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**Modernization processes in Ugocsa county between 1890 and 1914.
Problems and attempted solutions in the fields of politics, education,
and economy**

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The topic and justification of the research

In the public consciousness and territorial-administrative division of historical Hungary, Ugocsa became known as the county with the smallest area. Our research primarily focuses on this county, and after a deeper investigation, we discovered an extremely diverse social, ethnic, religious, and political landscape, especially during the period of dualism. Similar, or perhaps even greater, changes and promising developments also began to emerge in the economy. A sense of optimism prevailed in society, which—despite its prosperity—was still filled with conflicts, dissatisfaction, and unintended changes.

The main focus of the thesis revolves around the concept of modernization, which was one of the key moments within the dualist system. Nevertheless, it requires a multidimensional and complex definition, which our work also adopts. Starting from the former conditions in Ugocsa, we identified processes where we sought traces of the mentioned modernization. These included society and demographic behavior, politics and nationality policy, Ruthenian and Romanian advocacy, the roles of church leaders in public life, culture and education, and finally—one of the most prominent aspects—the economy. We further divided the latter into agriculture, industry and cottage industry, transportation, and healthcare. Wherever possible—particularly in agriculture, industry, and cottage industry—we also looked for ethnic connections, as such characteristics clearly existed

within the coexistence of nationalities. Strangely enough, modernization also seeks to transform the state itself, and through it, the public administration, sometimes in the form of a modern nation-state.

In determining the period boundaries, we primarily considered research feasibility and major historical events, as both had a significant impact on Hungarian-Ruthenian-Romanian-Jewish coexistence, which is one of the primary areas of investigation in this dissertation. Regarding research feasibility, we deemed the emergence of the county press and its use as a source to be of essential importance.

Beyond these factors, the year 1890 was a turning point within the dualist period, as it marked the end of Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza's 15-year term, during which the dualist Hungarian state system had solidified in political and administrative terms. The subsequent period brought a less stable political structure. Although there were precedents, the 1892 Romanian Memorandum Trial particularly brought nationality issues and the aspirations of various ethnic groups to the forefront, with increasingly louder demands for collective rights.

In the case of Ugocsa, this was somewhat less evident concerning the Ruthenians, as Ruthenian national development was still in an earlier phase, focusing on issues like the creation of a literary language and the formation of various cultural associations—essentially remaining in a literary-cultural stage.

At the same time, nationalist politicians extended their involvement beyond linguistic and cultural issues to social and societal matters. This was no coincidence, as by the turn of the century, a distinctly identifiable working class had emerged in major cities, and the trade union movement had begun—affecting ethnic minorities to a lesser extent but still leaving its mark.

Slowly but surely, the number of the agrarian population began to decline, although it remained increasingly significant. In the second half of the 1890s in Northeastern Hungary, the government began to address the peasants' dissatisfaction. The economic policy of Hungary during the Dual Monarchy largely remained liberal, whereas in the nationality policy, the former liberal principles were often replaced by an aspiration for Hungarian supremacy. However, it must also be noted that in the social, economic, and ecclesiastical spheres, the Hungarian governments and county leadership provided substantial support to the nationalities. We will see numerous examples of this in the chapters of the paper, starting with the fact that in 1904, Ugocea was also included in the so-called Hegyvidéki Akció, during which the areas of the county inhabited by Ruthenians received significant support in the form of economic investments. The county's industrial development committee chose the same method to strengthen Ruthenian cottage industries in order to raise the standard of living and reduce emigration. The various aid actions of successive Hungarian governments did not discriminate

between settlements inhabited by different nationalities but provided support based on their needs.

The path to county politics was open to the Ruthenian and Romanian social-ecclesiastical elite, which they were able to take advantage of regularly. The nationalities were not excluded from the development of the educational system in Ugocsa, and although the proportion of nationality-church schools significantly decreased in favor of state schools, this was most often requested by the national religious communities themselves, primarily due to financial and maintenance difficulties. At significant events in the ecclesiastical life of the nationalities, the leading Hungarian politicians of the county regularly attended, and the parliamentary representatives of Ugocsa also supported local issues—particularly in economic matters—which was important for the Ruthenian population as well. As examples, we only need to consider cottage industries or transportation. Naturally, the stories may partially deviate from the outlined and justified timeframes for the sake of completeness.

When conducting a county-level investigation, it is worth defining a broader geographical framework into which it can be placed, considering comparisons, parallels and contrasts, or any other context. In the case of Ugocsa, even works about the Dual Monarchy often define this framework as Subcarpathia. Since the term Subcarpathia—despite its existence—was almost entirely unused in the period under

examination, and considering that Trianon also divided Ugocsa itself, we generally use the term Northeastern Hungary when referring to it. This includes the counties of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramaros, and in some cases, Szatmár and Zemplén are also associated with these.

The Structure of the Dissertation and the Research Methods

Our work is divided into five chapters, each of which begins with a brief presentation of the questions raised and the objectives defined. The first chapter aims to provide a general overview of the county's society, the population of the time, population growth and the factors influencing it, as well as the linguistic and denominational indicators, examining the correlations between them.

The second chapter starts with an introduction to county administration, gradually moving on to local political life and its national connections. Here, we examined the work of municipal and administrative committees, dealt with various elected and appointed officials, and also covered parliamentary representatives. Separate sections discuss nationality policies and the situation of nationalities in Ugocsa, highlighting the Ruthenians, who belonged to the most significant minority.

The work is primarily descriptive, in which we explored the necessary points of biographies for the narrative through several so-

called low-resolution biographies. Occasionally breaking away from this, we also used high-resolution biographies, as we deemed it necessary to uncover the causal relationships within key historical figures to present the key actors of particular stories.

We applied the same method in the third chapter, which describes the churches and their leaders—without addressing the congregational level. In this section, we dealt with several individuals who, in terms of local context or the Northeastern Hungarian region, played a defining role in some aspect—whether in public life, religious, economic, or political matters—but rarely stepped outside the framework of the county or region. A separate focus is on the relationship of the Greek Catholic Ruthenian and Romanian clergy to the development of their own nations and to Hungarian nation-building efforts. Among church leaders, we highlighted the dominant denominations in Ugocsa, such as the Greek Catholic, Reformed, Jewish, and Roman Catholic faiths.

The fourth chapter deals with the educational and cultural system. Here, we arrived at what is considered one of the most significant processes of modernization in Ugocsa: education. Through comparative and descriptive analyses, we demonstrated the path from "A" to "B," or the failure to reach that point. We examined the improvement in literacy, the rise in educational attainment, changes in teaching and learning conditions, the state's increasing role in the operation and supervision of schools, and the opportunities available to

nationalities in education. This was followed by the exploration of the organizational life of the cultural system and the development of the press. These areas were significantly behind the national average and were undeniably built upon education. From this perspective, there was a strong connection between the renewal of the evolving and modernizing educational system, which was still struggling with serious issues and insufficient results, and the elevation of culture to a higher level.

The final chapter also examines an area that clearly embarked on the path of modernization: the economy and its related factors. In terms of county agriculture, the period was characterized by moderate progress and the underutilization of potential, which is now evident in hindsight, despite the aforementioned Hegyvidéki Akció supporting this sector and achieving significant results. In industry, commerce, and transportation, many processes showed stagnation or very slow progress, while others—such as railway construction and public lighting—were marked by rapid and significant advancement, even though these areas also failed to achieve the vaguely defined goals of the era. However, the development of cottage industries in Ugocsa became an economic success story. Several areas—such as basket weaving, so-called decorative embroidery, garden furniture making, pottery, and weaving—began to develop, providing livelihoods for a significant portion of the population of Ugocsa and acting as a deterrent to emigration.

Based on the above, we draw conclusions about how the county—as a partially isolated unit—was connected to the modernization processes of Hungary as a whole, and what shifts it made in relation to itself.

Presentation of the Research Results

We examined a barely begun, slowly changing, and suddenly ending modernization on one of the peripheries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Ugocsa. We outlined several areas of this modernization—which was not experienced in every aspect—such as administrative, political, ecclesiastical and national, cultural-educational, and economic domains. The starting point for all of these was the unique and distinct world of county society. This distinctive milieu was particularly characteristic of Ugocsa, as we encountered multiple coexisting communities—Hungarian, Ruthenian, Romanian, and Jewish—that were in constant interaction with one another. Moreover, these nationality-linguistic lines were often crossed by denominational divisions, which were just as important, and even more defining, at the turn of the century. We established that within just 20 years, the Hungarian-speaking population in the county increased by 9%, primarily due to the language shift of Ruthenian-speaking Greek Catholics and, secondly, the Magyarization of German-speaking Jews.

The population of Ugocsa and its development during the period were influenced by numerous factors. Among these, we identified the most prominent as natural population growth and economic emigration, primarily to overseas destinations. Ugocsa had a distinctive feature in emigration that set its process apart from neighboring counties and national trends. Specifically, overseas emigration did not primarily affect nationalities, such as the local Ruthenians, but rather the Hungarian-speaking population of the county, which participated in this process in greater proportion to its size. This may have been due to the fact that during the very decades when emigration was at its peak, a significant Magyarization process was underway among parts of the Ruthenian population. Despite all this, the county's population pyramid remained triangular, indicating clear population growth, which is one of the foundations of demographic modernization, though it contradicted the lower number of children in planned family models.

The situation was entirely different with social modernization, as the structure changed only minimally and still bore many similarities to the characteristics of the pre-reform era—albeit without feudal constraints—since the land ownership structure did not favor the broader layers of society. However, if we consider the other side of the coin, several social groups emerged or strengthened, which certainly indicated a developing region. These included railway, mining, and other industrial

workers, the still very narrow but growing intelligentsia, and participants in the increasingly thriving commercial and financial sectors.

At the beginning of the Dual Monarchy, Ugocsa, which was still being shaped geographically, was a joint administrative district with neighboring Bereg County. Despite the government maintaining the county's administrative officials, no lord-lieutenant was appointed, which always irked the local elite. In 1896, the ice was broken, and the long-awaited government commissioner finally arrived, giving Ugocsa the sense of being a full-fledged county. The prevailing idea was that this status had to be maintained at all costs, and if possible, the existing two districts should somehow be expanded—even at the expense of neighboring authorities—thus ensuring its survival. This goal, part of administrative modernization, was only partially achieved. The third district, Királyháza, was established with its own set of officials, but it was already too late. 1918 was not about stability; Ruska Krajna came, Trianon followed, and Ugocsa ceased to exist, along with all its efforts and achievements.

Thus, we can also speak of administrative modernization, especially in the sense that central administrative hubs were created and strengthened, which were truly elevated from other settlements by the institutional network created by the modern state and set on the path of urbanization. Primarily, these included Nagyszöllős, followed by Halmi, Királyháza, and Tiszaújlak.

The administration was well-established and functioned effectively by the middle of the period, adapting to government reforms, although it largely relied on the local elite, with the main exceptions being the lord-lieutenant and parliamentary representatives. In several parliamentary elections, local candidates ran, even against candidates backed by the Budapest delegation. However, the results rarely favored the people of Ugocsa, as the county was notably one of the places where parliamentary seats were secured for obtaining the title of representative. Despite this, the county was not only represented in the national parliament but also had a strong local political presence. Ugocsa's elected officials, particularly the deputy lord-lieutenants, were extremely active and had significant influence. For instance, their input was decisive in determining when the county should join the Hegyvidéki Akció or when it was deemed unnecessary. Moreover, the deputy lord-lieutenants and chief administrative officers were the longest-serving officials in the county administration, with average terms exceeding ten years. Both positions were typically filled by individuals who rose through the ranks of lower administrative roles.

We examined the position and role of Ruthenian politics in the county. The Ruthenian elite—primarily Greek Catholic priests, legal professionals, and, less commonly, schoolteachers—were integral to county politics, though they received less prominence than their proportion of the population would suggest. This was despite the strong

ties between county politics and church leaders, as many clerics were incorporated into the municipal committee. However, there was no instance where key political-administrative positions—such as lord-lieutenant, deputy lord-lieutenant, or parliamentary representative—were held by someone who openly identified as Ruthenian or Romanian and had not undergone Magyarization. Complicating this issue further was the fact that the local Ruthenians lacked the necessary political influence to achieve these positions. Nevertheless, the Ruthenian elite of the county also became involved in the public life of Northeastern Hungary, including politics and the press.

We also presented the church administration and denominational leaders, who excelled in various fields—politics, society, and culture. The primary meeting point of Ugocsa's religious communities was county public life. Every church and its leadership maintained strong ties with local politics, though they had minimal interaction with one another. Instances of inter-denominational friction were rare, but when they did occur, they often had political undertones, such as disagreements over which denomination's priest would bury a prominent politician of disputed religious affiliation, which served as a status affirmation for the respective church. A somewhat different issue emerged in the complex relationship between the Greek Catholic and Jewish communities, where a narrative of Jewish exploitation clashed with the economic underdevelopment of the Ruthenians. Several points

of connection were identified between Ugocsa and the establishment of the so-called Hungarian eparchy in Hajdúdorog, calendar reform, and the issue of script usage in the Greek Catholic Church. Despite this, the 1912 establishment of the Hajdúdorog eparchy had little impact on the county, and the Greek Catholics of Ugocsa remained under the jurisdiction of the Munkács eparchy. For each major denomination, we identified the key leaders and, using low- and high-resolution biographies, presented their activities, many of which extended beyond the boundaries of the municipality.

Educational modernization was one of the most exciting aspects of the period's processes. The foundations, including the school system, physical environment, educational tools, and the availability of trained professionals, were just beginning to take shape. Most school buildings were renovated, and thanks to regular inspector visits, the quality of education improved, which was reflected in the still very low literacy rate, school attendance rates, and the slow spread of public and school libraries. At the same time, education was a key component of Hungary's nationality policy. The number of primary schools peaked in 1898, clearly due to the opening of state schools, which increased by 329% during the period. With the increase in the proportion of state schools, the number of students learning in Hungarian also grew. By 1914, the number of purely nationality schools had dropped to just 8.1%, indicating a significant underrepresentation compared to the proportion

of nationalities in the county. The reasons for this primarily lie in the fact that in mixed denominational communities, which often also had mixed native language compositions, churches could not maintain their small schools. These schools were often replaced—frequently at the churches' request—by state institutions, which were Hungarian-language schools. School attendance among compulsory school-aged children also increased, particularly among Hungarian-speaking students, while the attendance rates for Ruthenian, Romanian, and especially Jewish students were much lower. Despite this, education remained important to the local nationalities, and in the case of Romanians, we can see that they were particularly attached to Romanian-language primary schools.

The highest level of education in the county was represented by the civic school in Nagyszöllős. For many, this was the opportunity to move into the middle classes, an opportunity that the Hungarian and Jewish populations of the county utilized much more successfully than the Ruthenians, and almost not at all by the Romanians. These facts were reinforced by the observation that those pursuing secondary studies in neighboring or more distant counties were almost entirely Hungarian-speaking.

To explain the conditions of cultural life, we mapped out the association life in Ugocsa, which presented a diverse picture, especially considering that it emerged almost from nothing. We introduced the associations of elementary school teachers, which initially operated

based on self-organization, later receiving strong state and inspectorate guidance while maintaining denominational character and special regulations in this area. The press operated in a fluctuating system, as, aside from two or three periodicals, none of the twelve newspapers that existed for varying lengths of time in Ugocsa managed to become permanent. However, this sector of culture gained significant momentum by the 1910s, as evidenced by the social and literary magazine "Királyháza." Such a magazine, which explored similar topics, could only be established if there was an interested readership. After a promising start, Királyháza ceased operations, partly due to a lack of subscribers. Nonetheless, if we examine not only the existence of newspapers but also the language of publication, we can only speak of Hungarian-language periodicals, many of which featured contributions from Ruthenian or Ruthenian-origin Greek Catholic clergy and intellectuals. A Ruthenian-language newspaper was never established in Ugocsa during the Monarchy, mainly because there was minimal demand for it. There were only partial connections to the press life of Northeastern Hungary, despite the fact that Eumén Szabó, a Greek Catholic priest from Nagyszöllös, was a lead writer for several newspapers.

The final, and most tangible, modernization arena was the economy. Even in terms of agriculture, Ugocsa stood out slightly among the counties in the region, thanks to relatively large lowland arable areas

and innovations like the introduction of fertilizers. However, the choice of agricultural profiles, both in crop production and livestock breeding, was unsuccessful. The promising viticulture could not be developed to a sufficiently high level or scale, despite vineyards being valued at 15.76 crowns per cadastral hold in terms of average productivity during tax assessments. This value was considered good even at a national level, but it only represented 1% of the cultivated area. The situation improved both in agriculture and industry when the county was included in the Hegyvidéki Akció. Cooperative life and cottage industries, which were already notable in the region thanks to the Ugocsan Industrial Development Committee, particularly focused on Ruthenian villages, experienced a boom. Ugocsa's cottage industry became a model for the region and a success story, though it never fully developed into a dominant economic sector.

A remarkable innovation was the solution to provide public lighting and partially electrify Nagyszöllős and Királyháza, which generated great interest among the population. Unfortunately, this development only truly began in 1914, and it never reached its full potential. However, the joint-stock company created to operate the electric plant serving the lighting needs was an excellent example of capital inflow into such a modern service. In addition to other industrial sectors—such as mining and light and cottage industries—the service sector also developed, with the regional fame of the Nagytarna spa being

indisputable, and hotels were opened in Nagyszöllős, Halmi, and Tiszaújlak. The same progress could be seen in healthcare services, as the expanding Perényi Public Hospital was considered high quality, and even in the 1890s, larger towns were striving to employ their own doctors. Nevertheless, by 1910, there were still only seven doctors serving in Ugocsa, a shortfall attributed more to a lack of professionals than to financial conditions. The number of pharmacies also doubled, but the population per pharmacy still ranked among the lowest in the country.

Thanks to the modernization of transportation, Ugocsa did not lag behind national averages in terms of the density of railroads and road networks. The issue of road connections—since the Tisza River cut the county nearly in half—was solved with bridges, whose maintenance and quality preservation were ongoing. Railways and train stations played an important role in the modernization of individual settlements. Thanks to the expanding rail and road network, residents living along the railway lines could reach the capital in less than 10 hours, while those living in mountainous areas were about 12 hours' travel time from Budapest in the 1910s. Transportation development was characterized by numerous plans inspired by the economic potential it offered, whether in the form of local interest railways or Tisza River shipping, though most of these plans remained on paper and could not be integrated into the broader framework of economic modernization.

List of publications

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