

# Năsăud in 1869: Between the Rural and the Urban\*

**Ioan Bolovan**

*PhD Professor, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of History and Philosophy, , M. Kogălniceanu st., no. 1, Cluj-Napoca; Romanian Academy Centre for Transylvanian Studies, Kogălniceanu St. No. 12-14; e-mail: bolovan@yaho.com*

**Sorina Paula Bolovan\*\***

*PhD Lecturer, Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Sindicatelor St. No. 7, e-mail: bpsorina@yahoo.com*

**Adrian Onofreiu**

*PhD Researcher Bistrița-Năsăud County Service of the National Archives, Gării St., No. 3-5, Bistrița, e-mail: adrianonofreiu@yahoo.com*

**Viorel Rus**

*Grigore Moisil College, Bistrița Năsăud, Rodnei St. No. 23, Bistrița, e-mail: grigoremoisilbn@yahoo.com*

**Abstract:** Relying mostly on statistical data provided by the 1869 census but also on specialized literature, the authors retrace the main characteristics of the town of Năsăud at the end of the seventh decade of the nineteenth century. Data refer to the demographic, denominational and professional structure of the town in the above mentioned period. The authors analyze this data explaining them in terms of local realities as well as general factors, that is socioeconomic tendencies in the respective period of Transylvanian history. They also explain the relationship between the urban space under analysis and the surrounding rural area, showing that a good deal of demographic and economic developments are directly interrelated. This mutual conditioning is due not only to the macro-economic context of the period but also to the geographical, ethnic and denominational particularities and

---

\* In this article, we shall valorise a part of the original material from the 1869 Census regarding Năsăud, which we published in the book: Ioan Bolovan, Adrian Onofreiu, Viorel Rus, *Familile din Năsăud în anul 1869. Contribuții de demografie istorică*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2010, 484 pages.

\*\* This work was supported by CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN II – IDEI code 2353/2009, director Lector dr. Sorina Paula Bolovan.

especially to the status held by the town and region in previous decades when the latter was part of the Austrian military border constituted in the second half of the eighteenth century and dissolved in 1851.

**Keywords:** Transylvania, demographic aspects, 1869 census, Năsăud, urbanization.

In 1867, the Dualist system of government was inaugurated in the Monarchy; Transylvania lost its autonomy, being included in Transleithania, an area of the Dual Monarchy that was administered from Budapest and where, politically, Hungarians were the dominant nation. One of the government's priorities was that of rapidly organising a modern and efficient institution which would handle the collection and processing of statistical data. Thus, in 1867, the Royal Hungarian Central Statistics Office came into being under the careful guidance of Keleti Károly, the founder and later the director of this important institution.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after the onset of Dualism, the Hungarian authorities wanted to inventory the entire human and material potential in the territories they exerted control over. Under Law III of 1869, the census of the population was initiated on 3 January 1870, without specifying exactly the limit-period for the collection of data; the information collected would represent the situation existing on 31 December 1869. We shall therefore consider that this population survey is the true Census of 1869.

The actual conscription work was supposed to last two weeks, but there were cases where things were delayed and where some errors occurred in grouping the inhabitants by age and occupation; the raw processing of the data at the level of the large administrative units was extended until 1871.<sup>2</sup> The final data of the 1869 Census were published at that time only for the larger administrative units: counties, chairs, districts, and royal free cities; the volume printed in 1871 provides information only about the confessional and professional structure of the population. Still, information on the ethnic composition of Transylvania in 1869 can be found in the contents of the 1893 volume of the publication, in *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények. Új folyam*, which presents the data of the 1890 Census and synthetically renders the ethnic situation in 1869. In recent years, a volume has been published in Budapest, presenting the 1869 Census data, albeit in accordance with the existing county

<sup>1</sup> Csahók István, Gyulai Ferenc, *Az Önálló Magyar Hivatalos Statisztikai Szolgálat Kronológiája. I. kötet (1867-1948)*, Budapest, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *A Magyar Korona országában az 1870. év elején végrehajtott népszámlálás eredményei a hasznos házi állapotok kimutatásával együtt*, Pest, 1871.

structure in Hungary after the administrative reorganisation of 1876.<sup>3</sup> After the appearance of this volume, the team led by Professor Traian Rotariu translated all the 1869 Census information – at the level of the localities – into Romanian, respecting the current administrative structure of Romania<sup>4</sup>.

Let us proceed with analyzing the demographic characteristics derived from the 1869 Census on the town of Năsăud, according to the information provided by the manuscript that we have examined. As shown in the document, a total of 510 families were registered in Năsăud, totalling 2,445 people<sup>5</sup>.

Compared with 1857, when the town's population was only 1,780 inhabitants, these 13 years recorded a significant increase, by 37.3%, a sign of increased dynamism in terms of the population growth rate. Compared to the general growth of the urban population in Transylvania between 1857-1869, of only 14.6%, the demographic evolution of Năsăud was truly spectacular, outpacing the existing trend in the province.<sup>6</sup> Even if we subtracted, from the total number of inhabitants, the 229 students from the district and the rest of the province studying at the local gymnasium, there would still remain about 2,200 people, and the percentual increase of Năsăud within the chronological range analyzed would be above 25%. What contributed to such growth, to such consistent dynamics? Obviously, the answer can be only one: the town gradually moved from being the former residential headquarters of a border regiment to a semi-urban settlement, with socio-economic characteristics specific to the period of transition towards a society based on the relations of its own market economy.

If we resort to an empirical calculation and divide the number of the town's stable inhabitants by the number of families, an average of 4.3 members per family results. Of course, such a family size was sometimes infirmed by the reality recorded for each house in Năsăud, but one may easily see that there were many families consisting of the father, the mother and 1-3 children, a grandmother/ grandfather also dwelling in the house sometimes. Beyond the inherent simplifications, we may infer from the actual Census material, the actual size of the families in Năsăud in 1869. In terms of the gender distribution of the total population, we may note that there were 1,371 men

<sup>3</sup> *Az 1869. évi népszámlálás vallási adatai, összeállította Sebők László*, Budapest, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *Recensământul din 1869. Transilvania*, coord. Traian Rotariu, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> In the sources published recently in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca (*Az 1869. évi népszámlálás vallási adatai, összeállította*, Budapest, Sebők László, 2005 and *Recensământul din 1869. Transilvania*, ed. Traian Rotariu, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008), different data are presented: 777 families and a total of 2,447 inhabitants.

<sup>6</sup> Ioan Bolovan, *Transilvania între Revoluția de la 1848 și Unirea din 1918. Contribuții demografice*, Cluj-Napoca, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2000, p. 80.

(56.1%) and 1,074 women (43.9%).<sup>7</sup> We should again make reference to the presence of the 229 students – of which only nine were girls – in the town; still, there were more men than women, which was a first, since it was the first time in many decades that the ratio between the two sexes had been reversed. Throughout the existence of the border regiment in Năsăud, men had been in a slight numerical and percentual inferiority, which could be explained through the losses incurred on the battlefields of Europe, where the Romanians from Năsăud had fought in the Austrian armies. After the disbanding of the border regiment and the changing of Năsăud's socio-economic profile, it was usually men who came to the town in search of jobs, given the opportunities offered by this town, which had become the administrative seat of the district.

In relation to the structure by age groups of the inhabitants of Năsăud in 1869, a spectacular element may be the case of a border guard named Iosif Bobu, born in 1785, who lived at house number 442, with his daughter and grandson: this denotes a somewhat unusual longevity for these guards, who had been involved in numerous military campaigns throughout Europe. As regards the distribution of the town's population by marital status, we may note that the largest share was held by the single people (1,472 – 60.2%), followed by the married (850 – 34.76%), the widowed (119 – 4.86%) and, finally, the divorced (4 – 0.16%). Such a high percentage of single people is striking for Năsăud, because in the rest of Transylvania this population represented only 52%.<sup>8</sup> Such a situation was the result of vigorous birth rates and the presence of young people from the district and the rest of the province, who were studying at schools in the town.

Unfortunately, we cannot reconstruct Năsăud's exact ethnic composition in 1869, because the Census only registered the inhabitants' confession; however, we may ascertain their ethnic structure by extrapolating the denominations that were specific to the Romanians, Hungarians, Germans and Jews living here. The manuscript we have examined reveals that in late 1869, there lived in Năsăud 1,941 Greek Catholics, 213 Mosaic, 167 Roman Catholics, 71 Evangelicals, 30 Reformed and 23 Orthodox.<sup>9</sup> In terms of proportions, the Greek Catholics prevailed, of course, with 79.4%, having visibly increased since 1857, when they had represented only 76.2%. Also, in 1869, 23 Orthodox were registered, which meant a modest percentage of about 1%. However, if

<sup>7</sup> In the sources published in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca, the data differ: 1,390 men and 1,057 women.

<sup>8</sup> Ioan Bolovan, *Transilvania între Revoluția de la 1848 și Unirea din 1918...*, p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> In the sources published in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca, the information provided is as follows: 1,909 Greek Catholics, 219 Israelites, 174 Roman Catholics, 68 Evangelicals, 54 Orthodox, 23 Reformed.

the percentages for the two confessions specific to the Romanians in the area are added up, what results is that the Romanians from the villages around Năsăud supported primarily the town's spectacular growth, compared with the urban population of Transylvania. This was natural, since Năsăud's administrative, economic and cultural importance was very different in 1869 compared to 1857! Taking into consideration the fact that Năsăud's hinterland was overwhelmingly Romanian, it was natural that much of the town's substantial population growth between 1857-1869 should have been due to the immigration of the Romanian population from the surrounding areas. In 1869, the Mosaic in Năsăud represented only 8.7%, having visibly decreased in numbers since 1857, when they had amounted to about 13%! The same thing happened in the case of the Roman Catholics, who represented a mere 6.8% in 1869, having slightly declined from 1857, when their proportion had been 8.2%. The Evangelicals, usually Saxons, represented 2.9% in Năsăud in 1869, compared to 1857, when they had represented 1.3%, while the Reformed, usually Hungarians, registered a slight increase, from 0.6 % in 1857 to 0.9% in 1869.

Like in other European areas or in Transylvania, the substantial increase in Năsăud's urban population was, therefore, the result of the immigration of the surplus Romanian rural population, especially from the surrounding district. In general, in the modern era, within the broader phenomenon of social mobility, internal migration preceded external migration. Demographic pressure, above all, which led to an increase in the number of landless people or people with little land, determined many young people to move away from the countryside, preferable to the towns.

In post-1850 Transylvania, social mobility, an essential component of the demographic regime in the modern period, was influenced by the abolition of feudal relations, the more adequate inclusion of the province into the economic circuit of the production and exchange of goods in the monarchy, and the elimination of the regime of military borders. Urban population growth was achieved not so much by natural growth as by absorbing the demographic surplus from the villages nearby.

George Barițiu noted, in as early as 1860, that "industrialism" was, for the rural overpopulation, the only solution for work placement.<sup>10</sup> The partial removal of social and economic barriers after the 1848 Revolution and the disbanding of the border regiment, allowed for a substantial infusion of Romanian rural population from the district into the town of Năsăud, the Census of 1869 being revealing in this respect.

---

<sup>10</sup> Nicolae I. Nistor, Mircea N. Marinescu-Frăsinei, *Sibiul și ținutul în lumina istoriei*, vol. II, Cluj-Napoca, 1990, p. 15.

During the first decades after the abolition of feudal relations, Transylvania was anchored in a traditional social and professional structure, in which a new socio-professional structure was shyly making its presence felt, as a result of the ever more powerful impact of factors which tended to impose a capitalist type of stratification. Thus, the Census of 1869 captured, for Năsăud, the trends in the evolution of Transylvanian society towards an occupational model specific to the bourgeois social-economic regime.

Naturally, of the 510 families of Năsăud in the year 1869, 256 (50.19%) were farmers, owners of larger and smaller plots of land, which allowed them to secure their existence primarily from livestock, but also from yields of field crops; these farm owners could also add significant income, especially in kind, from renting rooms to the students coming from the district and the adjacent areas to study in the schools in town, especially at the secondary level.

Testimonies from the time of liberalism mention the existence around towns, during the agricultural seasons, of “armies of day-laborers,” who waited to find work,<sup>11</sup> a situation that could obviously also be encountered in the early years of Dualism. In Năsăud, this social category was represented by 68 families (13.33%) of workers. The rest of the families, 186 (36.47%), had professions and occupations related primarily to the crafts and trade, but also the administration, jurisdiction, education, the cults and health – important activities in Năsăud, which had become a county seat in 1867. There were also military families in town, especially pensioners, who had been active in the old border regiment that had been disbanded in 1851.

One may already see the formation of the town’s true elites of in all the fields of activity. In accordance with the criteria of occupation and function, economic power, level of culture and the social importance of one’s activity, we have been able to select the elites of Năsăud at that time: 55 persons in the administrative, judicial and financial domains, 29 artisans and tradesmen, 25 teachers in the prestigious schools of Năsăud at that time, 12 active or retired professional military, 4 priests, 2 doctors, 1 apothecary and 3 qualified midwives.

This socio-professional composition reveals Transylvania’s “transition,” as yet rather timid, from a dominantly agrarian model to a modern, bourgeois one, as a sign of industrial development and general economic progress. The modernisation of Transylvanian society is also reflected in the numerical and percentual increase of certain social categories (craftsmen, rarely even industrialists, tradesmen, intellectuals, lawyers, notaries, doctors, etc.).

---

<sup>11</sup> Simion Retegan, “Aspecte ale stratificării sociale în satul românesc din Transilvania la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea,” in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj-Napoca*, 23, 1980, p. 332.

The data for Năsăud from the Census 1869, extracted from the manuscript at hand, provide information about an important aspect of the demographic regime in modern times: population mobility.

The census administrators found that out of the total of 2,445 Năsăud residents, 1,670 (68.3%) were locals, born in the locality, while 775 (31.7%) were foreign, having come from other regions of Transylvania or parts of the monarchy. These reports, which indicate that almost a third of the residents had been born out of town, suggest a fairly high rate of population mobility, which may be explained both through the legal and administrative history of the area (up until 1850, the military border had meant bringing military personnel from other regions to the regiment's town of residence) and through Năsăud's socio-economic opening and administrative position during the time when it had been the seat of the Romanian autonomous district.

The statistical material shows that most of Năsăud's inhabitants were at home at the time of the Census, i.e. 2,365 inhabitants (96.7%), while 80 people (3.3%) were away from home. Some of them were, for example, away to study in Romania (Leon Sfirca, living in house no. 392, was a student at the Faculty of Philosophy), others were doing military service, and some of the absentees were living in other localities (Sângeorz Băi, Reghin, Cepar, etc.); the Census did not specify whether their stay there was temporary or permanent.

The statistical data we have processed show that in 1869, Năsăud had a total of 1,148 people with intellectual abilities, meaning that they could read and write. Obviously, such a proportion of the literate population was quite high compared with the rest of the province or even with the rural part of the district; however, the positive situation regarding the level of training of Năsăud's inhabitants reflects primarily the military authorities' interest, prior to 1850, to encourage education in the militarised area, because a well-trained population was more likely to accept the innovation and modernisation Vienna promoted in its provinces.<sup>12</sup> Then, after the abolition of the military border, the remarkable development of Romanian education in the locality continued to be another medium of increasing the proportion of people with a high level of education.

We should mention here the constant and responsible effort of the local elite from the second half of the nineteenth century, after the disbanding of the border regiment, when the funds collected for nearly a century by the Romanian border guards in Năsăud, through the capitalization of certain

---

<sup>12</sup> Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan, "Granița militară austriacă și românii din Transilvania în sec. XVIII-XIX," in *Pe urmele trecutului. Profesorului Nicolae Edroiu la 70 de ani*, eds. Ioan Aurel Pop, Susana Andea, Cluj-Napoca, Academia Română – Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2009, pp. 440-441.

income categories of the frontier settlements and the direct contribution of the border rangers' families, became an important source for supporting the Romanian education in the area. After 1851, the frontier guards' funds contributed to reorganizing the old schools in Năsăud, to establishing and supporting other new schools and, through the scholarships granted over time, to supporting the training of hundreds of intellectuals, civil servants, merchants, craftsmen, etc.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that during those years Năsăud was the seat of an administrative-territorial unit also justifies, to a point, the concentration of the intellectual, public service and financial elites, which raised the percentage of those who knew how to read and write.

The data from the livestock census forms completed by the census administrators gave us the opportunity to centralize information on the farm animals the inhabitants of Năsăud owned in 1869, confirming that their main occupation was livestock farming. This occupational feature was natural if we consider the favourable environmental conditions and the large hay and pasture areas located on the border of the town and in the Saca and Izvorul Mare Mountains, which belonged to the Năsăud community.

At the same time, livestock represented a source of food, raw materials for clothing and footwear, as well as indispensable means for working the field. They were the farmers' means of acquiring – through their sale and the trade with the products obtained thereof – the necessary money for taxes, investments in the household, organising family events,<sup>14</sup> providing inheritance and dowry objects;<sup>15</sup> they are represented a symbol of family wealth and, last but not least, an index of their prestige in their community. As shown in our calculations, the people of Năsăud owned, in 1869, livestock as follows: 738 cattle, 163 horses, 917 sheep, 402 goats, 395 pigs, and 76 hives.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Lazăr Ureche, *Fondurile grănicerești năsăudene (1851-1918)*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Given the importance of livestock for the existence of Năsăud's families and communities at that time, there were very many local administration directives concerning animal care, the boundary pastures and those in the mountains; apud *Poruncile Primăriei Năsăud (1863-1867)*, Năsăud, Fundația George Coșbuc Publishing House, 2006, pp. 79-246.

<sup>15</sup> For details concerning the livestock dowry of the newly weds in Năsăud, in those times, see Claudia Septimia Peteanu, "Protocolul Căsătoriților' din comunitatea Năsăud în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea," in *Arhiva Someșană*, series III, IV, 2005, pp. 211-245.

<sup>16</sup> The data on the livestock in Năsăud that we have centralized resemble, in terms of numbers and proportions, the information provided by other sources. The centralizer of the Census results from the localities of Năsăud District, found at A.N.B.-N., the *Florian Porcius Fund*, file 19, records the existence in Năsăud of 2 bulls, 243 cows, 310 oxen, 8 buffalo, 76 mares, 58 horses, 1024 sheep, 390 goats, 466 pigs, and 69 hives; apud Simion Lupșan, Adrian Onofreiu, *Districtul Năsăud (1861-1876)- contribuții documentare...*, doc. 110, pp. 610-611.



Analyzing the structure by gender and age of the animal species that Năsăud's inhabitants owned, we have found that it suited their working needs and the needs of daily living in their households.

Insofar as the cattle were concerned, the 308 oxen (41.73% of the cattle) were used for plowing the fields, in the biennial crop rotation system – field, pasture – which necessitated strong yoke cattle, since tillage was in many cases done with 4 oxen. The 250 cows (33.87% of the cattle) were used primarily for providing the families with milk and milk products, and, if necessary, they were used for hauling. The 174 calves (23.57% of the cattle) ensured, partly, the future existence of mature animals, but they could also be slaughtered, representing quality meat sources.

As concerns the horses, the largest number was that of the mares – 70 (42.94%) – because they were breeders of the species and, at the same time, traction animals; next came the 60 horses (36.80%) for pulling carriages, often the families' pride, and 30 foals (18.40%).

Năsăud's inhabitants were famous shepherds in those days, owning 917 sheep and 402 goats that grazed in the mountains from spring to autumn, providing cheese to the households that would last for an entire year; there were also Easter lambs and barren sheep that were sacrificed for meat in the autumn, for hides used for sheepskin coats and vests, and for wool, from which knee-long coats, trousers, blankets and bed spreads were woven.

If the processed hides used for making, amongst others, *opinci* (common peasant footwear) are taken into account, the time for slaughtering pigs for lard, meat and derived products, such as sausages and *câlbași* (kielbasa), had passed; nonetheless, at the time of the census, there were still 395 breeding pigs in the households of Năsăud or reserves for the slaughters of the following year. Finally, 76 beehive skeps were recorded.

Based on the 452 tables of the families, households and animals, we have been able to identify the categories of the owners of these livestock, with particularly interesting results. Naturally, most of the animals were raised by the farmers – 203 families. To these were added 53 families of community or district officials, active or retired military personnel, teachers, entrepreneurs, priests and even medical personnel, who had 1-2 milk cows and a few meat pigs for their own consumption. Amongst the public servants, there was the special case of Iosif Mihălaș, the postmaster, who had accrued what today we might call a real animal farm, because he owned six mares, 3 foals, 2 bulls, 29 cows, 59 oxen, 6 calves and 9 pigs. Only two day labourers' families of the 68 existing in the town, which were also the poorest, could afford to have a horse around the house; one family had a calf and a pig, and three families had a pig.

There were 53 families of farmers who had no household animals. These were the families of newly married people, coming from poor families, who had received no animals, in terms of dowry, from their parents, or families of elderly people, who no longer had the strength to take care of their animals. Instead of growing animals, most of them used to rent rooms to gymnasium students from other localities in the district and the province, who brought them agricultural and animal products from their parents' households, on which they too subsisted.

We hope that at the end of these statistical and demographic considerations, what results is an overview of Năsăud in 1869, a period when we may say that the town truly experienced a time of glory, being, for a short while, the administrative, social-economic and, especially, genuinely Romanian cultural centre of a flourishing district. The demographic and social-professional structures place the town of Năsăud on the general path of modernisation that the whole of Transylvania would embark upon in the decades that followed the 1848 Revolution.