

# The role of the Academic Society “Dacia” in the organization of reading rooms and reading societies in Bucovina

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## Abstract

*In Bucovina, academic societies and cultural societies from Cernăuți played an essential role in establishing and supporting with books and newspapers the reading rooms, reading societies and libraries. The following societies were among them: the academic societies “Junimea”, “Orthodox Academy” and “Dacia” and “Society for Romanian culture and literature in Bucovina”, a cultural society established in 1862. Most of the communes from the Bucovina districts (counties) functioned between 1890-1940 as reading offices, reading societies, reading houses or reading societies. “Dacia” academic society, founded in 1905, had an important role in the development of the reading rooms, by supporting with books and newspapers, carrying out cultural activities, cultural parties, conferences, celebrations, exhibitions and other events dedicated to the residents of the villages.*

**Keywords:** *reading rooms, academic societies, “Dacia”, Bucovina, culture, villages, books, newspapers.*

## Introduction

Academic societies and cultural societies in Bucovina had an important role in establishing and supporting with books and newspapers the reading rooms, reading societies and libraries in Bucovina. Among them were the following societies: the academic societies “Junimea”, “Orthodox Academy” and “Dacia” and “Society for Romanian culture and literature in Bucovina”. During the Habsburg rule, in the most communes and then counties, worked reading rooms, reading societies, reading houses or reading societies. “To the student societies which, through the rhythmicity of the manifestations, the duration of existence and the cultural tradition they formed and imposed on the consciousness of contemporaries, are the most representative of historical Bucovina” (Olaru, 2002, p. 78). The establishment of the University of Cernăuți in 1875 created a favorable framework for Romanian students from Bucovina to organize themselves in academic societies with a cultural purpose. “The development of culture played a

particularly important role in the process of formation and consolidation of national consciousness among Romanians. The expansion of the educational system, the standardization of the literary language, the arts and modern literature have equally contributed to the removal of barriers between the members of the nation, ensuring the achievement of what can be called “national solidarity”. [...] The national movement campaigned for equality in the rights of the Romanian language with the German one, for a culture in the modern language” (Purici, 1998, p. 14). At the beginning of the 20th century in Cernăuți, two currents of opinion and action circulated in the Bucovina academic environment regarding the carrying of activities organized by students. The so-called “democratic” current in Junimea, considerably strengthened after 1900 by a large influx of peasants’ sons arriving at the university from the high school in Suceava, tended to direct all students towards work and cultural propaganda in the popular masses (Doboș, 1930, p. 20).

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The initiative to support the villages by getting involved in cultural activity was appropriated by some of the students who were members of the “Junimea” Society. They resigned from this society and founded another one. Their desire was to establish a new society, “Dacia”, which will give them the opportunity to develop their aspirations. “Our society was founded on May 21st, 1905, by the university students: Balan, Doboș, Ivanovici, Logigan, Marian, Marcu, with the support of: Bârtoi Ghiță, Cezar Scalat, Aurel Halip, Alexandru Jîjîie, G-ghe Tofan and Florea Florescu (Doboș, 1930, p. 20).”

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1905, the “Constitutive Assembly of DACIA” (Negură, 1988, p. 3) took place with 6 members who laid the foundations of the society, and then the number of members reached 12, according to the writings of Ion Negură. The student society had as its main objective “Spreading culture among the people, without neglecting other student’s duties”, (Negură, 1988, p. 3) a fact that was valued during its operation, especially through the involvement of students in supporting village communities with cultural, social and economic projects. This cultural program was put into practice by the academic society through free courses for illiterates and book lovers, popular banks were established, a collection titled “Popular Library” was edited and reading rooms were organized and developed and established the first archery societies in the villages (Negură, 1988, p. 36).

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*The beginning was made with the establishment of “Reading rooms” in villages, a kind of popular casinos. But these, in order to live usefully, needed newspapers, suitable books, conferences and above all social-cultural propaganda. The founders, several priests and teachers, who had the courage to face the wrath of the master, made beautiful beginnings at the urging of the tireless theological student and editor Atanasie Gherman. (Doboş, 1930, p. 15)*

Therefore, reading rooms and reading societies in Bucovina were supported by the “Society for Romanian Culture and Literature in Bucovina” and the Academic Society “Junimea” in Cernăuți, then after the appearance of the academic society “Dacia” in 1905 it was noticed a general involvement on the part of students, active members in the action of developing reading cabinets in rural communities. The Romanian students, enrolled in the academic society, were from the villages, [...] virgins from the people, who set out to spread the most useful teachings among the households from the villages and from under the cities of our fairs” (Foaia poporului, 1909, p. 3). Encouraged by the theological student Atanasie Gherman, some of the priests and teachers joined the activity of promoting and organizing the reading cabinets and registered as members of the society. This action of equipping reading rooms and libraries with books and newspapers was not an easy one, but the students from “Dacia” managed to fulfill the objectives specified in the company’s program. “Right from the moment of its establishment, the academic society attended all the social-cultural enterprises of the Cabinets, taking a close interest in the situation of these societies” (Doboş, 1930, p. 61) During this period, the reading rooms requested books and newspapers, to support its members. The difficult situation of the cabinets, noted by the “Dacia” Society, led them to request help from “Casa Şcoalelor” society in Bucharest and “Steaua” Library (Doboş, 1930, p. 61). In this context, the academic society made a call at the beginning of August 1905 to all the cabinets in Bucovina to have a clear picture of the situation, trying to solve the requirements for books and newspapers.

*On August 6th, 1905, Dacia addressed the following call to all Reading rooms: “The total lack of books written for the understanding of the people greatly hinders the progress of the reading rooms in the country. The “Dacia” academic society, wanting to remove this lack, addressed the competent places and received several hundreds of popular books, which it will distribute to the Reading rooms. Reading rooms, who want these books for free, are asked to send us a small report, which contains: the committee, the number of members, the state of the library and the Reading rooms’s assets, as well as 20 money in postage stamps for sending the books’’. Daily management of the Dacia Academic Society. Cernăuți, Stones Street, No. 28 (Doboş, 1930, p. 61)*

In the call launched by “Dacia” to the reading cabinets, a report was requested on the state of the book collection in the library, the number of members, information about the management committee and the wealth it had under it.

With this information, a real x-ray of the organization of the cabinets in the communes of Bucovina could be made. Eager to increase the number of books, newspapers and magazines in the cabinet libraries, in order to support those interested in books and reading, the “Dacia” Society in order to be able to cope with all these requests, [...] created a section: “People’s Library”, which would administer this cultural material” (Doboş, 1930, p. 62). The activity of equipping the reading rooms with publications continued until around the First World War, reaching “30,000 copies” (Doboş, 1930, p. 62). Delighted and satisfied with the help received from the “Dacia” Society, the reading rooms in Bucovina brought public thanks, or through letters, and in some localities, the society was honored with the status of honorary member of the cabinet. “The leadership of the Frația cabinet in Braşca wrote on August 20th, 1905: “The Dacia academic society has kindly enriched our society’s library with 20 very instructive and useful booklets for the people” (Doboş, 1930, p. 61). The “Albina” reading room from Costâna thanked for the “14 booklets” received, the “Buciumul” cabinet from Stulpicani wrote: “Small gifts are great treasures for us” (Doboş, 1930, p. 61) and “The undersigned reading society “Unirea” from Capul Codrului feels pleasantly obliged to bring the tireless academic society “Dacia” the most cordial thanks for the support provided” (Doboş, 1930, p. 61).

“Dacia” society offered free of charge the “Poporul” publication to the Reading cabinet in Bălăceana and sent books for the library to the archers in Bădeuți. “The brave society Dacia”, a handful of young people inspired for great things, thirsty for progress and guided by the principle of seeing their nation in bloom, also volunteered to donate to the Reading cabinet, “The Handsome Guide from Tişauti” many books” (Doboş, 1930, p. 63). In addition to the book donations from the “Dacia” Society, it also got involved in the cultural life of the villages by participating in the popular celebrations and parties organized by the reading rooms with “theatrical performances”. In this sense, “Drăgoi” cabinet from Drăgoieşti organized a party “[...] on July 23rd, 1905, when the secretary of Dacia, Dimitrie Logigan, with a band made up of several young teachers played a play to the full satisfaction for many spectators” (Doboş, 1930, p. 64).

Theatrical performances also continued in other localities in the area of Bucovina, forming a continued cultural tradition, [...] especially after the war, when under the leadership of Ştefan Pavelescu, Dacia troupe roamed under the

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patronage of General Mircescu, the commander of the VIIIth division, the alienated regions of Bucovina and northern Bassarabia” (Doboş, 1930, pp. 64-65). Respecting its statute and the programme presented at its establishment, “Dacia” Society emphasized its objective of supporting the reading rooms, nothing that “Another side of cultural propaganda is the content: historic, moral, social and economic. They were held by the Dacians on various occasions in Cabinets and Arcăşii and at courses for craftsmen.” (Doboş, 1930, p. 65).

At the end of 1905, the first conference of “Dacia” Society took place within the “Sprijinitorul” Cabinet in Ilişeşti, with the theme “anti-alcohol propaganda” (Doboş, 1930, p. 65), and in the following years these meetings continued with the participation of students, members of the organization. “Later, Gh. Tofan and V. Marcu, then all the young people, who wandered through Dacia, for the last few years they roamed the villages threatened by denationalization holding conferences on the history of the nation accompanied by projects with the schiopticon, commissioned by Dacia for this purpose” (Doboş, 1930, p. 65). The activity of those from “Dacia” expanded and, “In addition to supporting the cultural activities of the village reading rooms and the national houses, free courses were organized for Romanian craftsmen and a legal assistance service” (Diacon, 2002, p. 418). These free courses were for craftsmen and workers from Cernăuţi and the surrounding area and were held in the Greek Orthodox Primary School in Cernăuţi, thus contributing to the professional training and literacy of the illiterate, but also supporting education in the Romanian language through the aid provided students with low material incomes. In 1906, the “Dacia” Society appealed to the rural population to participate in the great exhibition in Bucharest.

To be able to participate in this exhibition, the president of the society, Filaret Doboş, asked for help from some societies from Bucovina and Romania, and Professor Nicolae Iorga from the kingdom sent him a letter, asking him to support the departure by train to Bucharest and accommodation for those who were to arrive at the exhibition.

*Seeing now in your exhibition an eminent school for the peasant from Bucovina, overwhelmed by needs and even denationalized by the rush of foreigners, we decided to arrange in September a large expedition of the peasantry from Bucovina to Bucharest. We do this in agreement with all the real workers for the peasant cause in our country [...]. As you, Mr. Professor, you are a convinced defender of the peasant cause and a man of merit and move to Râmâni, we ask you to support our enterprise through newspapers and interventions.*

*Yours devoted,  
Filaret Doboş,*

*Student in letters, president of "Dacia". (Doboş, 1930, p. 76)*

"We invite all the peasantry, all the peasant societies in the country: the village banks, the reading rooms, the archers and the agricultural meetings, to leave in the month of *Septemvrie*, before the harvest with us in Bucharest." "Dacia" Society participated with 2,000 peasants in this large-scale action, and "Dacia Excursion was for the Bucovina peasants a living school on the material, cultural and military powers of the Free Kingdom" (Doboş, 1930, p. 93).

The activity of the students from "Dacia" has diversified through involvement in the editing of brochures and calendars and the publication of articles in the publications: "Junimea literară" and "Voința Poporului" and "To provide Cabinets, Archăşii and Popular Banks with a shelter safe and therefore the existence. Dacia supports the idea of raising National Houses in the villages with the competition of intellectuals raised from each village". (Doboş, 1930, p. 63).

The First World War left traces in the functioning of the society, it was closed, and the library, archive and furniture were moved out of the way of destruction. Gradually, after the war, the society was reopened and reorganized, and "Immediately after the Unification, the idea of uniting all the Romanian students' societies in Cernăuți in a single Center emerged, so an idea strongly supported by the political factors of the time in the press". (Doboş, 1930, p. 98) The society was established again in 1919, at first with a small number of members and few material resources, then a choir, an orchestra. A theater troupe was established with the participation of the members and the activity expanded. "In the second year after its establishment, it now had trucks or a special wagons at its disposal for cultural propaganda in these parts of the country, which were available every Sunday and holiday to transport members to different localities" (Doboş, 1930, p. 100). Filaret Doboş made a presentation of the society's activity and after 1919, the society participated in numerous cultural events in the villages of Bucovina and Basarabia, but also organized activities at its own reading room in Cernăuți. On July 18, 1919, "Dacia" encouraged "[...] all its members, who spend their holidays in the country, as well as all friends, acquaintances and well-wishers of the society to collect folklore material in order to publish a brochure for popular libraries". (Doboş, 1930, p. 105).

In 1921, the Society participated at the celebration organized by the "Mahala Reading House" (Doboş, 1930, p. 108) and in the following years, the Society's involvement in cultural activities in the community was visible, according to documentary research. On April 28th, 1922, the "Literary meeting" took place in the society's reading room. The emeritus member T. Balan holds a conference on

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the Revolution of 1848 in the Romanian countries” (Doboș, 1930, p. 108) and the society, until the end of the year made book donations to some reading rooms and established popular libraries. The reading room in Frasin received 40 books, Călineștii lui Cuparencu benefited from a donation of 70 volumes, and Cacica received 40 volumes (Doboș, 1930, p. 110). On July 15th, 1923, “Dacia” Society organized a folk party in Măzănești, Suceava County, and “Arcășia” from Drăgoiești also participated in this celebration. “On this occasion, in Măzănăiești, Dacia established the reading room “Vasile Găina”, in memory of the worthy university professor of this name from this commune. “Dacia” donated over a hundred books to the reading room, thus laying the foundations of a public library”. (Doboș, 1938, p. 110). That year, the society participated in numerous parties, celebrations and other cultural events in the localities of Bucovina (Câmpulung, Valea Seacă, Costâna, Buda, Roșa, Vatra Dornei, Cernăuți and others) (Doboș, 1938, p. 111). In September, “Dacia” gives an artistic contest at the folk celebration organized by the reading room “Mihaiu Viteazul” in Boian, Cernăuți County. Two plays were performed. Conference about the benefits of education” (Doboș, 1938, p. 111), and in the town of Arbore he responded to the invitation, made by the office “Luca Arbore” and the society “Trezvia” and “[...] Dacia organized a big party with theater and other artistic productions. A conference for the people was also held” (Doboș, 1938, p. 111). The cabinet’s activity continued in the following years, supporting the readers in cultural development by participating in the organized parties. In 1924 they got involved “in arranging a popular party with theater, recitations and dance” (Doboș, 1938, p. 113) alongside “Ștefan cel Mare” reading room from Dărmanesti.

Within the “Dacia” Society, there was a library and a reading room that supported the members with books and newspapers. At the beginning of the activity, “166 works in 419 volumes and brochures entered the library, partly by donation, partly by purchase (Doboș, 1930, p. 32). During 1906-1907, the society’s library made available to the members publications for information, the book fund developing through donations and purchases made by the society. “Among the donors are: The Committee of Bucovina Romanians for the general Romanian exhibition in Bucharest, the editorial office of the newspaper “Voința Națională” in Bucharest, soc. Acad. “Romania Jună” from Vienna, “Casa scoalelor” from Bucharest, honored soc. “Steaua” [...]” (Doboș, 1930, p. 38) and private individuals, including: Dr. I. G. Sbiera, Teodor Bălan, Ion Grămada, Liviu Marian, Isidor Ieșan and others. During this period, “715 works were borrowed in 766. Apart from these, the society also possesses a public library, which was well

researched, especially by craftsmen from the suburbs, borrowing books at over 150” (Doboş, 1930, p. 38). In 1930, the Society had a library with a fund of 4347 volumes worth 300,000, structured by domains as follows: 2410 Romanian literary books, 700 scientific books, 820 books in German, 117 books in French and 300 related magazines (Doboş, 1930, p. 134).

The society’s reading room carried out its activity, coming to the aid of students and craftsmen from the area of Cernăuți and its surroundings. “There were 13 literary and scientific magazines and 23 political newspapers available to the members in the reading room, some of which were purchased at public expense, some of which were received free of charge” (Doboş, 1930, p. 134). “Dacia” society also supported the establishment of archery societies in the villages of Bucovina, and to implement the objectives proposed for the development of these archers, the realization of “firefighter exercises was encouraged; gymnastic and athletic exercises; the organization of pompous processions, gymnastic, musical productions, reading rooms and public libraries; the maintenance of didactic courses and useful conferences” (Diacon, 2002, p. 421). “Conceived as national propaganda societies among the youth of the state, archers carried out, with the support of other cultural societies, actions that contributed to the development of national consciousness, to the emancipation of the Romanian peasantry on cultural, socio-economic and political level” (Diacon, 2002, p. 423). They collaborated with the reading offices, organizing activities, sometimes they held meetings in the office headquarters in the locality and supplemented the activities of the offices through their involvement.

After the union of Bucovina with Romania, “Dacia” Society continued with the organization of celebrations and conferences in the society’s reading rooms, but also in the localities of the territory. Between the years 1924 and 1930, numerous conferences and literary sessions addressed to members, students, but also supporters were held in the cabinet belonging to the “Dacia” Society with a varied and interesting theme, and in this sense, we mention here only a part of these speeches: “The Hurmuzăchesti Family supported by the emeritus member Teodor Bălan, “The role of students in social life” presented by the honorary member Traian Brăileanu, “The columnist type; Mihaiu Teliman, Bucovina’s columnist, presented by the emeritus member Vasile Paşchivski, Prof. Huţan spoke about “Interesting types from the animal kingdom”, student D. Sofroniuc presented “Historical moments from the life of our nation”. (The sociologist Traian Brăiloiu completed the series of conferences with a sociological theme, and in 1930, the president of “Dacia” society, Ion Negură, made a presentation with the title “History of our society”. “Dacia” society continued the series of cultural



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activities in the following years and "carried on with the same youthful vigor until 1938, the society acting together with the other associations as a dynamic factor of the national-cultural life in the northeastern corner of the country". (Negură, 1988)

*Conclusions*

The student societies contributed to the establishment of reading rooms in the communes of Bucovina and "Priests and teachers on the one hand, students and politicians on the other, competed in the action of establishing reading rooms. This is the only way to explain the fact that in less than 20 years all of Romanian Bucovina was covered with reading rooms" (Loghin, 1943, p. 206). In 1938, the government decided to close all students' societies, and "On October 24th, 1938, all students' societies in Romania were dissolved, their place being taken by a single official student organization, which, however, did not enjoy any audience from the students" (Loghin, 1943, p. 206). The abolition of student associations in Bucovina in particular and in Romania in general, led to the cessation of cultural activities in the territory and a huge void on the map of academic societies with a pronounced cultural character. Therefore, "Student societies by their status, the rhythmicity of supported manifestations, the duration of their existence and the cultural tradition they formed and imposed on the consciousness of contemporaries are the most representative associations with a cultural character in Bucovina". (Dugan-Opaïț, 2015, p. XXIV) and "Dacia" society through its cultural, material and spiritual actions, it was among the societies that contributed to the development of reading rooms in Bucovina.

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