

**Insights into the Politico-Administrative Dimension
of Interwar Romania.
A Perspective of the Gustian Monographic Sociology¹**

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Abstract: In this study, we intend to present, using a socio-historical approach, the political and administrative aspects of the interwar Romanian society and state, as it has been investigated, from the perspective of monographic methodology, by the Sociological School of Bucharest, headed by Professor Dimitrie Gusti. The article aims at highlighting the existing legislative conflict between the traditional local government organization in the “old” Counties of Făgăraș and Vrancea, for example, and the modern administrative codes, adopted after 1864, by the “new” centralized Romanian state. Furthermore, we also highlight the negative perception of the population in the Romanian villages of Bessarabia and Transylvania (who lived under the tsarist and Austro-Hungarian rule until World War I) on the deficient administrative functioning of the interwar Romanian state. Although various projects of administrative reform attempted to correct these shortcomings, within the interwar period studied, excessive bureaucratization of the state and poor salaries of the public servants remained constant elements of the Romanian administrative political life.

Keywords: Sociological School of Bucharest, monographic methodology, bureaucratization, administrative reform, state centralization, local and central government.

1. Introduction

The social politico-administrative embedding has always played a significant role since it has shaped the social actors' roles, the legislative context, the ruling styles and the social structure of the respective community. This article will focus on a synthetic analysis of the social politico-administrative reality specific to the interwar Romanian society and state as it was studied through a monographic methodology, within the span

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of 23 years (1925-1948), by the Sociological School of Bucharest². From the very beginning, it should be highlighted the fact that such a retrospective and sector-based approach on the impact of the politico-administrative regulations, practices and manifestations (as they were perceived, studied, measured, observed, or analyzed, at that time, by the Sociological School of Bucharest) upon the interwar Romanian society, even under this synthetic form, represents a novelty within the Romanian sociological research, which has been claiming itself since the Gusti School, more than 60 years since the banning of sociology by the communist authorities of the Popular Republic of Romania.

Two reasons can be mentioned for such a novelty within the Romanian sociological research. On the one hand, the Gustian monography, in order to be “complete”, focused on the “unitary” study (Gusti 1939: 2; Stahl 1937: 9-12; Larionescu 2007: 121) of four aspects (cosmological, biological, historical and psychical) and of four manifestations (economic, spiritual, moral and judicial, politico-administrative). Except for Henri H. Stahl’s monumental work (*Nerej, un village d'une region archaïque*, three volumes, published in 1939), this scientific wish has never been achieved. On the other hand, according to Paul H. Stahl (2002: 7-8), the study of the Romanian interwar political-administrative life was, probably, “the most unpleasant” aspect of the local public life which seemed to foreshadow the legendary aura of the rural areas and settlements which had been provided with monographic studies. This is the reason for which, for example, such a significant chapter for the Gustian methodology belonging to the sociological research is not included in the monograph of the village of Nerej (published in 1939, as the opening speech of the International Sociological Congress which should have been held at Bucharest that year). This chapter would have been “hard to be accepted by those who love the most noble traditions of the Romanian regions” (Stahl 2002: 8, our transl.), under the political conditions of that époque marked by the royal patronage exercised upon the Prince Carol Royal Cultural Foundation (which used to finance most of the

²The Sociological School of Bucharest (1919-1948), also known as the Gusti School, named after its founder, was the first and the only Romanian school of sociology. It was founded, after the World War I, by Professor Dimitrie Gusti and his collaborators: Henri H. Stahl, Traian Herseni, Anton Golopenția, Octavian Neamțu etc. Within the intellectual interwar scene, the Gusti School proposes the concept of a modern sociological seminar or the revolutionary idea, at that time, of the sociological monographs. These monographs started in 1925 and involved the direct investigation of the Romanian villages. After December, 30, 1947, when the totalitarian communist regime sets in Romania, sociology was considered a “burgeoise”, “utopian” discipline which was said to mystify the social realities. The total exclusion of sociology from the curricula of high-school and high education represented the end of the Gusti School.

monographic campaigns conducted by the Gusti School, in the 30's of the 20th century).

In order to highlight the way in which the Sociological School of Bucharest studied the politico-administrative problems through its monographic campaigns during the interwar period, it is necessary to provide a brief insight into the concepts of the Gustian theoretical and methodological framework.

2. The Gustian sociological system – a theoretical framework of the politico-administrative manifestations

From the very beginning, there should be emphasized the fact that the political action is based on the sociological knowledge within the monographic sociological system developed by Prof. Dimitrie Gusti. The theoretical system established by the Sociological School of Bucharest involves an interdependence between relation and correlation, a harmonious collaboration between the scientific research *versus* the political action or between “the cogitans sociology” *versus* “the militans sociology”. Thus, politics can no longer be conceived apart from a thorough sociological foundation. Being embedded into a unitary system based on Sociology, Ethics and Politics, “the new science of the Nation”, which, during the interwar period, was to become the monographic sociology, was placed, from the very beginning, by the founder of the School of Bucharest, within the public service of the Romanian village. Firstly, as “cogitans sociology”, in order to apprehend and scientifically study “the synthetic and complete social reality”, having as main work methodology the monographic campaign or the field sociological survey, mainly run in the rural areas of the Great Romania. Secondly, as “militans sociology”, in order to justify and guide, on the basis of the sufficient reasoning acquired through early scientific knowledge, the political action of social change that can be noticed especially during the ‘30s in different domains of activity, under the reign of Carol II (Gusti 1934: III, VI-VIII & 12).

In the volume *Îndrumări pentru monografice sociologice/ Guidelines for Sociological Monographs*³, Anton Golopenția (1940: 365-367) develops the problematic of the political and administrative sociology, following the line highlighted by the founder of the School of Bucharest. A. Golopenția considers that the main aim of monographic

³ This volume was published under Professor Gusti's scientific guidance and under Traian Herseni's technical supervision, by the Bureau of Sociological Researches (The Romanian Institute of Social Sciences).

studies is to document the political decisions that are to be taken by the persons who perform state functions. Thus, the effort to know and to scientifically study the social reality should be carried out within the context of the act of running a nation.

The sociological monographs which study the demographic, economic, social, cultural, or politico-administrative situation of some concrete social units constitute “the contribution of social science researches [...] to the development of domestic politics of one’s own nation” (Golopenția 1940: 365, our transl.). Dimitrie Gusti (1934: 19) emphasizes the necessity of such an institutional effort to organize the sociological competence and to place social science within the service of “the development of the general social will”. His main arguments lie on the fact that “the Romanian ruling group, with few exceptions, is mostly led by routine, – lacking ideas and information –, in some favorable cases, by empiricism, namely by unsystematic information, [...] and in the best cases, by a sort of sentimental utopianism, namely by ideas lent through a feeling of sympathy, without any serious information” (our transl.).

As for the politico-administrative mission of the monographic sociology, the founder of the Romanian School of Sociology is of the opinion that the scientific study of villages should provide to the local and central public administration the documentation and information materials on: “the vices which keep threatening and gnawing at the very roots of our nation and our public life”, “the lack of a technical organization of the rural social life”, the misery and the social backwardness, the bad life conditions, “the lack of a proper care-taking coming from the State authorities”, illiteracy, “the spread of social diseases with all their well-known damages”, the concubinage problems, “the greater number of pubs than that of schools”, “the tithing in the name of religion”. For the public administration, the monographic research constitutes a valuable scientific help, “without which it cannot become productive or creative, namely it cannot accomplish its mission”. Starting from the premises according to which “one cannot legislate when one does not know for what and for whom (s)he legislates, as one cannot manage one’s household, when one does not know what and for whom (s)he manages his/ her household” (our transl.), Professor Gusti considers that the sociological monograph places politics, whose main task is to achieve the social ideal, within the context of the concrete reality, through a deep awareness of the real social evolution tendencies (Gusti 1934: 85-86).

But the sociological monograph also has its own politics, since the social man of science, through his/ her personal contact with the rural social life, arrives to discover and understand the evolution tendencies and the social ideal towards which the society is heading. Then he may work on the adequate means, from a political point of view, to

provide the social achievements and changes. Thus the man of social science, “overtaken by the life torrent”, will turn into a man of action (a political man) as he is “eager to suppress or at least to diminish the conflicts, the deadlocks and the vices” beyond the interwar Romanian political and social reality. As the man of science becomes a political man, the monographic sociology, which is always based on an objective study of some concrete social reality, gets at the ethical and politico-administrative achievement of the social ideal, having as final outcome the accomplishments of some social reforms through political means. Within the Gustian system, sociology (the scientific research) is interwoven with ethics (the defining of the social ideal) and with politics (the achievement of the social ideal).

3. The politico-administrative manifestations – the monograph methodology

Within the monographic and sociological activities conducted by the Sociological School of Bucharest, between 1925-1948, the politico-administrative manifestations were not generally given a great attention and were not widely spread (compared to other manifestations and frameworks). Nevertheless they used to stir some scientific interest. Taking into account this situation, Dimitrie Gusti (1946: 164-165) considers that the sociological monograph studies the rural administration (village halls, public servants, constables, superior courts, county halls), the rural inhabitants’ attitude towards the Romanian administrative, executive, and legislative authorities (at the central and local level), and the peasants’ political perceptions especially on the way in which politics works and the party system functions at the local level. A special attention should be provided to the administrative habits or customs, *de facto* applied at the local level since ancient times. These should be related to the administrative laws, regulations and codes, *de jure* applied at the national level. Regarding the manner in which the Gusti School understood how to achieve this monographic study of villages, there should be highlighted the fact that in a work whose foreword is written by Dimitrie Gusti, Henri H. Stahl (1937: II & 194-196) largely deals with the political and administrative life problems of the Romanian village, referring both to the aspect of the written administrative law (the way in which the administrative legislation of the Romanian modern state is applied at the local level) and that of the oral administrative law (which produces judicial consequences in the name of the land tradition, without being “stipulated in the official papers of the village hall”).

Starting from the premise that “the Romanian ancient villages always had their own well-established administration”, the Romanian sociologist mentions that in a

monographic study, “one should observe the whole administration of the village since ancient times up to nowadays, thus all the local administrative tasks being noticed” (Stahl 1937: 194-195). The study of the political life of the village involves, on the one hand, the study of the local election phenomenon, as the political parties are the organizations which maintain the link between the local and the national political life, and on the other hand, the research into “the [political] turmoils, that are to be found even in villages, between different race, confession or economic categories, each of them wishing to have a decisive word in what the administrative problems are concerned”. In order to accomplish these objectives of monographic research, H.H. Stahl (1937: 196-197) writes some guidelines formed of two questionnaires:

1. *The questionnaire for the study of politico-administrative life* focuses on the history, domestic administration, location description, former activity presentation, present functioning of the village hall, the rural goods and properties administration, the relations between the village hall and other public authorities or state organs, the pinpointing of the tasks customarily or habitually assumed by the village hall and which are not stipulated in the modern administrative legislation, the village annual budget construction and implementation.
2. *The questionnaire for the study of political life* focuses on the political psychological elements regarding the persons involved in the village politics, on the knowledge of the political club members, on the knowledge of the persons with “political beliefs, but without being political members”, of the rebels and of the social reformers, on the presentation of the party organizations which have local branches, on the observation of the way in which the election and political confrontations take place in villages, on the analysis of the county and village election results.

In the volume *Îndrumări pentru monografiile sociologice/ Guidelines for Sociological Monographs* (see footnote 3), Traian Herseni and Gheorghe Lupchian (1940: 368-374) consider that the study of a rural administrative entity, in what “the household life” is concerned, involves three major layers of scientific interest for the sociological investigation:

- the technical-judicial perspective: the legal administration or the administrative law focuses on the study of laws, administrative regulations or other legislative acts;
- the sociological perspective: the real administration implies the study of the local administrative life as it really takes place in the village, beyond the legal stipulations.
- the political perspective: the (local) political action focuses on the measure plan, scientifically drawn and studied on the basis of the data of the social reality, provided to

the state by the field sociology. This plan embeds the ways in which some concrete improvements to the administrative functioning can be brought about, thus having immediate positive consequences for the state domestic activity.

Once these main elements of the methodological and theoretical framework belonging to the Sociological School of Bucharest have been established, we will provide a synthetic analysis of the main approaches that the Gusti School had on the manifestations and genesis of the politico-administrative activities. A special emphasis will be laid on the negative social consequences of the politico-administrative issues under study.

4. The dissolution process of the local traditional administrative and organizational structures

The analysis will focus on the dissolution process that took place in two Romanian regions: (1) Țara Vrancei/ the County of Vrancea which was organized on three layers of local authority: the layer of the village, the layer of the valley (embedding more neighboring villages along the same valley) and the layer of the region (formed of more valleys); (2) Țara Făgărașului/ the County of Făgăraș which used to have the lad group and the Drăguș neighborhood as administrative structures.

According to Henri H. Stahl (1929: 576-578), the main reason which led to the disaggregation, administratively speaking, of the former Moldavian-Wallachian community life and to the internal dissolution of "the group under the form of a village", lies on the harmful influence of the Romanian modern state and especially on the centralization process, following the French model. Starting with the Phanariot 18th century and having as main reference points, the adoption of the Organic Regulations (1831/ 1832), of the administrative reforms initiated by Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1864 – the Rural Law, the Law for the County Hall Settlement) and the 1866 Constitution as a climax point, there had been taking place a rapid process of replacing the traditional systems of free village collective administration with the official system of state administration.

Traditionally, the free yeomen's villages (a yeoman was called "moșnean" in Wallachia, and "răzeș" in Moldavia) used to organize, run and administrate by themselves through their own administrative organs, elected from among the rural community, according to the habitual or customary judicial norms. Also labeled as "Grămada satului" ("the Village Crowd"), the general Assembly of the community gathered as its members with equal rights, all the adult villagers under a form of deliberative and decisional

association which used to be specific to a primitive democracy. This assembly had the role of delegating the elected executive public authorities (the village seneschal, prince, judge, mayor) and those mandated (having no time limit, but always under the possibility of being revoked). Their role was to put into practice the decisions taken by the respective village assemblies (Cernea, Molcuț 2006: 105-106; Guțan 2006: 60-63).

In the 19th century, the two laws regarding the complete reorganization of the Romanian local public administration (the Rural Law and the Law for the County Hall Settlement, promulgated by Al. I. Cuza on the 1st and 2nd of April 1864) had a twofold effect:

- on the one hand, they caused a break from the Romanian institutional tradition because of the import of politico-administrative organizations and institutions, following the French and Belgian model.
- on the other hand, they determined a complete and immediate change of the Romanian institutional environment by the abandoning of the ruling role that the traditional administrative organ, under the form of a group, used to play at the local level.

Following the French model, there were legislated the institution of the prefect and of the mayor (having executive tasks) and the county and commune council (having deliberative tasks). The two executive functions at the county and commune level acquired a double quality: a) organs of decentralized public administration, and b) governmental representatives at the local and county level. The interweaving of these roles had a twofold consequence: the politization (loading with tasks imposed by the central executive authorities from Bucharest) and the rigorous governmental control upon the mayor and the prefect positions. This is the reason why in Romania, the local autonomy and the administrative decentralization – principles formally stipulated in the 1866 Constitution⁴ – actually implied a moderate centralization, having as consequence the extreme instability of the position of a prefect. The reasons for this incertitude lie on the frequent changes of the Government and the shift within the mayor's tasks from his official duty, that of being a promoter of his village interests, to a role of a mere executor of the higher executive authorities' dispositions (Guțan 2006: 203-204).

Whereas in Nerej (the County of Vrancea), the traditional organizations of the local

⁴ According to the 106 and 107 articles in the 1866 Constitution, the commune and the county institutions shall focus on “a more complete administration decentralization and commune independence” (our transl.).

public administration (village, valley and yard group) had rapidly dissolved once they entered into contact with the public law norms of the modern Romanian state, in Drăguș, in the County of Făgăraș, the lad group and the neighborhood used to experience an alteration of the former norms which were the basis of the ancient traditional organization, especially the ancient election mechanism of the neighborhood fathers and the group leader (Herseni 1936; Stahl 1929; *Idem* 1936).

5. The local public administration (in Bessarabia and in Transylvania)

We will present the way in which the administration in the two territories evolved under the Tzarist and the Austro-Hungarian ruling (until the First World War) and the Romanian ruling (after 1918).

A significant population sample which might appreciate and knowingly evaluate the Romanian local public administration organization and functioning mechanisms during the interwar period is formed of those Romanians who, until 1918, lived under the Russian ruling in Bessarabia and under the Habsburgic ruling in Transylvania and who could compare the "new" Romanian administrative regime with the "old" Russian and Austro-Hungarian imperial system. The most sensitive problem, after the Great Union, lay on the local administrative autonomy, an issue which, according to Manuel Guțan (2006: 253), "would make the Old Kingdom's centralized regime confront with the more decentralized local public administration regime" (our transl.). The latter regime was of Hungarian origin in Transylvania, of Austrian origin in Bukovina and of Russian origin in Bessarabia. For example, "in Transylvania and Banat, each village used to form a commune, towns used to benefit from an administrative autonomy, all the organs of these administrative units being elected. These organs might self-organize and run themselves following their own by-laws, the head of the decentralized county public administration was not a representative of the center, the control being more relaxed and there were sufficient financial resources to support all the commune and county tasks" (Guțan 2006: 253-254, our transl.).

In the Old Kingdom, the local public administration situation was totally different: "the communes were artificial creations, arbitrarily delimited by the legislator, the towns had an administrative autonomy only if the center accepted such a thing, only some of the decentralized administrative organs were elected. Generally the county and commune regulations were to be approved by the tutelary organs, the position of the county public administration head coincided with the government representative at the county level, the administrative control was excessively overwhelming, especially for the rural

communes, and the financial resources were most of the times fictitious, thus not being able to finance the local public services. Above all, the local collectivities were often forced to give important sums of money to the state budget” (Guțan 2006: 254, our transl.).

Actually the liberal law which was meant to achieve, in 1925, the unification and extension of the administration regime of the Old Kingdom, towards all the recently joined Romanian provinces, was deeply centralized and neglected the great local autonomy which Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia, within the Habsburgic and the Russian empires, benefited from (Guțan 2006: 260).

This is the reason why the monographic research teams that studied two rural communities from Bessarabia (Năpădeni) and Transylvania (Șanț) during the interwar period, were surprised to notice, on the one hand, the generalized hostile state of the local population towards Great Romania’s central and local institutions and organizations and, on the other hand, the explicit regret for the “former” imperial politico-administrative life (free of anarchy, violence and Romanian electoral demagoguery).

5.1. The Russian administration versus the Romanian administration (Năpădeni, in Bessarabia)

Arriving to Bessarabia, in Năpădeni, in 1934, the 40 student royal team (Năpădeni-Bălți) is surprised to notice the local population’s stifled hostile reaction towards the Romanian state administration. Although in this Bessarabian community everything “is Romanian, the language is Romanian, the customs and spiritual manifestations were Romanian”, Dumitru Dogaru (1937: 288-291 and 296-297) was surprised to find out that not an inhabitant from Năpădeni knew anything about the Romanian history or culture (“the mother country” being rather perceived as “another country”). Instead, “Russia was loved” by the Năpădeni inhabitants, the Russian imperial state succeeded in gaining these inhabitants through its huge dimensions, its uniform glamour and brightness, and the superior social classes’ privileges. The team students noticed that the local population had still been holding the portrait of the Russian tzars in every single house, in 1934. This loyal feeling towards the Russian state was based on the lack of Russian constraint upon the villagers, who seemed to feel “freer under the Russian domination”, since the taxes were paid through share tribute, the education and military services – the latter introduced relatively late, towards the end of the 19th century – were not compulsory and the own product commerce was tax free.

Once Bessarabia joined Romania in 1918, the first impact with the new Romanian state “will strike them in an unpleasant way” because the Bessarabian inhabitants from Năpădeni will lose even “those privileges that they enjoyed during the Russian domination”. Thus it could be explained why the new Romanian state compared to the Russian one, seemed to the Năpădeni inhabitants too complex, puzzling, and much more coercive because it involved scholarly compulsory presence, a different form of taxation, different supervisors, the financial guard, soldiers, too many official papers for the most insignificant request addressed to authorities. ”Since the war, Mătia Popa, 72 years old, considers that if you want to transport a small wine barrel from one place to another, you are caught and they confiscate all your fortune. This did not happen under the Russians. Now you even pay the vineyard and if God helps and the wine is made, you even pay the beverage tax. It was better before. I just used to load my wine barrel and I could just cross the Nistru. Nobody asked me a thing”. One should also take into account ”the lack of tact, the clumsiness, the inability and the evil will of the Romanian official representatives” (at the local level) who used to sell the portrait of the Romanian royal family, even if this should have been freely distributed. Asked by the team students where she had the royal family portrait from, a woman gave the following answer: ”Well, from the village hall. We paid 20 lei for it. Everybody was upset. I hang it here (on the wall) but some simply threw it into the fire” (Dogaru 1937: 297-298, our transl.).

5.2. The Austrian-Hungarian administration versus the Romanian administration (Șanț, Năsăud County, Transylvania)

A relatively similar situation could be met in another region monographically studied by the Sociological School of Bucharest, namely the village of Șanț (Năsăud county). If before the war, under the Austrian-Hungarian administration, the villagers from Șanț “did not know what hatred and dissension among them might mean”, after Transylvania joined Romania, there was a period of political “decay” and “falling apart” determined, at the local level, by the lack of application of the deduction law “full of anomalies”, adopted by the Parliament in Bucharest (Micu 1937: 460).

After the Great Union, starting with 1924, “the political life of the village has grown more and more violent”. It seemed to be the time for different political forms to be established. Thus “speculating the population’s [political] events and [economic] shortcomings (caused by the growing number of inhabitants and the plotting of the properties due to inheritances)” and through “pettiest propaganda means”, these newly-created political entities might launch, support and legislate “the idea of the partial or complete withdrawal from the possession right”. This idea was very popular among the

villagers because it “provided to the people, insufficiently informed, the illusion of an immediate satisfaction”. The influence upon the public opinion and the political agitation of the village could happen due to the invention of the syntagm “the problem of separation” of the “mountains and forest heaps” which since 1763 had been under the collective property and administration of 44 communes from the Năsăud county which formerly used to be the workplace of border guards.

”The political sparkle” lightened after the First World War for ”the achievement of separation at all costs” kept on ”smoldering” until 1931, when ”the political propaganda” of the National Peasants’ Party ”succeeded in winning and completely influencing the public opinion of the village”. This is a period marked by great political problems, which the village experienced for two years, the climax point happening in 1933, at the end of the National Peasants’ Party governing, when the separation law was voted. The consequence of its inapplicability was “the outburst of a *revolutionary separation*” of the forest complex of Năsăud, achieved by the inhabitants of Șanț themselves through violent means (Micu 1937: 460, 463).

While ”the population’s revolt” and ”the anarchy wave” were growing, the villagers of Șanț, stirred by the politicians’ shallow promises, acted under a desperation impulse. On July, 23, 1933, they organized a great protest meeting which, although forbidden in the last minute by the government, gathered 5,000 persons in the streets of Bistrița, from all the 44 communes of the Năsăud county, the former workplace of border guards. The protesters threatened to devastate the County Hall and the County Forest Division.

On October, 17, 1933, ”there are harvested the crops of a decade of political agitation” in the village of Șanț, when ”the alarm-horn could be heard and all the men, the whole village gathers at 7 o’clock in the morning in front of the Village Hall. Carrying hatches and axes, they form groups and they start to accomplish the separation”. As a consequence, there were a lot of arrests and interrogations, and thus “the infiltration of the political parties in Șanț ends at law courts” (Micu 1937: 463-464). During the judicial investigation which followed the 1933 “revolution”, initiated by the inhabitants of the villages of Năsăud, the former workplace of border guards, Constantin V. Micu (1937: 463-464) notices that “the public action started by the Law Court of Năsăud, against the so-called heads of the revolt” should have been actually directed against the political organizations which “in their desire to win the masses, had been competing in seducing and luring the people”.

6. The former traditional local autonomy *versus* the new modern administrative centralism

Unlike the villages under the domination of boyars, monasteries or rulers, where the representative of the owner used “to run, administrate and judge”, the free yeomen’s villages in Wallachia and in Moldavia usually preserved their former administration, leading and judging rights through “their elected or inherited leaders, princes“, but always consulting the council of the elders (or that of the village groups). In time, starting with the Phanariot époque, “the influence and authority of rulers kept influencing the village administration and justice more and more”, through the diminishing of the leaders’ attributions, elected by the free village community, through the persons sent from the centre and authorized to rule and to exercise administrative and judicial attributions at the local level. During this period, the local public authorities were to be appointed, even in the free yeomen’s villages in Wallachia and in Moldavia, directly or indirectly⁵ by the ruling centre (Cernea, Molcuț 2006: 187-188; Guțan 2006: 109-113). The Organic Regulations somehow corrected this deficiency and set, from the point of view of the village administrative management, ”a Council, formed of elected people” from the local community. In the judicial system, there were established ”village law houses, formed of owners, priests and jurymen, elected by the villagers” (Rădulescu 1927: 29-30).

This historical process, started in the 18th Phanariot century and accomplished under Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s reforming reign, which completely changed the pre-modern Romanian local public administration (traditionally, having a relative autonomy from the central authority), had a twofold outcome:

- on the one hand, the adoption of an administrative centralism, thus following the French model, which was acknowledged in the 1864 administrative ruling systems;
- on the other hand, the excessive growth of the public officer system, with all its well-known deficiencies concerning the poor salaries, the attribution overlap, the poor professional training, the poor public services for the population and the lack of control.

“The presence of such an unprecedented centralism in the both Romanian regions”, even since the Phanariot rulings, determined the shaping of a state administrative system which was “by far better developed and organized than in the former centuries”, its deep

⁵ The indirect appointment was made by the county prefect (“ispravnicul de județ”). This position is the equivalent of the County Prefect of the modern Romanian state. This county governor was appointed and revoked by the powerful rulers.

functioning purpose being that of serving “the systemic exploitation of the country resources” (Guțan 2006: 95-96). The direct consequence of the enactment and implementation of this “new” modern administrative system of Western influence in the 18th and 19th centuries, implied the dissolution of the traditional autonomous legal forms of administrative organization at the local level (in the County of Vrancea – the village group, the valley group and the yard group and in the County of Făgăraș – the neighborhood and the lad group). These were replaced with public organizations, completely centre-free, and having a double task: a) deliberative tasks (commune and county councils whose decisions became executory only after they were approved by the tutelary administrative organs) and b) executive tasks (the state tutelary organs – the prefect, the minister of domestic affairs, the voivode, having the right to suspend and revoke the commune mayor or to dissolve the local and county council) (Guțan 2006: 203-204).

7. The politico-administrative origins of “the social evil” in interwar Romania

There were various and numerous deficiencies of the Romanian politic system which finally led, in 1938, to the collapse of the Romanian parliamentary and democratic political regime. Ten years later, after the Russian military intervention, the troublesome modernization process of Romania, following the Western model, was to be stopped for more than 40 years.

Without providing a complete analysis of the elements which constituted the major disfunctions of the interwar politico-administrative system, totally inefficient and which caused significant inequalities, we will only mention those elements which were considered important by the main social actors studied by the Gusti School. Among these irregularities, there could be mentioned the administrative and political arbitrariness, the agrarian reform failure, the corruption and the public authority system inefficiency, the legislative and administrative instability, the public administration inefficiency, the administrative system overload, and the public officers’ low salaries.

7.1. The administrative and political arbitrariness

Since Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s reformative ruling, the modern reorganization of the Romanian local public administration had been involving some malfunctions, among which Andrei Rădulescu⁶ (1927: pp. 36-37) mentions the fact that during the process of

⁶ Andrei Rădulescu is the former President of the High Court of Cassation and Justice, the 18

commune shaping (“artificial creations, arbitrarily cut off by the legislator”), “it happened that one village might be joined to a commune which was too far away or that a mountain, a large forest or some water which often used to prevent a proper communication might separate the village from the respective commune” (our transl.).

Although, according to the law, the commune administration and ruling belonged to the commune council, which was directly elected by the villagers, it sometimes happened that “in those villages where there was a boyar, a follower of a prince, a wealthier man, a man who was involved in the central political life, he was the one who decided how the Council should be elected”, because, being a voter in College I, “his will was carried out under all governments”. Actually, this situation, which obviously violated the legal provisions in force, seemed not to disturb the Romanian peasant too much because “something like this used to be happening before; the village rulers used to judge and take decisions”. As the violent interwar election confrontations are concerned, they were full of “demagogic promises” and “corruption means”. The election battle did not take place in order to elect the best thrifty men, “but to satisfy a group of one or another particular person from the county capital”.

During the 6th monographic campaign of the Sociological School of Bucharest, which took place in July 1930, in Runcu (Gorj County), Gheorghe Focşa (1932: 159, 169-171) talked with the peasant Grigorie Loghie. He highlighted some elements of peasant-like mentality: a disappointment in the concept of (secular or clerical) local public authority, the village hall and the church being considered the very souls of swindling in the rural environment. According to this mentality, the origin of the social evil has a political nature and “it always starts from the head, from [those] rulers” who “fight against each other to cast themselves down from the high positions of power and make this country and the peasants poorer and poorer”, continuously trying “to cram their pockets instead of accomplishing their duty”. The peasant, Grigorie Loghie, labelled the politicians and the interwar political party representatives as “rogues and thieves who keep on promising wonders till they occupy the cozy positions of power”. Once they got their ruling positions and had “the keys of the money box in their own hands”, their role is that of “getting themselves richer and richer and the country poorer and poorer”. Thus “the high authorities are guiltier than the thieves who steal” because they set some counter-models for the society: “if the evil did not come from the rulers, the petty people would not steal”. As a conclusion, the peasant, Grigorie Loghie, was skeptical about the democratic alternance to governing because “the rulers are poor” and they “impoverish” the country budget and the inhabitants with the payment of their excesses. He even

provided an ironic solution: “it would be better to be only one party which should never change” because “it might get rich enough not to feel the need of stealing”.

7.2. The legislative instability

As during the Old Kingdom (1866-1918), “almost every government used to come with its own administrative law”, the Romania of those times gave its contemporaries the impression of “a huge [legislative] lab” which performed different types of experiments on its own citizens. To mention only two examples: a) the law for the county council settlement (promulgated by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, on April, 2, 1864) was changed, until the First World War, at least eight times (in 1872, 1883, 1886, 1894, 1903, 1905, 1912, and 1913); b) the Rural Law (promulgated on April, 1, 1864) six times (in 1874, 1882, 1887, 1904, 1908, and 1910) (Guțan 2006: 228).

7.3. The public administration inefficiency

In the article “The Plague of the Romanian Bureaucracy” (1938: 70-72), initially published on March, 7, 1938, in *Revista Ofensiva Română (The Romanian Offensive Journal)*, there were published, for the first time, the conclusions of a report, edited at the request of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, on the 125-day “journey” through the tangled Romanian interwar central and local public administration that a petition of a state factory should go through in order to be solved. Unfortunately, this phenomenon turned into a social practice: at village halls, not a public officer could be found during the program hours; at schools, children played on the porch because the teacher was late again; at hospitals, the sanitary agent was out of town; at church, the priest could not be found; at police stations, the soldiers wrote letters. The consequences of this state of social inaction were visible: the population was very unsatisfied, the roads were broken, the bridges were damaged, the schools were filthy. Even in the forest villages, where there was enough wood, the firewood for the public institutions was scarce. In the rural areas, the epidemics and the filthiness were a constant characteristic (Rădulescu 1927: 39-40).

7.4. The state administrative system overload and the public officers’ low salaries

The continuous change of the different public officers’ duty position names and tasks constituted the main cause of the public officers’ instability on their positions. The direct

appointment of the central public authority representatives in communes implied the annihilation of the local autonomy principle⁸. Under these conditions of such an extreme legislative instability, the number of public officers was constantly increased without any objective reason and without them being professionally prepared. Being the beneficiaries of low salaries and having “the special mentality of the ruler who looks down on his servants, namely the peasants, and who gives orders and asks for things to be done and who receives whatever and whenever he wishes and satisfies whomever and whenever he wishes”, the services performed by the public officers for the Romanian population could not satisfy anybody (Rădulescu 1927: 38-39).

In a study published in *Sociologie Românească (Romanian Sociology)*, Ion I. Teodorescu (1938: 568) reiterated, after 11 years, the academician Andrei Rădulescu's conclusions, and he noticed that if there was some characteristic feature for the interwar Romania, from an administrative perspective, this was “the plethora of public officers” since their activities and performances of the public services were totally unsatisfying”. For example, in 1928, in Romania, there were 345,066 state public officers in the central public administration and more than 100,000 county and commune public officers in the local public administration. This means more than 455,000 employers in the state administrative system at all levels whereas in Romania, according to the 1930 census, there were 14 million inhabitants. Comparing the interwar Romanian percentage of 34 public officers to one inhabitant (which means a 3.4% of Romanian population embedded into the state administrative system) with the percentages of public officers of other European countries, there could be noticed, according to Manuel Guțan (2006: 258-259), “a significant disproportion and some huge budget expenses for the public officers' salaries and other payment rights”. Compared to the whole state budget of Romania (approximately 38 billion lei for the year 1928), these expenses for the employers in the state system meant nearly 20 billion lei, which was more than 50% of the total budget expenses. Paradoxically, despite the fact that “an enormous amount was

⁸ C. Enescu (1937: 513) provides a good description of the Romanian centralized administrative regime, where all the decisions were taken in the capital. The main cause of this phenomenon lay on “the small numbers of those who were really interested in politics, or better said, of those who could efficiently influence the change of the social state”. The explanation for this interwar political reality could be found „in a troublesome historic past”, when “between the ruling class of the powerful, the rich, of those who could influence politics (let us say, the rulers), on the one hand, and of the others, of the ruled, on the other hand” there was built “a dangerous road hardly to be overcome”. With no direct contact with “the ruling class and with no qualified personnel, the ruling class, small in numbers, had its headquarters in the capital where they fought against each other, in order to have the order right of state collect”.

assigned from the state budget for the payment of public officers, their salaries were generally very low”, and their public services for the population were of poor quality.

As for the monthly salary of the Romanian public officers, Ioan Measnicov (1938: 25-26) highlighted that 72% of the public officers received less than 4,000 lei monthly during the 1934/ 1935 budget year whereas the life costs for that year included the higher monthly expenses. For example, for a 5-member family (2 grown-ups and 3 children) whose head was an average public officer, the expenses were the following: 10,596 lei, for Bucharest; 7,500-9,000 lei, for big towns, and 5,500-6,000 lei for towns with cheaper life-styles. In Bucharest, the rent for a modest two-room flat was 3,000 lei. Thus it is obvious that these low salaries triggered a low or better said, miserable life standard for the majority of public officers. This social situation forced the Romanian interwar public officer to find other money resources, even if this implied some “help” based on illegal services.

8. Conclusion

The objective of this article was to provide a first attempt of systematizing the main directions of monographic investigation that the Gusti School carried out in order to study the Romanian interwar politico-administrative phenomena. Firstly, our concern was to highlight the evolution of the historic dissolution process of the local administration and organization traditional structures in the County of Vrancea (Țara Vrancei) and the County of Făgăraș (Țara Făgărașului). The outcome of our analysis was to identify the politico-administrative origin of the “social evil” severely experienced by the Romanian population during the interwar period. Secondly, we mentioned the improper manner in which the local public administration used to function in Bessarabia and Transylvania, under the Romanian ruling (after 1918). Last but not least, we tried to set an opposition between the “old” and “new” administrative organization in order to observe the disastrous consequences of the state modernization process, following the French centralist model. This permanently centralized cultural and political vision upon the state life organization in the modern Romania (although the principles of local autonomy and decentralization or administrative regionalization never stopped to be acclaimed by the legislator) is best underlined by the founder of the Sociological School of Bucharest in the following syntagm: “*It is not «the man who is the measure of all things», but «the country which is the measure of all things»*” (Gusti 1937: 4). This syntagm should be embedded within the spirit of that period, marked by the apparent failure of the democratic regimes and of the economic market systems in the whole Europe, by the nationalism and statism of the ‘30s and by the consolidation of

the extreme right movements. As, in that period, at the cultural level, it was not the individuality or personality that mattered for the officials from Bucharest, but the abstract concept of country, nation or “mass”, the same happened at the politico-administrative level: it was not the local or regional specificity which mattered, but the centralism (a reality which, judicially speaking, was acknowledged in all the Romanian administrative codes). Finally, all the major dysfunctions of the politico-administrative system generated, during the interwar period, a failure of the political modernity and of the democratic regime in Romania.

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