Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, 5, 2 (2013) 185–202

The Myth-Shaping Power of a Past Vision of the Future[1]

Imola GYÖRGY V.[2]
Department of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology
Babeş–Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
gyimola@yahoo.com

Abstract. The creation of an era itself, as rhetoric of time, creates the otherness from which it builds up its own borders. Thus the creation of an era goes hand in hand with identity formation. The beginning of the 20th century, as the boundary of an era, appears as such a self-reflective moment in the life of Târgu Mureş. The study aims at presenting the social, economic and cultural changes of this period, notably the time when György Bernády was the mayor, the most significant period of urbanization of the town, the moment of the conscious designation of the above mentioned boundary of an era. It makes an attempt to grasp the beginning of the powerful personality cult of the former mayor; it analyzes those strategies of canonization and discourses that have played a key role in the process of the myth-formation of the hero and its time. In this era the process of György Bernády's raising to the status of a cultural hero took place. The articles, which appeared in the local press, give a clear-cut image about what kind of judgements and appreciations have developed about the city and its councillor, as well as the infrastructural and cultural development.

Keywords: cult, canon, discourse, hero, identity

1. Introduction

In Târgu Mureş (Romania) the local elite tries to capture the past through the memory of György Bernády, the urbanization at the beginning of the 20th century and the prosperous time, it aims to ensure that the past does not disappear without a trace, but it connects to the future. After the 1989 revolution the cult of

1 This work was possible with the financial support of the Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU/107/1.5/S/77946 with the title "Doctorate: an Attractive Research Career."

2 The article, including the quotes from the Hungarian specialist literature, was translated by Annamária Klaudia Şerban.

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

György Bernády, as a significant part of the mechanism of identity preservation and amplification, suddenly gained momentum. The so-called invisible memory mechanisms that focus on the strong points of the past are extremely important to community life. In Târgu Mureş this strong point of the past is the period between 1902 and 1913, when the city, due to the organizational work of mayor György Bernády, cast off its former provincial peculiarities and became the scene of major infrastructural and developmental changes. The question, however, is how the society of the era lived to see the change, was it aware that it was the participant in the turn of an era? From what perspective, whose point of view can we talk about the moment of rebirth of the city? To what extent are the figure of György Bernády and the concept of the turning of an era connected? What image did they form about the leader of the city?

In my study I am making an attempt to analyse the events of the past through which the Hungarian political elite of Târgu Mureş seeks to define the collective identity of the Hungarian-speaking community. I am examining those events and phenomena at the beginning of the 20th century which can be considered the antecedents of the cult mentioned above, I am trying to grasp the development of the role of the hero, and answer the question: where could we pinpoint the beginning of the cult? Can we talk about cult in this era?

2. Interpretive framework, methodology and resources

The characteristics and attitudes through which the intellectuals aim to create the image of the town leader at the beginning of the 20th century, can be well determined on the basis of the studied materials. The content analysis method proved to be the most efficient in the examination of characteristics and relationships. Klaus Krippendorff presents the well-defined steps of content analysis: data preparation that includes the definition of the unit, sampling and data recording; data reduction; conclusion; analysis (Krippendorff 1995). I am aiming to follow this in my paper.

My study covers the period when György Bernády was mayor for the first time, the years between 1902 and the end of 1912, a period that is remembered as the most intensive and the most productive. Of the periodicals that appeared at the time, I reviewed the political paper called *Székely Lapok*, published between 1900 and 1910; a paper that, beginning with the year 1910, was united with the paper called *Napló* and was renamed *Székely Napló*. Initially this paper published its articles in a pro-governmental tone, then, due to an editorial change, it became a paper of the opposition, later on using again a pro-governmental voice. Another political paper I have reviewed that also appeared in 1902, called *Székelység*, went through the same change; after an editorial change in 1906, after a change

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

of views and name, it appeared under the name of *Székely Ellenzék* until 1918. These two newspapers proved to have the greatest life span in the period I have studied. The mixed-content periodicals I have reviewed that had a shorter span of life are *Maros-Vásárhely* (1911–1913) and *Közérdek* (1903–1904); the former one favours the mayor's activity, the latter one disapproves of it. From the materials I have reviewed I have extracted the ones that dealt directly with the person and activity of György Bernády.

Using one of the techniques of analysis recommended by Krippendorff, my research is attempting to find out how the symbolic image of the mayor was formed in the studied era. The analysis can be approached from two directions: from the direction of the attributes, the frequency profiles, distribution peculiarities as well as from the direction of associations (Krippendorff 1995: 120–122).

Concerning the figure of György Bernády, the former viewpoint is the one with chances of success, because this is the one that highlights the characteristics, the relationships, the background of the studied person. With this technique I will systematically show the characteristics of the mayor, what people consider important to be told about him, in what context his name appears.

3. What kind of image does the contemporary press market about György Bernády and his era?

In order to clarify the imagery referring to the beginning of the cult, I have summed up the facts in tables, i.e. the types of newspapers, the journalists and the genre of the articles about György Bernády: what they write about him and in what manner. A total of 311 articles have been analysed. In the following I will bring forward a few steps of content analysis. But before that I will outline the most important events of György Bernády's first mayoralty so that it will become clear in the course of the analysis what events the press discusses or, eventually, what events are being left out of the discourse.

3.0. Bernády's biographical events and public appearances between 1902–1913

György Bernády was born on the 10th of April 1864; he came from a family of pharmacists. As a child he moved with his family to Târgu Mureş. He graduated from the Presbyterian College in Târgu Mureş after which he continued his studies in Cluj, then in Budapest. First he acquired his PhD in Pharmacy, then also in Law and Politics. After his studies he became an apothecary, then soon he became involved in public life as a parliamentarian, he was a municipal member in 1890

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

and in 1900 he held the position of police superintendent. For several decades he worked as a chief curator of the Reformed Church in the Castle Church and the Reformed College. He was elected mayor in 1902 (Marosi 2006: 72). For the first time he was mayor until 1913, then he was Lord Lieutenant for five years. Based on political-party agreement he was reelected mayor between 1926 and 1929 (Pál-Antal 2007: 13). From 1926 he became a Member of Parliament of Maros-Torda County. In 1930 he left the National Hungarian Party and formed the Democratic Civic Bloc, thus continuing to participate in the political process. Although he continued to work faithfully for the interest of his own nation, ethnicity, the inhabitants of Târgu Mureş mostly remember him as Mayor Bernády. He died in Târgu Mureş on the 22nd of October 1938.

At the moment of his taking the mayor's office the population of Târgu Mureş was 19,522 souls, which by 1910 increased by almost 6,000 people, and continued growing in the following year (Varga 2007). At the beginning of his career he applied for huge amounts of money, which he used to launch enterprises. In 1903, for the first time in 80 years the city ended the financial year with a profit. Thus the city became creditworthy. Modernisation occurred mainly in the city's layout design. Over a period of 15 years more than 3,000 land parcelling, measurement, purchase, or expropriation were prepared and implemented (Marosi 2006: 21). The entire city and its borders were re-mapped, land books were settled, then they opened and modernized 117 streets and squares, several hundred acres were turned into parks.

This was the time when the sewage system was developed and street lighting was installed as well as major public buildings were constructed. The Maros river was regulated, weirs, dams, artificial channels and bridges were built; a water treatment plant, reservoirs, a sewage treatment plant were established; the city was supplied with plumbing, an electric plant was established, a gas plant, a steam-dryer brick factory and warehouses were built. For those who wanted to establish industrial companies, factories, significant land and customs duty reduction, construction materials and transportation benefits were granted. Sixteen small and medium-large plants were established; this is when the paraffin refinery, a number of customs houses, greenhouses and nurseries were built. One of the most modern public slaughterhouses of the time was equipped in 1904. This is when the Chamber of Commerce, the Pension Palace and the Art Nouveau style City Hall was built. Thus public life went through a period of significant modernization.

György Bernády's modernizing activity created space in many cases for civil leisure activities as well. A cold bath for summer and later on a warm steam bath were opened. They started to build up the Somostető, the restaurant and the shooting range were inaugurated, at the same time picnic areas with fireplaces were established. The newly built bank of the Maros river also became appropriate for weekend recreation and collective picnics in the city.

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

At the same time a range of educational, social and cultural institutions were established: the orphanage, five elementary schools in the city's various districts, the civil school (now the Technical University), later the High School for Commerce [Felsőkereskedelmi] (also a technical university today), a grammar school for girls, (now Papiu Ilarian high school), the administration school, the military school (now the Medical University). The city music school, the public library and art gallery were founded, and in the last years of peace the Cultural Palace closed the list, thus creating the modern city centre of Târgu Mureş (Szepessy 1993: 20–21).

As soon as the institutions were established, cultural events began, so in 1909, through György Bernády's intercession, the first symphonic concert took place. The societies and associations created in the second half of the 19th century continued to function actively, their number increased with new ones. An increasing number of theatrical performances were held, at the same time sports-life flourished as well (Flórián 2003–2007). Newspapers also had their heydays in György Bernády's time. Anyone could acquire a license to found a newspaper for a low price (Sebestyén 1999).

György Bernády also took significant steps in order to preserve the national and local memory. On his initiative Ferenc Rákóczy II's bust was erected in 1907. A few years later, in 1912, a Petőfi-column was unveiled with a relief depicting Petőfi on it. These as well as other earlier erected monuments were removed after Bernády's mayoralty, after the change of the state system (Gagyi 2000: 88).

Three bank buildings were constructed in the first decade of the 1900s, the Austro-Hungarian Bank, the Albina Bank and the Agricultural Bank (Marosi 2004). It is all due to Bernády's administrational and organizing ability.

3.1. What media genres were used?

I have classified the analyzed texts into genres based mainly on the categorizations found in the specialized literature of present-day communication science[3] (see their summary: Szirmai 1997). Additionally, there were many texts that cannot be concretely located, being the final result of a multi-genre mix. The existence and frequency of certain genres depend on the image of the newspaper, too. There are several pieces of news in the political newspapers, for example, about the mayor, while in the mixed-content papers they do not reflect the work of the city leader at all.

3 According to the literary classification of the genres listed, the news, announcements and reports are included in the information genre group, the editorial, the commentary, the gloss, the note and the pamphlet belong to the journalistic or opinion-communicating genre categories, while the readers' letters, the portfolio, the satire and the subject picture are part of the group of associated genres (see: Szirmai 1997).

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

As seen in *Table 1*, it becomes clear that the most common genre in which the mayor's name appears is the news (a total of 96), by which every inhabitant of the city may learn about the mayor's public activity. The news is not merely reporting the larger-scale activities, but in many cases it covers smaller journeys, not too serious sicknesses. The genres of announcements and reports were written with the same purpose, but they were longer in size. They are individual notifications from which it becomes clear that the journalist attended the event. The second most common genre about György Bernády is the 77-times occurring editorial, which is present in an emphasized quantity in each reviewed newspaper, whether government or opposition oriented. In the former case the editorials write in a positive tone about the mayor, while the latter pass judgment, emboss his flaws. Notes follow editorials in frequency; their number is forty-two, usually they express the author's private opinion in addition to the event presented as news. They are followed by reports (a total of 19), then a mix of notes and reports (a total of 15 articles). The genre of announcement occurs 13 times and so does the mix of news and notes. Genres with less than 10 occurrences: the commentary, the gloss, the readers' letters/ open letters, the pamphlet, the portfolio, the satire, the subject picture, the advertisement, texts taken from other newspapers, as well as mixed genres. Thus the activity of the mayor appears mostly in the informative genre group, it is closely followed by the journalistic writings, and finally a smaller amount of related genres group.

The fact that both György Bernády as a person and the events related to him are dealt with in such a wide scale of genres proves that quite a lot of attention was paid to his person.

Table 1.

Genres of newspapers	Székely Lapok/ Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
News	54	42	-	-	96
Announcement	10	3	-	-	13
Reports	6	8	-	5	19
Editorials	47	18	9	3	77
Commentary	7	2	-	-	9
Gloss	1	2	-	-	3
Notes	35	5	-	2	42
Readers'/ open letter	3	-	-	1	4
Pamphlet	3	-	-	-	3
Portfolio	2	-	-	-	2

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

Genres of newspapers	Székely Lapok/ Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
Satire	2	-	-	-	2
Taken from other papers	2	1	-	2	5
Advertisement	1	-	-	-	1
Subject picture	-	-	-	1	1
Mixed genres	20	8	4	1	33

3.2. What is the nature of the articles?

While documenting the texts I also paid attention to the direction of the judgment they have formulated related to the mayor and his activity. Whether the texts are filled with positive, negative meanings or they are just communicating facts without any judgment. Thus I have classified the texts according to their nature as appreciative, condemning or fact-transmitting; two fictional texts were also reported.

The question may arise why the number of fact-transmitting texts does not match the number of informational texts mentioned in the table above which, according to their definition, are supposed to be fact-transmitting. This is so because in the contemporary journalistic practice the authors' opinions left their marks on the merely fact-transmitting writings as well; we may sometime deduce this from the specific phrasing or an adjective here or there, or from the tone of the writing.

Based on *Table 2*, the appreciative texts occur 184 times, i.e. twice as many times as the condemning texts, and many times more than the condemning and fact-transmitting texts together. The number of the condemning texts is 80, and that of the fact-transmitting ones is 45. This indicates that the presentation of the figure of the mayor is not unequivocally appreciative but it is controversial. If we regard the percentage of occurrence of the articles containing the three types of judgments, it turns out that 51% of the texts of the data are appreciative, 25.7% are condemning and 14.4% are fact-transmitting. Therefore, in most cases, the journalists appreciate György Bernády's person and activity. Considering the opinion-forming impact of the media, there may have been readers, inhabitants of the city who recognized György Bernády's qualities. But we can only draw this conclusion from the writing containing this kind of information.

The question may arise how the above-mentioned judgments may change over time, whether the positive view is strengthened or the criticism becomes more frequent. It turns out from the examined newspaper articles that the

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

modification of the judgment has nothing to do with the passage of time but in each case it depends on the political orientation of the newspaper. This means that the government supporting texts are approving, while the opposition's are condemning, regardless of whether they appear at the beginning or at the end of György Bernády's mayoralty. The frequency of the fact-transmitting texts is proportionally divided in the newspapers.

Table 2.

Type of article	Székely Lapok / Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
Appreciative	105	64	-	15	184
Condemning	62	6	12	-	80
Fact-transmitting	24	19	1	1	45
Fiction	2	-	-	-	2

3.3. Who participates in the discourse about Bernády?

The following aspect of the analysis is connected with the previous train of thought, i.e. the investigation of who is the one who formulated the judgment in the given texts, and thus who participates in the discourse about the mayor.

In most cases, the opinion of the author is mirrored in the article. Generally, the editor himself was the author; therefore, the judgments mostly disclose the conviction of the editors. They were all, with only a few exceptions, members of the Municipal Government Committee, so they were closely familiar with the happenings in the city. The articles often publish the details of the record, speeches that were delivered and recorded in the meetings, welcoming speeches at ceremonies, etc. In these cases, the author of the judgment is the speaker, not the editor. There are several texts that contain the opinion of someone else besides the editor; this explains the fact that if we add up all the cases in which someone expresses an opinion about the mayor, then we obtain a much larger number than the number of the studied texts.

Table 3 shows clearly that those who form opinions and share their opinions with the public are nearly all representatives of urban intellectuals, members of the city administration and local politicians. We can find 272 cases of opinions expressed by editors/authors; they are followed in frequency by value judgments of people in different executive positions in the city, clerks, members of the municipality, people working in offices, teachers, priests. We have found examples of this in 40 texts. Then, with 13 occurrences, Bernády's superiors follow in the line, amongst which most of the time we can enumerate the prefect, different ministers, ministerial

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

councilors, in one case the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Prime-Minister László Lukács. The author of the texts refers in 10 cases to the positive or negative judgment of the citizens of the city, i.e. the judgments of the public in the city, all the citizens of the city, its people, passers-by. In the same amount of texts we find examples of the appreciation of various associations, societies, circles, unions, where György Bernády was either the president, or founding member, or member. In 7 articles the leaders of some institutions take sides with the mayor, such as bank managers, priests, newspaper editors. In 6 texts the support of the mayor's friends, acquaintances, admirers, supporters and relatives appears. Finally, in 5 cases the author writes about the positive attitude of the famous personalities or noblemen of the city. Actually this group may coincide with any other group. However, it is important to point it out, because it also emphasizes that we get acquainted with the image of the mayor, formed from the perspective of the Hungarian-speaking intellectuals, at the beginning of the 20th century.

Table 3.

The participants at the discourse about Bernády	Székely Lapok / Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
The author/ editor	172	76	13	11	272
Bernády György's superiors	8	3	-	2	13
Noble personalities	5	-	-	-	5
Leaders of institutes	6	1	-	-	7
Societies, members of companies	6	4	-	-	10
The leaders of the city, officials, members of the Municipal Committee	18	17	-	5	40
Friends, acquaintances, supporters, relatives	2	4	-	-	6
The citizens	7	2	-	1	10

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

3.4. What qualities does the press present about György Bernády?

One of the most important moments of the analysis is the systematic presentation of György Bernády's displayed attributes, which may reveal what image of the mayor was alive in his era, or what image of him the local elite tried to market.

Table 4 shows that there are 124 newspaper articles in which the authors present advantageous attributes, and 70 in which negative attributes are presented. As can be seen, the former is a lot more frequent, thus we can again draw the conclusion that the contemporary media attempts to emphasize György Bernády's positive side, it creates and markets a positive image of him.

Table 4.

Bernády György's qualities	Székely Lapok / Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
Favourable	70	42	-	12	124
Unfavourable	53	4	13	-	70

The displayed favourable attributes can be divided into five groups. The first group contains general positive personality traits: conscientious, thorough, purposeful, brave, hard-working, ambitious, altruistic, he is characterized by willpower, perseverance; self-respecting, masculine, open, courageous, honest, trustworthy, self-sacrificing, work-loving, calm-voiced, aristocratically humble and proud, careful, generous, self-confident, strong and fair. The second group is related to his work as a mayor: zealous, energetic, a cognizant of public life, talented, experienced, a good organizer, a man of work, a genius, the first man of the city, thrifty, father of the city, role model, tireless, man of action, iron man, having endless energy, no limits, well-respected, enthusiast, proficient in educating people, working with super-human powers for the benefit and progress of the city, he is characterized by genuine style, wise moderation, economical, the master of winning hearts, the re-creator of Târgu Mureş, always making sense, his life is an unremitting struggle, unrivalled creative talent. The third group includes those characteristics that apply to his environment's relationship with him: lovable, sympathetic, he is characterized by warm heart, subtle sense, excellence, valuable personality, peacemaker, distinguished, dignified, first, the most prominent mayor, the head of a big family, having a strong power of suggestion, and he is all heart, all soul. The fourth group would be the attributes that prove his patriotism: the grand master that tends to the national ideals, true antique Hungarian, ardent apostle of the Hungarian culture, servant of the Hungarian national ideal, he reveals real love towards his race, and he is a patriot. And finally comes the group of magnified, exaggerated favourable attributes: his name is magic, he has superhuman strength,

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

the Doge of Venice, his name is a concept, he is a head taller than the crowd, he is an uncrowned king, miracle man, a Christ-like role-model.

The series of unfavourable attributes is also long but it does not catch up with the number of favourable features. They can be categorized almost in the same way. First the general negative attributes can be mentioned: too passionate, plenipotentiary, "brilliant", "modest", roistering, conceited, stubborn, luxurious, violent, ill-minded, wary of his honour, self-absorbed, "polite", a wanton, bold, vain, selfish, strong-handed, crazy, substandard, rude, indifferent, actor, mentally strong, "innocent as a newborn goat kid", careful in his own interest, unjust, a pup, inexcusably frivolous. The negative traits regarding his work as a city official and his political work are as follows: he encumbers the citizens with additional taxes, he does not know the laws, he is politically spineless, he makes it impossible to be in the opposition, he is the main bartender at the water-supplies, he is a maniac builder, he washes his hands as a Pilate, excellent juggler, he only struggles for laurels, he withdraws from responsibility, he is reckless, he is too hurried, he does not properly plan his work, his longing to build is a disease. The group of unfavourable attributes that refer to his environment: he is an arbitrary lord and commander, a shepherd, he is afraid of the press, the "beloved György Bernády", "the city's respectable and amiable mayor", "he harbours goodwill towards the citizens", his hands are pulling towards himself. The group of unfavourable attributes referring to his patriotic deeds contains the nation-eater and Vlach-eater (Romanian-eater) qualities. And finally, in the group of the unfavourable attributes, too, one can find phrasings that denote magnified, exaggerated attributes: Frankó of Târgu Mureş, Caesar, podesta (authority), the valiant György Bernády, almighty, king, despot, he has magic power, sphinx-man, Lord Bernády, Spartan character, Louis XIV's slogan suits him: "I am the City", Israel.

Judging on the basis of the enumerated attributes we may determine two poles of the image created about György Bernády. One of them is an attitude depicting György Bernády as a saint, the other attitude is the hazing, de-sacralizing of the saint. The people on György Bernády's side present him in a biased manner as a benevolent, dedicated leader, ready to do anything for the city, one who sacrifices himself for the public interest, while the people representing the other side turn these qualities to the opposite pole, highlighting the activities, behaviour that do not put the mayor in a good light.

It is worth noting that the texts containing the favourable attributes almost never reflect György Bernády's wantingness, while the authors of the texts presenting the unfavourable attributes give voice several times to the fact that they recognize the results and the personality of the mayor, but the objections are not negligible either. The numerous elite groups, the inhabitants of the city holding leading functions, as well the intellectuals certainly present him as the local national hero who had "re-created" Târgu Mureş on the altar of the Hungarian culture.

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

3.5. How does the environment relate to György Bernády?

There are many texts in the reviewed press that display a certain attitude of György Bernády's environment towards the mayor. Congruent with the earlier findings of the analysis here, too, the attitude of the political elite in the immediate surroundings of György Bernády is the most visible. The reception of the city residents can be observed from the point of view of the authors of the texts.

Generally, the members of the Municipal Committee, the city aldermen receive the mayor's activities, life events with greetings, warm welcome, salute, cheers, applause, acclamation, banquettes, toasts, serenades, the usual good wishes, huzzah hosannas, noisy cheers, unadulterated enthusiasm, joy, satisfaction, even homage, and his words are received kindly. When György Bernády prepares to leave his mayoralty for other political activities, they express their disappointment; they politely protest against his political campaigning, they demonstrate so that Bernády should remain. He is surrounded by love shown as to the head of the family; his person is girdled with admiration. It is even stated in a meeting that there is not even one person in the opposition who would disapprove of the mayor's suggestions. During the tragic events in his life his environment's feelings are defined by undivided love and condolences. As other reactions of the people, the public's support with sympathy, trust, true esteem, public affection, appreciation, gratitude and pride of the citizens of Târgu Mureş, great attention, support and sacrifice are mentioned. Overflowing joy is often seen on behalf of the authors, their disbelief against gossip, in two cases even blessings occur. The immortalization of the mayor's name on plaques appears as another appreciative attitude. The government's multiple benevolence, thoughtfulness and generosity are also expressed; from other cities envy is experienced. It is mentioned that he was defamed as well, but this event pales in comparison with the love surrounding him.

The authors of the articles reflecting the negative attitude repeatedly question the authenticity of the recognition, the plaques, they express their gloat upon the failure of Bernády's plan; they are concerned about the welfare of the citizens. They express their disbelief, mistrust regarding the city's finances. Not once do they highlight their grievances, their hatred due to additional taxes, express their own and the citizens' indignation, draw attention to the dangers of infatuation. They write about accusations which are caused by the mayor's racketeering, intentions to bribe, threats. In press reports about trials they portray György Bernády as a slanderer. They often present the high respect surrounding the mayor in an ironical way: Bernády is surrounded on all sides by the halo of undivided appreciation; people sing hosannas and hymns to him, idolize him, and all of this is an attempt to weaken the opposition and to favour the emergence of cliques. According to the authors, the members of the Municipal Committee are asleep; they do not notice how the mayor manipulates them.

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

Figures show that in the texts positive attitudes occur more frequently than negative ones. We find positive opinions about the mayor and his activity in 129 cases and negative ones only in 30 cases.

Table 5.

The approach expressed in the article	Székely Lapok / Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
Positive	62	56	-	11	129
Negative	15	3	12	-	30

3.6. To what extent is the turn of the era conscious?

The period determined by György Bernády's person and activity meant a turn of an era for Târgu Mureş. This is attested by the cult existing today in the town, the contemporary discourses about him. In macro-historic dimensions Bernády's importance is of lesser significance than the local elite confer to him but in the city's past the beginning of the 20th century is definitely a landmark period. By looking back on the past or creating the past, the contemporary historical consciousness makes its own "spatiality" temporal, coexistence or timelessness with the rhetoric of time (Kulcsár-Szabó 2000: 102). That is, at the same time we talk about an identity-shaping process. This is observable in the fact that "self-reinforcement", "self-renewal" are naturally inherent in the various events, commemorations (Kulcsár-Szabó 2000: 103). However, the question is still there: when was this turn of the era marked for the first time?

Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó notes in his study that the end of the 19th century ascended to the rank of a special cultural-historical era. While the situation at the end of the century in itself brought about the notion of decadence, the beginning of the century brought the demand for a revival. This explains the action-movement nature of the debut of the Art Nouveau in the era, which is quite obvious in the case of Târgu Mureş as well (cf. Kulcsár-Szabó 2000: 96). György Bernády's work started with rebuilding intentions, as it is evidenced in the excerpt of his often-cited inaugural speech: "Let the deeply respected Council vest me with the trust, the right of regulations and the Seal and I will build a new city for you" (see Marosi 2006). His work started with the consciousness of the need for renewal and the characteristics of the current trend at the turn of the century. The Transylvanian cities in this period begin to be urbanized, this is the moment when the new paths of urbanization develop, which try to resolve the urban-rural division; meanwhile the theory of "small home in the big home" still circulates according to which the city is the miniature double of the national home (Sonkoly 2001: 162–163). We can see that György Bernády took all these

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

facts into consideration for the city's development, while he was aware that he was creating for the future, and his environment acknowledged this.

We often find references to the future, to the turn of the era in the discourses appearing in the press; they are present 27 times in the corpus I have studied.

Table 6.

	Székely Lapok / Székely Napló 1902–1912	Székelység / Székely Ellenzék 1902–1912	Közérdek 1903–1904	Maros-Vásárhely 1911–1913	Total
References to the turn of the century	14	6	1	6	27

In the course of the analysis it becomes clear that in Târgu Mureş, at the beginning of the 20th century, urbanization takes place in the spirit of a conscious creation of an era, thus emphasizing the—in itself—boundary-forming process of the turn of the century. Despite the fact that the creation of an era is the product of historical reflection, the era-consciousness of the prosperous time will approach the future, in this case the post 1990 era-consciousness. According to Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó, the present-time era-consciousness is not able to select "the great events" from the multitude of events, but then the analyzed texts reflect the fact that the ten-year productive mayoralty of György Bernády—from the beginning of his work as a mayor till its end—is definitely recognized as a boundary which the city's Hungarian ethnic intellectuals begin to remember again after 1990 (Kulcsár-Szabó 2000: 92). This is proved by the allusions published in the newspapers, the first of which I discovered in the *Székely Lapok* of the year 1903: "*…because there are signs that his government signified an era in the history of Târgu Mureş!*" (*Székely Lapok*, 4 April 1903) It is also clear in the contemporary discourse that the above mentioned era-boundary cannot be separated from the mayor's name: "*This work, which is the starting place of the evolving Székely culture, is undeniably the great merit of Mayor Dr Bernády, it marks a notable turning point in the cultural history of the Székely capital, which will remain in an inseparable connection with dr György Bernády's name.*" (*Székely Lapok*, 28 October 1909)

Thus, from a retrospective point of view, the period between 1902 and 1913, the time of György Bernády's mayoralty, was definitely a confine which the contemporary leader of the city and his environment consciously plan, appoint, figuratively speaking, hand over to the future. The post-1900 city-history discourse, the identity preservation that is organized around it, reaches out for it. The expressive definition of the phenomenon is made possible by the fact that during the almost ninety years that passed between the two periods there were less opportunities to talk about the age of development of the city. Immediately after the mentioned ten years, until the end of György Bernády's life, one can still grasp the

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

pursuit for the development of the cult; however, after this, the constant changes, the new political system sank the memory of the conditions from the beginning of the century. After 1990, as soon as an opportunity arose for the identity-preserving actions of the Hungarian ethnics of the city, Bernády's era emerged immediately as an exemplary era with its own leading personalities, aspirations, ambitions similar to those formulated by the representatives of the democratic system.

3.7. The legacy of content analysis

As a conclusion of the line of thought above we may state that the different segments of the local society experienced differently the significant changes that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century in Târgu Mureş. The political elite that supported the alderman, turning the mayor into a hero, spoke with recognition about the era of modernization, while, according to the texts, the city residents were forced to put up with the heavy load of taxes, with the rules and regulations that influenced their subsistence, the constantly uncomfortable circumstances due to the city's process of modernization. Nevertheless, in the examined media discourses the mayor and his activity appear mostly in a positive light. The urban community is certainly aware of the fact that they are experiencing an age of change, a significant period in the history of the city.

The image of the city and that of the mayor are created by intellectuals. From their point of view we may talk about the moment of rebirth of the city, which is clearly linked to the activity of György Bernády as a mayor. The image of the mayor is not free from errors, but in most cases he is depicted as a local hero who is fighting for the uplifting of Târgu Mureş from an economic, cultural and administrative point of view, a hero that will most certainly be remembered by posterity.

4. Summary: the establishment of the cult, the age of hero creation

The findings, according to which the ten years of city building mayoralty of György Bernády could be considered the beginning of Bernády's cult, belong to the historical cult, and can only be interpreted as such in the light of the definition of cult.

Péter Dávidházi defines cult as attitudes, habits and language distinguished from the concept of culture. That feature of the cult, according to which it consists of the diligence of participation in the rites and compliance with life-governing regulations, is not missing from their interpretation (Dávidházi 2003: 110). This aspect is not present at all in the presumed contemporary cult creation, since, in

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

order to do this, it lacks the necessary distance in time from the given phenomenon. Still, one of the most important moments of cult-attendance is the series of ritual-ceremonial acts associated with the object of reverence which bears significance, meaning to a specific community (cf. Lakner 2005: 16). The cult of personality, on the one hand, presumes a well-known person who has a lasting impact on a community, and this community manifests an unreasonable, unprincipled praise towards him (see *Hungarian Explanatory Dictionary* 2001: 800). On the other hand, it is important that this praise should become palpable in deeds (Povedák 2009). In György Bernády's case, his impact on the community is given, but we cannot talk about such a manifestation in the cult-creating group, in the best case we can talk about separate opportunities for celebration, which are always brought along by the specific situation. However, they are not ritualistic in nature.

Examining the models of cult-research, József Takáts mentions a possible explanation that "cults that are non-religious in character attend to express a sort of reverence that is not simply oriented toward a person (or persons), but toward the significance that a community accredits to this person's works, deeds, life or way of life. This sort of reverence is bound to a hierarchical concept of the human world: they do not regard themselves equals with the subject of their reverence, but they consider him as an example, as their superior. When expressing reverence, the cultural memory of the community is activated, mobilizing such language-behavioral kits, a 'terminology' that, according to the cultural memory, were once decisively sacral (Takáts 2003: 291). We can validate this explanation in the examination of the personality cult from the beginning of the 20th century, as we talk about the reverence of the activity of a person regarded as an example. When formulating reverence he is often spoken of in sacral idioms. However, this is still not enough to undisputedly talk about a cult from the beginning of the 20th century. I would rather call the revealed phenomenon the foundation of a future cult.

All the more, the process of hero-creation is obvious. According to the Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopedia the hero is such a positive or negative character who is always in the focus of the story and represents the ideal type of a community. Every era creates its own ideal type (*Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopedia* 1987: 640). This is also exemplified by the etymology of the word. Although the term 'hero' has its roots in the distant past, its modern sense is in a close connection with the 19th-century nation-building efforts. By this time the meaning of the word is transformed and it begins to approach the concept of nation, as opposed to the previous meaning of saint, martyr. In the antiquity the term 'hero' referred to the characters of myths, epics that possessed exceptional qualities (Centlivres – Fabre – Zonabend 1998: 234-235). In the Middle Ages the saints panoplied with exceptional virtues were described as heroes. Finally, during the Renaissance and Humanism the term gained a new meaning, those great men were named 'heroes' (*grande homme*) who themselves were the embodiments of

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

good examples and their virtues rested on the moral norms of civil community. Thus, the *grande homme* was equivalent with the useful leader for the society and people (Centlivres-Fabre-Zonabend 1998: 238). The change in the meaning of the word reflects the fact that the definitions of the concepts change with the age and context, the hero can usually be interpreted as a representation of the interests of a particular social group. According to this approach we may call György Bernády the representative of the interests of the local social group, such a hero or great man who carries out activities that are beneficial for his community, therefore he receives recognition. The general finding in literature, concerning the birth of a hero and his characterization, also applies to him, according to which his memory is directed toward future generations in order to create an example to follow. He fits among the heroes of current time (in our case, the beginning of the 20th century), who are real people who become models for the young generation, having a real social reception (Centlivres-Fabre-Zonabend 1998).

In this light, therefore, György Bernády becomes the local national hero of his age, being recognized by his environment, the city's leading aristocracy, due to his modernizing activity in such a way as to provide a basis for the future development of a personality cult.

References

Dávidházi Péter. 2003. Egy irodalmi kultusz megközelítése. [Approaching a Literary Cult.] In: Takáts József (ed.), *Az irodalmi kultuszkutatás kézikönyve. Tanulmánygyűjtemény.* [*Manual of Literary Cult Research. A Collection of Studies.*], 107-134. Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó.

Centlivres, Pierre & Fabre, Daniel & Zonabend, Françoise (eds.). 1998. *La fabrique des héros*. Paris: M.S.H.

Flórián Csaba. 2003–2007. *Krónika évszámokban. Marosvásárhely történeti kronológiája.* [*A Chronicle Timeline. A Historical Chronology of Târgu Mureş.*] *http://www.erdelyweb.hu/mvhely/mvhely_main.html* (28 April 2013)

Gagyi József. 2000. Bernády-szobor bajlátta városban. [The Statue of George Bernady in a Sombre City.] In: Bodó Julianna (ed.), *Miénk a tér? Szimbolikus térhasználat a székelyföldi régióban.* [*Ours is the Space? Symbolic Space Usage in the Szeklerland Region.*], 83-106. Csíkszereda: KAM – Pro-Print Könyvkiadó.

Juhász József & Szőke István & O. Nagy Gábor & Kovalovszky Miklós (eds.) 2001. *Magyar Értelmező Kéziszótár* I. kötet. [*The Concise Hungarian Explanatory Dictionary,* Volume I] Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Krippendorff, Klaus. 1995. *A tartalomelemzés módszertanának alapjai*. [*Methodology of Content Analysis.*] Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)

Kulcsár-Szabó Zoltán. 2000. A „korszak" retorikája. A korszak- és századforduló mint értelmezési stratégia. [The Rhetoric of the "Era". The Turn of the Era and the Century as a Strategy of Interpretation.] In: Bednanics Gábor & Bengi László & Kulcsár Szabó Ernő & Szegedy-Maszák Mihály (eds.), *Az irodalmi szöveg antropológiai horizontjai*. [*Anthropological Horizons of the Literary Text.*], 90-105. Budapest: Osiris.

Lakner Lajos. 2005. Irodalom, kultusz, történetiség, aktualitás. A kultuszkutatás útjain. [Literature, Cult, Historicity, Actuality. The Ways of Cult Research.] In: Kalla Zsuzsa & Takáts József & Tverdota György (eds.), *Kultusz, mű, identitás*. [*Cult, Creation, Identity.*], 11-30. Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum.

Marosi Barna. 2006. *Bernády György városa*. [*George Bernady's City.*] Marosvásárhely: Dr. Bernády György Közművelődési Alapítvány.

Marosi Ildikó. 2004. *„Tekintetes tanács!" Marosvásárhely városképének alakulása a 20. század elején*. [*"Respected council!" Urban development of Târgu Mureş at the Beginning of the 20th century.*] *http://www.korunk.org/?q=node/7655* (28 April 2013)

Ortutay Gyula et al. (eds.). 1987. *Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon* III. kötet. [*Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopaedia*. Volume III] Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Pál-Antal Sándor. 2007. Marosvásárhely a 20. században. [Târgu Mureş in the 20th Century.] In: Pál-Antal Sándor & Novák Csaba Zoltán (eds.), *Marosvásárhely történetéből 2.* [*History of Târgu Mureş 2.*], 9-37. Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó.

Povedák István. 2009. *Hősök és sztárok*. (Doktori disszertáció) [*Heroes and Celebrities*. (PhD Dissertation.)] Budapest: Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar.

Sebestyén Mihály. 1999. A marosvásárhelyi sajtó kezdetei. [The Beginnings of the Press in Târgu Mureş.] *Népújság* nr. 51, December.

Sonkoly Gábor. 2001. *Erdély városai a XVIII–XIX. században*. [*Transylvanian Cities in the 18–19th Centuries.*] Budapest: L'Harmattan–Atelier.

Szepessy László ed. 1993. *Bernády György városa*. [*George Bernady's City.*] Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó.

Szirmai Éva. 1997. *A sajtóműfajok elmélete*. (Egyetemi jegyzet) [*Theory of Media Genres*. (Lecture notes.)] Szeged: JATE Közművelődés Tanszék média szakirány.

Takáts József. 2003. A kultuszkutatás és az új elméletek. [Cult Research and New Theories.] In: Takáts József (ed.), *Az irodalmi kultuszkutatás kézikönyve. Tanulmánygyűjtemény. [Manual of Literary Cult Research. A Collection of Studies.]*, 289-300. Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó.

Varga E. Árpád. 2007. *Erdély etnikai és felekezeti statisztikája, 1850-2002*. [*The Ethnic and Religious Statistics of Transylvania, 1850-2002.*] *http://www.kia.hu/konyvtar/erdely/erd2002.htm* (16 April 2013)

BDD-A7552 © 2013 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 04:01:19 UTC)