..²¹

The fact that the industry became subordinated to the defensive forces and placed under military control must be emphasized. Regarding the economy, those industrial sectors in which the army showed interest were militarized, for example: arms factories, footwear factories, those producing canned food, mines, and so on, and those that do not meet the military criteria experienced a lapse into derelictness caused by lack of sufficient workforce and demand.²² But even so, militarization did not save those industrial sectors that were part of the war effort- one example would be the textile industry. Moreover, the lack of raw materials and of skilled labor even led to the cessation of activity in some domains.²³

The situation of the State finances was also growing increasingly and rapidly worse. The attempts that were meant to solve these problems only amplified that decline. The issuance of banknotes without coverage led to a large increase in inflation, as reported in 1913- on October 31st 1918, it had increased by 1,260 %.²⁴ This led to a dramatic decline in the purchasing power of the population.

Regarding the situation of the Romanian banks of Transylvania, they managed to resist the problems caused by the war's development. Moreover, they even managed to complete a lot of charitable activities, thus helping the families of those who had been deployed and not only, as I pointed out in a previously published article, which is why I will not insist on this.²⁵

For many families it was not a good situation at all, both because of the difficulties encountered because of the outbreak of the war and because of disagreements within the family. For instance, one woman's father-in-law, in whose care his son had left the household, asked for payment in exchange for his aid, even if the woman did not have the means to comply with his demand.²⁶ Many women were forced to seek employment, to work in various industrial domains and services, in order to receive an income that would

²⁰ Lucian Turdeanu, *Dezvoltarea industrială a Ardealului, Institutul Economic Românesc*, (București: Tipografia „Lupta” N. Stroilă, f. a.) 16.

²¹ Eugeniu Merce, *Gândirea economică cu privire la credit și instituțiile bancare din Transilvania (1848-1918)*, (Cluj-Napoca, 1999) 95, 97, 98, 114-117.

²² Eugenia Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra primului război mondial*, (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2004) 100.

²³ Toader Ionescu, *Ideea unității naționale reflectată în gândirea economică din Transilvania. 1848-1918*, (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983) 155.

²⁴ Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra primului război mondial*, 100.

²⁵ Ioana Elena Ignat, „Economic system in Transylvania during World War I: Romanian Banks and their major charitable activities”, în *Research and Science Today*, Nr. 2, (Târgu-Jiu, 2012).

²⁶ DJCAN, *Fond Scrisori din Primul Război Mondial*, 551.

allow them to support their families, as a result of the recruitments of those who under normal circumstances had that responsibility.²⁷

The industrial State was affected by the outbreak of war firstly because of the fact that it had the obligation of sending master workmen and their journeymen, specialists, and therefore women and children were unable to replace them well enough to get the same profit as before. Regarding the agricultural State, in this case the workforce was much easier to replace. Men aged 19-20 years and over were replaced by young people of 16-17 years old, and by women who took on the responsibilities of sowing, reaping, harvesting and so on, and thus the economy at home did not meet its demise with the mobilization of the man responsible with the administration of the household's affairs.²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

At the risk of repetition, the fact that the family was, is and will always be the basic unit of society still needs to be stressed. Regardless of what happens in society, the family is always affected, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the seriousness of the situation. World War I was one of the situations that caused both the family as a whole, as an institution, and individually, from each member's perspective, much suffering and hardships. This study has endeavored to observe the relationship between the three demographic phenomena: birth rate, marriage rate and mortality, and the context created by the war's development, especially within the Romanian families of Transylvania. It is impossible to create a general image of a society without a more complex analysis of the relationship between statistics and the socio-economic, cultural, political and military context, which is sometimes difficult to complete because of a lack of necessary information, as was also this case. However, based on the little information obtained, I managed to analyze how World War I affected the population of Transylvania at a demographic and socio-economic level, as well as outline a partial picture of family life in Romanian Transylvania, a picture which will hopefully be completed with the addition of some more detailed future studies, in order to shape a general image as clear as possible.

²⁷ *Revista economică...*, 1917, nr. 30.

²⁸ *Libertatea din Ardeal. Foaie națională poporală*, București, 1916, nr. 4.

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