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ASPIRATIONS FOR HUNGARIAN-LANGUAGE HIGHER EDUCATION IN TRANSCARPATIA (1919–1991)

ОРОС Ільдико Імріївна, ПОЛЛОІ Каталін Дезидерівна, МОЛНАР Федір Федорович. ПРАГНЕННЯ ДО СТВОРЕННЯ УГОРСЬКОМОВНОЇ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ НА ЗАКАРПАТТІ (1919–1991 рр.)

У статті досліджується історична траєкторія формування та прагнень угорськомовної вищої освіти на Закарпатті у 1919–1991 роках у контексті трьох великих політичних епох – чехословацької, угорської та радянської. Основна увага зосереджена на становленні угорськомовної вищої освіти в радянський період, з особливим акцентом на створенні та ролі Ужгородського державного університету після 1945 року. Автори

показують, як трансформувалися освітні рамки після Другої світової війни, коли регіон опинився під владою Радянського Союзу.

Ключові слова: Закарпаття, вища освіта угорською мовою, Ужгородський державний університет, Гунгарологічний центр.

OROS ILDIKO IMRIEVNA, POLLOI KATALIN DEZYDERIVNA, MOLNAR FEDIR FEDOROVYCH. ASPIRATIONS FOR HUNGARIAN-LANGUAGE HIGHER EDUCATION IN TRANSCARPATIA, 1919–1991

This study presents the path towards developing Transcarpathian Hungarian-language higher education. It examines the historical, political, and cultural conditions that shaped the creation of Hungarian academic institutions in a multi-ethnic border region marked by frequent regime changes.

By tracing key milestones from the Czechoslovak period to the Soviet era, the study highlights the persistent efforts of the Hungarian minority to secure institutional recognition and linguistic rights in higher education. In doing so, it emphasizes how access to mother-tongue education became a crucial means of cultural preservation and collective resilience.

Particular attention is given to community initiatives, petitions, and informal academic circles that sought to maintain Hungarian scholarly presence despite restrictive language policies. Situated within the broader discourse on minority education in Central and Eastern Europe, this study reveals how higher education served not only as a field of academic aspiration but also as a vital instrument for sustaining identity, transmitting cultural heritage, and strengthening the long-term cohesion of the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia.

The study examines the historical trajectory of the formation and aspirations of Hungarian-language higher education in Transcarpathia between 1919 and 1991, within the framework of three major political periods: the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Soviet eras. Its primary focus is on the development of Hungarian-language higher education during the Soviet period, with particular attention to the establishment and role of Uzhhorod State University after 1945. The authors explore how educational structures were transformed following the Second World War, when the region came under Soviet control and institutions were shaped by Marxist–Leninist ideology.

The study provides a detailed analysis of the early efforts to introduce Hungarian-language instruction at the university, including the interrupted initiatives of the 1950s and the emergence of Hungarian philological programme from the 1960s onward. It also addresses linguistic restrictions, the pressures of Soviet educational policy, and the forms of social resistance that emerged through petitions and community movements. The founding of the Hungarology Centre in the late 1980s marked a significant milestone, although an independent Hungarian higher education system did not materialise. The study concludes that aspirations for Hungarian higher education during the Soviet era served not only educational purposes but also became essential instruments for minority identity, linguistic and cultural self-preservation, and community continuity.

Keywords: Transcarpathia, Hungarian-language higher education, Uzhhorod State University, Hungarology Centre.

Formulation and justification of the relevance of the problem. The establishment of Hungarian-language higher education in Transcarpathia reflects a long struggle for cultural survival and linguistic rights. Studying this process reveals how political changes shaped minority access to education and the preservation of identity. It also highlights the community's resilience in pursuing academic representation.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Previous studies on Transcarpathian Hungarian education, such as those by Orosz, Csernicskó and Fedinec, have focused on language policy, minority rights and institutional change. Research has often emphasized primary and secondary schooling, while the evolution of

Hungarian-language higher education remains less explored. Existing works address petitions, cultural activism and the role of local intellectuals, yet a comprehensive historical account of academic aspirations and university-level initiatives is still lacking.

The purpose of the article. The purpose of this article is to trace the historical development of efforts to establish Hungarian-language higher education in Transcarpathia between 1919 and 1991. It aims to reveal how political changes, language policies, and community initiatives shaped the possibilities for Hungarian academic institutions. By focusing on key turning points – such as the creation of Hungarian philology at Uzhhorod State University and the emergence of

cultural activism – the study highlights higher education as both an educational objective and a means of preserving minority identity.

Presentation of the main research material. In its modern sense, Transcarpathia was formed mainly from the territory of the four counties of the former Kingdom of Hungary (Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Máramaros) after the First World War. Until then, the area was referred to as Northeastern Upper Hungary. Under the Peace Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 10 September 1919, Transcarpathia was assigned to Czechoslovakia along with Upper Highland. Less than a year later, the Treaty of Trianon confirmed this situation. The local Hungarians found themselves in a minority position for the first time. The leaders of the First Czechoslovak Republic undertook to guarantee the autonomy of the multi-ethnic Transcarpathia, mainly inhabited by Rusyns/Ukrainians. However, Prague did not ensure the self-determination of the administrative unit defined as «Podkarpatska Rus» [10].

The civil Czechoslovak state managed to significantly increase the peripheral region's educational level and reduce the illiteracy rate. In Transcarpathia, the dominant role of the Hungarian language ceased, and instead, the Rusyn/Ukrainian language came to the fore both in the offices and education. The local intellectuals, who had socialised before the Treaty of Trianon, were educated in the Hungarian language. For them, the use of the Czech state language was a challenge. The local Rusyns did not have a codified language, and there was even a division among them regarding the literary language to be followed. According to Czechoslovak laws, using the Hungarian language was only possible when their proportion reached 20% [5].

The use of the state language became compulsory in educational institutions in 1923 [7]. More and more children from peasant families could attend school, facilitating mobility between social strata. Teacher training colleges (Uzhhorod, Mukachevo and Khust) were significant [22]. This is where the teachers of elementary schools, upper classes and civil schools came out. Hungarian language training was terminated in teacher training colleges [7].

The Czechoslovak period also brought changes in the field of higher education. Although it was not possible to establish a university in the period between the two world wars, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian

Monarchy also influenced the Transcarpathian students' institution-selection strategies. The Czechoslovak authorities did not recognise Hungarian degrees issued after 1 October 1928. As a result, Transcarpathian students preferred higher education institutions in Czechoslovakia. Among the most famous institutions were the universities of Prague, Bratislava and Kosice [7].

The end of the 1930s was a turning point in the history of Transcarpathia. With the First Vienna Award (2 November 1938), more than one-fifth of the territory, the entire region was returned to Hungary after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (mid-March 1939). The most important scientific workshop of the Hungarian era was the Transcarpathian Scientific Society, founded in 1941, whose interest was mainly in local history, ethnography, culture, geography and other fields of science. The company also published a bilingual scientific periodical, *Зоря-Хайнал* [9]. Hungarian and the so-called «Hungarian-Ruthenian» bilingual administration was introduced in the public administration. Gyula Marina, of Rusyn/Ukrainian origin, was appointed as the Transcarpathian Educational Referent and performed her duties alongside the territory governor. The secondary schools in Uzhhorod, Mukachevo and Khust also operated during the Second World War [2].

The Hungarian period in Transcarpathia was ended by the Red Army, which entered in October 1944. In November 1944, Hungarian and German men aged between 18 and 50 were deported to *malenkiy robot* («little work»), which decimated the local population. Following the wave of deportations of Transcarpathians, the First Congress of People's Committees of Transcarpathian Ukraine was held on 26 October 1944. The body, consisting mainly of local Rusyns/Ukrainian – as expected by the Soviet authorities – declared the unification of Transcarpathian Ukraine with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, i.e. the Soviet Union. This status was also recorded in the intergovernmental treaty concluded on 29 June 1945 between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. In January 1946, a county-level Soviet-Ukrainian administrative unit (Transcarpathian region; Zakarpattia Oblast) was organised from Transcarpathia, the centre of which was Uzhhorod [11].

The history of education of Transcarpathia during the Soviet period.

The Soviet power had a profound effect on Transcarpathian education, the spirit of which

was entirely determined by Marxist ideology and atheism. Textbooks and technical books that differed from the specified spirit were removed from the public collections. On 20 April 1945, a decree was issued in Uzhhorod on the nationalisation of Transcarpathian schools [8].

The government promoting atheism considered the church to be its enemy and closed its educational institutions. The teachers working in the schools were dismissed, and more than five thousand teachers from the Soviet Union were hired. Hungarian language education could only start in elementary and primary schools. Completion of the seven-year primary school was made compulsory. There was a shortage of Hungarian-speaking teachers, as many moved to Hungary. From the point of view of the new government, the Hungarian teaching staff that remained in Transcarpathia represented the intellectuals of the hated «fascist» Horthy era; therefore, a significant proportion of them were not employed. The missing teachers were replaced from the Ukrainian and Russian territories beyond the Carpathians. The number of teachers who settled in such circumstances reached 2700 in the early days [15]. In the Soviet Union, the 1944-1945 school year was the first when the final and matriculation/graduation examination was introduced [20]. In 1947, Hungarian groups were first started in the teacher training school of Khust and later in Mukachevo [8].

The Iron Curtain of the Soviet era cut Transcarpathia off from Central Europe. Compared to the period between the two world wars, the situation was even worse: contact with Hungarian-speaking lands became much more difficult, and the centuries-old direct cultural contacts with Upper Hungary were now ended. Migration for student purposes was almost exclusively limited to the republics of the Soviet Union [2].

Before 1945, there were no higher education institutions in Transcarpathia. The highest level of training was at the Greek Catholic seminary. However, there were universities and colleges in the territory of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The main task of the higher education institutions operating in the Soviet Union was to train highly qualified professionals according to Marxism-Leninism principles, master the latest achievements of domestic and foreign science and technology, and the practical part of the profession. In addition, the students had to learn about the process of scientific research work to

help solve the tasks of communist construction. The primary task of higher education institutions was training scientific and pedagogical cadres, raising the qualifications of specialists who worked in various sectors of economy, culture and public education, and disseminating scientific and political knowledge among workers. The Uzhhorod State University, founded in Transcarpathia in 1945, also had to follow this pattern [1].

On 5 December 1944, the Carpathian-Ukrainian People's Council adopted a decision on the establishment of a higher education institution. On 19 July 1945, the People's Council, together with the county organisation of the Carpathian-Ukrainian Communist Party, submitted another request to establish a Transcarpathian university. Four faculties were proposed in the application: history, philology, biology and medicine. Furthermore, they requested that suitable buildings be provided for the university. They aimed to advertise the teaching posts by 1 October. As a result, from 20 July 1945, sixty people were recruited per major. On 18 October 1945, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukrainian SSR and the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic decided to establish the Uzhhorod State University in a joint resolution. In October 1945, preparatory courses were started for future applicants. On 1 February 1946, the university's first students began their studies. The 168 young people starting their first semester came from various cities and villages of Soviet Ukraine to the University of Uzhhorod. The university's first rector was Stepan Dobos. The university was established in the building of grammar schools equipped during the Hungarian period (1938–1944). The education was provided by specialists from different regions of the Soviet Union, as there were no teachers with appropriate qualifications in Transcarpathia. The language of education in all majors was Russian and Ukrainian. No Hungarian majors were started [12].

The first steps towards establishing Hungarian-language higher education in Transcarpathia were taken in the 1950s. At that time, the Teacher Training College of Uzhhorod was established by Decree No. 1488 of the Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR on August 28, 1950. In the academic year 1950/1951, Russian language and literature, Ukrainian language and literature, and physics-mathematics majors were opened, and in 1953, a Hungarian language and literature major was

established. The institution was closed in 1954, and all the college students were transferred to the Uzhhorod State University. The Hungarian major students were asked to change majors and become Russian major students. Between 1956 and 1959, these students were allowed to study Hungarian language and literature in optional courses. In January 1956, Hungarian language and literature were taught for the first time in the history of the university. In 1959, however, the optional teaching of Hungarian at the university was terminated [3].

The so-called destalinisation announced by the Soviet Secretary General Nikita Khrushchev (1953–1963) relieved the Soviet Union. Since 1957, Hungarians in Transcarpathia have been able to subscribe to and buy mother tongue newspapers and literary works at a discounted price. The Hungarian television broadcasts became available to viewers in Transcarpathia [18]. Transcarpathian Hungarians were thus more familiar with Hungarian «events, actors and sportsmen than Soviet ones» [2]. As a result, a bridge was rebuilt between the Hungarians of Transcarpathia and Hungary. By learning about the situation in Hungary, which was considered the «happiest barrack» of the socialist bloc and was milder than Soviet political conditions, the Transcarpathian Hungarians were better informed about world affairs than their Ukrainian or Russian neighbours.

In 1960, a small group of Hungarian intellectuals from Berehove organised a Hungarian Community College. In 1963, a Hungarian Language and Literature major was launched at Uzhhorod State University on the initiative of the Community College. Thanks to this, the Department of Hungarian Philology was opened in 1965. The department's main task was to train Hungarian language and literature teachers [14].

In 1986, the governments of the Soviet Union and Hungary, and then in 1987, the ministries of education of the two states signed a decision to establish a Centre for Russian Studies in addition to the Department of Russian Language of the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, and a Centre for Hungarology at the Uzhhorod State University. Accordingly, the Soviet Centre for Hungarology was established in 1988 alongside the Department of Hungarian Philology [17]. The second period of Transcarpathian Hungarian-language higher education can be dated to this period.

For many years, the Department of Hungarian Philology was the only option for higher education, but only specialised subjects were taught in Hungarian. The other courses were taught in Russian. Since in the Soviet Union, education could only take place in the languages of the republics in higher education institutions, a constant battle had to be fought for admission to the Hungarian language in the university's other departments. This was usually achieved, but it was only possible to hold a lecture, answer questions or write a thesis in Russian, even if the teacher knew Hungarian. At that time, the Department of Hungarian Philology operated with 20-20 students per year. In the academic year 1969/70, the correspondence course also started, and the number of full-time students decreased to ten [21].

In 1967, Sándor Fodó, a graduate of the University of Tartu and already a teacher of the Department of Hungarian Philology of the State University of Uzhhorod, and András Polcer, a teacher at the grammar school of Velyki Berehy, wrote to Leonid Brezhnev, Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and Andrei Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, requesting that Hungarian-speaking graduates can take the entrance examinations in Hungarian instead of Ukrainian and Russian. Since 1968, the use of Hungarian has been allowed in the admission procedure and has been temporarily incorporated into the admission regulations of the university. However, in 1971, the day before the entrance examination, the examination system was changed, and applicants had to take the entrance examination in Russian. The next day, the applicants boycotted the procedure and turned to Moscow for help [13].

The university supported the Russian exam. Applicants who performed well in the subject exams were assured that they would achieve a positive result in the last, the Russian exam. Since those who graduated from the Hungarian-language school knew that their knowledge of the Russian language could not reach that of those who graduated from the Russian-language school, they did not appear for the exam. As a result, they were finally able to take the entrance exam in Hungarian at a later date.

The peculiarities of the era were reflected in the fact that, in the case of admission to higher education institutions, the results of the entrance exams were not taken into account but rather the applicant's worldview, political beliefs, and

social origin. During this period, regardless of the results of the entrance exams, preference was given to applicants who had a complete high school education, were also members of the Communist Party, trade union, Leninist Komsomol or other social organisations, industrial companies, and were leaders of collective farms. In addition, applicants who had an employment relationship enjoyed an advantage [20].

1972 was a turning point in the life of Transcarpathian Hungarians. A group of Transcarpathian Hungarian intellectuals wrote a petition to the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party. The petition dealt with the fundamental rights of Transcarpathian Hungarians and was signed by more than a thousand Transcarpathian residents. The general European student movements influenced the '72 petition. Since Transcarpathian Hungarians were not allowed to create political and civil organisations, professor Sándor Fodó and writer and poet Vilmos Kovács became the intellectual leaders of this generation, and their base was the Department of Hungarian Philology at the Uzhhorod State University. The students were the most active in the creation of the petition, as they were the most receptive to the issues concerning the fate of the Hungarians. These students regularly met with Sándor Fodó and Vilmos Kovács [14].

In the petition, a separate subsection was devoted to education, including public and higher education problems. The aim was to establish Hungarian-language teacher training at the University of Uzhhorod. The document proposed that the Hungarian university be open to the Hungarian entrance exams and that the institution be declared bilingual. More than a thousand people from Transcarpathia signed the petition. Sándor Fodó personally took the document to the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party. As a result, several people, including Fodó, were fired from the university and taken to military service. Apart from that, the petition had positive consequences, both in the short and long term [4].

Regarding higher education, Hungarian-language admissions for all majors were achieved at the Uzhhorod State University. As a result of the petition, several Hungarian students were admitted to the university. Most often, they chose natural sciences majors because, in these faculties, it was possible to get by without a more excellent knowledge of the Russian language.

In the 1980s, the Hungarian entrance exams were again terminated. At that time, they referred to the fact that applicants taking the Hungarian language exam encounter language difficulties, and as a result, the quality of education decreases. However, with the help of parental requests and petitions, the Hungarian entrance exams were restored. In 1988 – a few days before the entrance exams – the Soviet Ministry of Culture allowed examinations in the mother tongue in higher education institutions. This measure temporarily increased the number of Hungarian students at Ukrainian universities and colleges. In February 1989, the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (KMKSZ) was founded under the leadership of Sándor Fodó. The organisation proposed the creation of a faculty at the Uzhhorod State University, but university leadership, maintaining its monopoly position, did not accept this. The Transcarpathian Association of Hungarian Pedagogues, founded in 1991, took the initiative to start Hungarian-language subgroups in those majors (mathematics and physics) in which the proportion of Hungarian students is high. The heads of the faculties allowed it but didn't make it official, so the students had to attend the sessions twice. After two years, the Hungarian-language consultations were terminated. This marked the end of the Soviet era of Hungarian-language higher education [16].

Conclusions and prospects for further exploration of the direction. The study examines the historical trajectory of the formation and aspirations of Hungarian-language higher education in Transcarpathia between 1919 and 1991, within the framework of three major political periods: the Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and Soviet eras. Its primary focus is on the development of Hungarian-language higher education during the Soviet period, with particular attention to the establishment and role of Uzhhorod State University after 1945. The authors explore how educational structures were transformed following the Second World War, when the region came under Soviet control and institutions were shaped by Marxist-Leninist ideology. The study provides a detailed analysis of the early efforts to introduce Hungarian-language instruction at the university, including the interrupted initiatives of the 1950s and the emergence of Hungarian philological programme from the 1960s onward. It also addresses linguistic restrictions, the pressures of Soviet educational policy, and the forms of social

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