

Introduction

Throughout history, universities have proven to be excellent indicators of the social, political and economic dynamics of the communities that build them, and inside of which they themselves evolve. Just as they produce knowledge and build the elites of some worlds, universities also reflect the value systems, problems and vision of those same worlds. The relationship between universities and the communities they belong to is one of particular complexity. More than once, studies published in the JRHE journal have focused on topics centred around these complex problems. In the particular case of the centennial anniversary of the creation of the Romanian University of Cluj (2019), one of the most important higher education institutions of modern Romania, in the affiliation of which Babeş-Bolyai University is explicitly found today, the festive events were accompanied by extensive programmes dedicated to research on the history of higher education – in Transylvanian, Romanian and European contexts -, that have been published in various books and journals in recent years. The anniversary thus opened a debate whose topicality needs no further justification, about the role of universities in the history of a nation, a region or a country – these three never coinciding perfectly in modern Europe.

The studies included in the present issue of the journal come to amplify the echoes of the respective debates, reverberating in a series of examples and 'discreet' excerpts, of some institutions, personalities, traditions, etc., which the Romanian University of Cluj, during the interwar period, appropriated in its identity construction project as a higher education institution dedicated to Romanians from the province united with the Kingdom of Romania on December 1, 1918. The multicultural and multi-ethnic history of Transylvania, a former province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before December 1918, reverberates on the surface of the great narrative of the Romanian national project, built by state institutions after the union in December 1918. The studies published in the present volume bring to light a profusion of seemingly 'minor' examples of that identity construction, in relation to the process

of creating a modern university, following the European Humboldtian model, and thus allow us to refine the way we reflect on the place of university in history: hard to define, essential and irreducible by definition.

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