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## RADIO MARIA TRANSYLVANIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY ROMAN CATHOLIC PRAYER PRACTICE IN THE SZÉKELYFÖLD<sup>1</sup> REGION\*

**Abstract:** Radio Maria in Italy began prayer-oriented operation 30 years ago with the aim of strengthening faith and also of becoming a new kind of evangelisation tool. Since then close to 80 fraternal institutions have been set up around the world. It has been present in Transylvania since 2006. Three workshops were created in the Székelyföld region, assisted by several hundred volunteers. In addition to presenting Radio Maria Transylvania, the study seeks an answer to how this tool of the religious media has influenced individual and community Roman Catholic prayer practice and religious practice in Transylvania.

**Keywords:** Radio Maria, Székelyföld, prayer, Roman Catholic, religious community

In my research on Roman Catholic religious communities in the Székelyföld region I found the phenomenon of Radio Maria Transylvania that celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016 and is an important presence in the everyday lives of certain communities and individuals. In my field work in recent years I often found that when I arrived my elderly interlocutors, generally living alone, were engrossed in listening to the radio, and also that some of the Székelyföld religious communities have embraced the “radio” rosary prayer as a new possibility. This observation led me to a closer examination of the operation of this media in the Székelyföld region and its influence on individual and community religious practice and prayer life.

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<sup>1</sup> Székelyföld is a historical unit in the eastern part of Transylvania (the whole western part of Romania – in the study I use the wider interpretation of the region), where on the average the Hungarian population is in the majority.

## The World Family of Radio Maria

The first Radio Maria was established in Italy in 1987, placing the main emphasis in its programmes on prayer and instruction in the Catholic faith. At its initiative, a non-profit international civil organisation, the World Family of Radio Maria was established in 1998 with the aim of setting up similar media around the world and coordinating their activity.<sup>2</sup> There are now 77 Radio Maria stations operating in 70 countries.<sup>3</sup> Four of these broadcast in Hungarian, all of them operating in the territory of historical Hungary. One was established in Serbia in 2003<sup>4</sup>, one in Hungary<sup>5</sup> and another in Romania in 2006, and one in Slovakia<sup>6</sup> in 2012.

### Radio Maria in Transylvania

On several occasions the World Family of Radio Maria made proposals for the establishment of the media in Romania, but at first representatives of the Roman Catholic church in Romania were not open to the initiative. Finally in 2003 Ferenc Szatmári, a businessman in Oradea undertook to establish the institution and act as its secular chairman; citing the ethnic composition of Catholics in Romania<sup>7</sup> he did so with the proviso that the station would be bilingual, or even better would operate two separate channels, one in Romanian and one in Hungarian. After several years of preparation the latter variant was realised: on 25 March 2006 the radio stations based in Oradea in the same building, with the same three coverage areas, sharing the broadcast time equally but with different editorial offices,

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2 <http://mariaradio.ro/maria-radio-vilagszerte> (Accessed on 7 July 2016.)

3 It is present in 20 countries in Africa, 19 in the Americas, 24 in Europe, and 7 countries in Asia and Oceania. It has multilingual broadcasts in Canada (Italian, English), the United States (English, Italian, Spanish), Italy (Italian, German), Romania (Romanian, Hungarian) and Serbia (Croatian/Serbian, Hungarian). <http://www.radiomaria.org/>. All the live broadcasts can be heard from the website.

4 <http://www.mariaradio.rs/> (Accessed on 7 July 2016.)

5 <http://www.mariaradio.hu/> (Accessed on 7 July 2016.)

6 <http://mariaradio.sk/> (Accessed on 7 July 2016.)

7 The majority of Romanian citizens, 16,307,004 persons (81%) are members of the Orthodox Church. Among the other churches present with much smaller numbers, the largest is the Catholic Church. Among the followers of the Catholic religion, 870,774 persons (4%) are Roman Catholics, 150,593 persons (0.7%) are Greek Catholics and only 60 persons are Armenian Catholics. The majority of Roman Catholics are Hungarian (57% – 500,444 persons Hungarian, 34% – 297,246 persons Romanian, 0.02% – 20,821 persons Roma, and 0.02% – 21,324 persons German); the majority of Greek Catholics are Romanian (83% – 124,563 persons Romanian, 11% – 16,144 persons Hungarian, 0.4% – 6,511 persons Roma, 0.01% – 1,204 persons Ukrainian, 0.01% – 858 persons German). I based the calculations on the 2011 census data. <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/noutati/volumul-ii-populatia-stabila-rezidenta-structura-etnica-si-confesionala/> (Accessed on 28 July 2016.)

began their official activity. From October 2007 they divided up the coverage areas between themselves on the basis of the ethnic and denominational distribution of the population. In areas where one of the two ethnic groups formed a substantial majority<sup>8</sup> they began all-day monolingual broadcasts. They broadcasted in Romanian in the vicinity of Zalău, in Hungarian in the Székelyföld region, and continued to broadcast in both languages, sharing the time equally, in the coverage area of Oradea. In 2008 the two editorial units were completely separated, the Romanian-language unit moved into a different building and continued its activity as an independent legal entity.<sup>9</sup>

Radio Maria Romania now broadcasts 24 hours a day in 24 coverage areas<sup>10</sup>, as well as 12 hours a day in Romanian in the area of Oradea. It has regional studios in Zalău, Șimleu Silvaniei, Iași and Bacău.<sup>11</sup> At present Dorel Emil Popovici, a Greek Catholic priest, is acting as programme director. The media strives to meet the spiritual needs of both Roman and Greek Catholics. The liturgy of both rites is included in their daily programmes.<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime Radio Maria Transylvania acquired two more coverage areas (Tășnad, Cluj Napoca); it now broadcasts in Hungarian 24 hours a day on three frequencies. However the four frequencies do not cover the whole of Transylvania. For example the network does not extend at all to the Timișoara diocese. Five regional workshops assist the work of the central studio. The workshops in Odorheiu Secuiesc and Șumuleu Ciuc were set up in 2009, the one in Alba Iulia in 2011, in Cluj Napoca in 2013, and in Sfântu Gheorghe in 2014.<sup>13</sup> With the exception of the studio in Alba Iulia, they all regularly edit programmes. All five studios have the task of producing one morning and one

8 In Romania the majority of Roman Catholics live in Transylvania and Moldavia, and 95% of the Greek Catholics live in Transylvania. There are larger Romanian Roman Catholic communities in Moldavia (Bacău county: 91,444 persons, Neamț county: 45,118 persons and Iași county 34,972 persons); there are Hungarians in the Székelyföld region (Harghita county: 195,895 persons, Covasna county: 70,047 persons, Mureș county: 43,195 persons) and in the western part of Transylvania (Satu Mare county: 43,508 persons, Bihor county: 34,563 persons, Arad county: 23,568 persons, Timiș county: 22,780 persons). The largest Greek Catholic groups are found in the north-western part of Transylvania (Satu Mare county – 24,568 persons, Cluj county – 23,164 persons, Maramureș county – 21,836 persons and Bihor county – 12,184 persons), the largest number of Hungarian Greek Catholics live in Satu Mare county (8,234 persons). The infograph by Dénes Csala helps to visualise the denominational distribution in Romania. See: CSALA 2015.

9 Cf.: <http://mariaradio.ro/az-erdelyi-maria-radio>; OZSVÁTH 2011; BERECZKI 2016.

10 The radio strove to acquire coverage in areas with larger numbers of Romanian Greek and Roman Catholic believers. In Transylvania in addition to the earlier frequencies (Zalău, Oradea) it now has frequencies in Blaj, Baia Mare and Târnăveni, in Moldavia in Bacău and Roman.

11 Cf.: <http://www.radiomaria.ro>; <http://www.ercis.ro/actualitate/viata.asp?id=201203105> (Accessed on: 10 August 2016)

12 Cf.: <http://www.radiomaria.ro>; <http://www.ercis.ro/actualitate/viata.asp?id=20141124> (Accessed on 10 August 2016.)

13 In most cases the consecration of the studios coincided with one of the Marian feasts (in Oradea the Feast of the Annunciation – 25<sup>th</sup> March, in Odorheiu Secuiesc the Queenship of Mary – 22<sup>nd</sup> August, in Șumuleu Ciuc the Immaculate Conception – 8<sup>th</sup> December, and in Alba Iulia the Miraculous Medal of the Blessed Virgin – 27<sup>th</sup> November), in this way too emphasising that they are celebrating the establishment of a workshop set up in the spirit of the veneration of Mary.

afternoon weekly programme, as well as filling programme time every fifth weekend (Saturdays and Sundays).<sup>14</sup>

Like the other Radio Maria stations around the world, the media refrains from engaging in politics<sup>15</sup> and does not sell advertising time, instead it finances its operation with donations and the help of voluntary work. It provides a number of possibilities for the payment of donations. Most of the regular supporters pay the contribution to which they commit themselves, monthly through volunteers, or by postal or bank transfer. Another alternative is to offer 2% of the donor's income tax,



Fundraising in front of studio building.  
Photo: Gabiella Fábián, Şumuleu Ciuc, 2016.

14 Odorheiu Secuiesc: Monday morning, Friday afternoon, Şumuleu Ciuc: Tuesday morning, Thursday afternoon, Cluj Napoca: Tuesday afternoon, Friday morning, Sfântu Gheorghe: Monday afternoon, Wednesday morning, Oradea: Thursday morning, Wednesday afternoon.

15 The Polish Radio Maryja set up in the early 1990s with the support of the World Family after a while did not meet this expectation because the programme director began to engage in extreme political activity. As a result the Italian organisation completely disassociated itself from the activity and had its own name protected internationally. Ozsváth 2011. For more detail on the phenomenon, see: ÁDÁM 2006. 11–16.

or to make a donation during the MARIATHON<sup>16</sup> held once or twice a year. In its first year Radio Maria Transylvania operated with the support of the World Family of Radio Maria; after that it became self-supporting,<sup>17</sup> and since then it continues to cover its costs with the help of the donations listed.

Like most Radio Maria stations, the one in Transylvania also popularises its activity on its own Facebook page, and in the bimonthly magazine that it edits. The magazine is distributed free of charge, it regularly reaches its supporters and others interested in it<sup>18</sup>.

Its broadcasts can be heard not only on conventional radio sets: it also uses the new technical possibilities such as cable, satellite and the internet.

Associates of Radio Maria Transylvania represent the position that the Maria Radios throughout the world have the most listeners and are a unique media in the world. According to them, what makes them special is their supernatural origin, as evidenced also by the fact that they have been able to survive in so many countries solely with the help of donations and voluntary work.

## The work communities of Radio Maria Transylvania

Since it is not a profit-oriented media provider and supports itself with donations, the tasks are carried out by only a few paid employees and a large number of volunteers. The radio is directed by the secular chairman and the clerical programme director. The association is directed by the chairman, while providing a programme corresponding to the teachings of the Catholic church, and editing the magazine, the website and the Facebook page are the task of the programme director. Ferenc Szatmári, a businessman from Oradea, has been chairman right from the beginning, while the programme director, Tibor Karácson, a Roman Catholic priest has held this post since August 2015.<sup>19</sup> At present the radio had ten paid employees,<sup>20</sup>

16 A common event of radios belonging to the World Family during which they all organise their own fund-raising for their own development, or to help launch new fraternal institutions.

17 OZSVÁTH 2011.

18 Visitors to the website can ask to receive the magazine, either in print or the online version.

19 During the ten years of its operation Radio Maria Transylvania has had several programme directors; at first the directors were priests from the Oradea and later from the Alba Iulia diocese. From the Oradea diocese: 2006-2009: József Selymes, 2009: Rudolf Anzelm Fejes, Premonstratensian abbot, 2010-2011: Leonárd Giosanu. From the Alba Iulia diocese: 2012-2013: P. Sándor Asztrik Tímár OFM, 2013-2014: Csaba Szócs. There was a period when the regional studios all had programme directors; this post was held in Odorheiu Secuiesc by Attila László, parish priest of Odorheiu Secuiesc, in Şumuleu Ciuc by László Koncsag, at the time parish priest of Lelicieni.

20 In Oradea: two coordinators, Mihály Csorba and Izabella Illés, a music editor, Attila Majoros, an editorial assistant, Tünde Vidican-Lokodi, a technician, Gábor Tarr and a "promotions" manager, László Szilágyi. The regional studios employ one person each, who serves both as technician and editorial assistant for the programmes: in Odorheiu Secuiesc Ferenc Józsa, in Miercurea Ciuc

none of them specialists.<sup>21</sup> The chairman is a volunteer, not a paid employee of the radio.<sup>22</sup>

Several hundred volunteers assist the work of the radio. Some help in contact with listeners, collecting donations and delivering the magazines. Others are active in the local studios, cleaning, operating the reception service, introducing programmes, editing, operating technical equipment, etc. Volunteers are recruited and supervised by the “promotions” manager; the meetings held every second month enable him to maintain personal contact and discuss any problems that arise.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of volunteers are women in the over 60 age group, but recently there has also been an increase in the number of young people offering their services.<sup>24</sup> Two regional studios have been most successful in attracting young people to help in the workshop activity: university students in Cluj Napoca and seminarists in Alba Iulia.

Like the fraternal institutions, Radio Maria Transylvania regards its work communities, listeners, supporters, all the individuals and communities who help its operation and survival, as one big family.

A term often used by Radio Maria Transylvania is “daily listeners”, and many of the listeners themselves refer to themselves in this way also when they express their prayer intentions.

## The programmes of Radio Maria Transylvania

Most of the programmes are broadcast live, from the studio and from various external locations. The programme structure follows strict rules that apply uniformly to all existing Radio Marias. One third of the daily broadcasts are devoted to prayers, one third to Christian education, one third to public service programmes, and 10% to music. They produce a considerable part of their programmes; exceptions are the news programmes of Vatican Radio and a few broadcasts taken from Radio Maria in Hungary.<sup>25</sup> The programmes are often interactive, listeners are given the opportunity to speak and express their views. A regular daily time frame is set aside for masses and prayers. Mass is always

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Gellért Pál, in Sfântu Gheorghe Tünde Andrea Görgényi, in Cluj Napoca Mária Serbán. The website lists ten employees but at present Enikő Varga is no longer employed by the radio, and László Szilágyi the promotions manager who has been working part-time in this position for two years is not listed. See: <http://mariaradio.ro/csapatunk>. (Accessed on 4 September 2016.)

21 Oral communication from Tibor Karácson. (01. 10. 2016.)

22 Ozsváth 2011.

23 He also organises the broadcasts of masses, and holds meetings with the public in areas where the radio is less well known.

24 Oral communication from Tibor Karácson, programme director. (01. 10. 2016.)

25 For example, the programme of the Franciscan Balázs Barsi, *The truth makes free*.



Greeting Mary on the first Saturday in Șumuleu Ciuc.  
Photo: Gabiella Fábíán, 2016.

broadcast live, generally at a fixed time<sup>26</sup>, from one of the smaller or larger church communities (parish, monastery, editorial office, hospital, prison, etc.) operating in the four dioceses in Transylvania (Alba Iulia, Oradea, Satu Mare, Timișoara). Broadcasts from the churches offering to participate last for a week, with a separate broadcast devoted to the history of the given community. Parallel with this, masses are also broadcast from the locations of church fairs<sup>27</sup>, major church events<sup>28</sup>, and events associated with Radio Maria<sup>29</sup>.

26 Once or twice on weekdays, at eight in the morning and six in the evening. At varying times on Sundays because they have to adapt to the local order of masses, there can be as many as three masses a day.

27 In most parishes in Transylvania the day of the name of the church or the feast day of its patron saint is still a major event.

28 These may be in the country (the day of the foundation of the Saint Therese of Lisieux Carmelite Monastery in Sângeorgiu de Mureș, the opening and closing celebration of the anniversary Marian year in Șumuleu Ciuc, the Șumuleu Ciuc Youth Gathering, the prayer greeting Mary in Șumuleu Ciuc), or abroad (the Medjugorje Youth Festival, or the World Youth Gathering in Cracow). Their activity can be followed most easily on the Facebook page. But the programmes and information in the news programme can also be searched, even years back, on the website. Earlier broadcasts were accessible for three months on the website. Now they have larger storage capacity and broadcasts of the last four months can be downloaded.

29 For example the Radio Maria World Congress, or the events commemorating the establishment of the Transylvanian studios.

The daily prayer frame includes hymns (at 6:40,12:05, 19:45), the four traditional rosary prayers (joyful, luminous, sorrowful, glorious) (at 5:15, 9:15,17:15, 00:05), the chaplet of mercy (at 15:00, 3:00), the Angel of the Lord (at 12:00, 19:00) and the prayer of the Hungarian nation<sup>30</sup> (at 20:55). On certain days (Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays) this is supplemented with the Flame of Love prayers (at 2:00, 13:00). The prayers during the day are broadcast live, at night from recordings, that are generally introduced and led by religious groups operating in the area covered by the studio. Less often this may be done by listeners phoning in to the studio, or on the occasion of very special days, such as the Whitsun feast at Şumuleu Ciuc, with the help of invited pilgrims on the spot. Before the live broadcast of prayers the programme devotes time for listeners to express their prayer intentions, either directly (by phoning in) or indirectly (by SMS or leaving a message on the website<sup>31</sup>).

The four Hungarian-language Radio Marias have common programmes that they all broadcast live, such as the daily national prayer mentioned above, the rosary at noon on the 13<sup>th</sup> of each month, and the round table discussion among the Hungarian programme directors held every second month.<sup>32</sup>

Transmitting Christian values also plays an important part in the broadcasts of Radio Maria Transylvania; a separate thematic day is devoted to them each month. In the spirit of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Divine Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis in 2016 it threw light on various opportunities for exercising mercy, such as giving food to the hungry, forgiving those who sin against us, bearing hurts peacefully, visiting the sick and prisoners, giving good advice to doubters, admonishing sinners, providing shelter for travellers, teaching the ignorant, clothing the poor, burying the dead.

Among their programmes we find broadcasts featuring representatives of various spiritualities and religious groups (community of Saint Monica, School of Mary, Camillian Family, City of Love, Life in the Soul), monastic orders in Transylvania (Franciscans, Helping Sisters) or other denominations (Calvinist, Armenian Catholic).

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30 At the initiative of Radio Maria in Hungary from February 2012 a joint evening programme was launched with the four fraternal organisations broadcasting in Hungarian. The "Cry", a prayer for the Hungarian nation, is broadcast every evening at eight (Hungarian time) by all four Hungarian-language Radio Marias, in a live broadcast from one of the shrines in historical Hungary. The idea for the prayer came from the Polish practice known as "Apel" in which, at the initiative of the Paulines of Czestochowa, they pray for the future of the nation. <http://www.magvarkurir.hu/hazai/kialtas-nemzeti-imadsagot-indit-maria-radio#lightbox/0/>

31 These can also be read retrospectively on the website; see: <http://mariaradio.ro/imaszandek> (Accessed on 19 August 2016.)

32 Oral communication from Tibor Karácson. (1 October 2016.)

## Listeners of Radio Maria Transylvania

On the basis of feedback from volunteers, the assessment of the radio's staff, the identity of people phoning in and personal experience it can be said that the radio's most frequent listeners are the elderly, the bedridden, the lonely and people living alone. Auto mechanics also find that many people listen to the programmes of Radio Maria Transylvania while driving.<sup>33</sup> There is also information from prison pastoral activity indicating that the station has an audience in prisons too.<sup>34</sup> It can be seen from comments on Facebook<sup>35</sup> and prayer intentions posted on the website<sup>36</sup> that thanks to the digital broadcasts, the radio has followers not only in the territory a Transylvania but also in historical Hungary and many other places in the world. There are also data from those sources and from feedback to the radio's staff indicating that the radio has listeners among other denominations and non-believers.

## The studios in Şumuleu Ciuc and Odorheiu Secuiesc

Among the district studios, I examined in greater detail the activity of the studios in Şumuleu Ciuc and Odorheiu Secuiesc. Both were set up in 2009, and they were the first regional studios of Radio Maria Transylvania. In Şumuleu Ciuc they were provided with space next to the votive church thanks to assistance from the Franciscans and in a Odorheiu Secuiesc through donations. In Şumuleu Ciuc thanks to the proximity of the votive church there was no need to set up a separate studio chapel, but as this possibility did not exist in Odorheiu Secuiesc it was considered justified to create one that was opened in 2011 and is used jointly with the Saint Pio Retreat House. The chapel that functions as a filial of one of the church communities in Odorheiu Secuiesc is used not only for live broadcasts but also for various devotions independently of the radio. Different religious communities in the town hold prayer meetings there, once a month there are evening atonements and continuous acts of adoration during the day<sup>37</sup>.

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33 Oral communication from Ferenc Józsa. (18 August 2016.)

34 See: FÁBIÁN 2016.

35 <https://www.facebook.com/mariaradioerdely/>

36 <http://mariaradio.ro/imaszandek>

37 To the best of my knowledge, this practice that began a year and a half ago and runs from eight in the morning till eight in the evening is unique in the Alba Iulia diocese, and is the result of an individual, lay initiative. Mainly individuals, most of them from the middle-aged group undertake to perform the spoken or silent hour-long devotions. They would like to extend these devotions born out of a personal vow to 24 hours of the day, so on certain days they fill more than the 12-hour time frame.



The studio building in Șumuleu Ciuc. Photo: Gabiella Fábán, 2016.



Inner courtyard of the studio in Odorheiu Secuiesc with a statue of the Blessed Lady of Medjugorje.  
Photo: Gabiella Fábán, 2016.



The Odorheiu Secuiesc studio chapel.  
Photo: Gabiella Fábíán, 2016.

The work of both studios is assisted by more than a hundred volunteers. I have figures for the Şumuleu Ciuc district recording 121 volunteers in September 2016, people living in settlements of the region, of whom 23 (19%) are men and 98 (81%) women. Many of them maintain contacts with the supporters, collect donations and deliver the bimonthly magazine. Approximately 15% help to operate the reception service, 7% as programme introducers.

In both studios the devotions broadcast over the radio are led by prayer groups that are local or come from the micro region. Most of these are groups organised from Roman Catholic religious communities operating in the region (spirituality groups, movements, societies, associations), but some have been formed in response to a new demand created by the radio, such as most of the children's and youth groups, and a prayer group of volunteers. In Odorheiu Secuiesc a separate staff member draws up a roster for them; in Şumuleu Ciuc they organise themselves<sup>38</sup>. In 2016 this service was undertaken by 30 communities in Odorheiu Secuiesc, and by 25 in Şumuleu Ciuc; 46% (14: 9 women and 5 men), and 90% (20: 18 women and 2 men) of these respectively were rosary confraternity groups, the others were children's and youth groups or spirituality groups.

38 When they come for the prayer service they enter their names for the next occasion.

## The presence of Radio Maria Transylvania in individual and community prayer life in Sândominic

During the past year I examined the influence that Radio Maria has had on individual and community prayer life in Sândominic, one of the biggest settlements in the Șumuleu Ciuc area. In my research on the rosary confraternity in the village it was mainly the radio listening habits of this community and its leaders that I was able to observe.

With one or two exceptions, the leaders of the societies were daily listeners to the radio. In cases where this did not become a custom, it was attributed to the poor quality of reception or to the lack of a suitable device. My experiences to date suggest that on the average it is mainly during the rosary prayers (especially at 9 am and 3 pm) that listeners tune in to Radio Maria Transylvania. Whenever they can they try to plan their daily tasks to fit in with the times of the rosary prayers. There are also others, mainly elderly women living alone, who spend most of their day listening to Radio Maria. Some have the radio permanently on, day and night. Most people listen to the radio alone, with their spouse, or in a small family circle, but not in a community group. Although the possibilities for digital reception exist in the settlement (cable TV, satellite, internet), most people listen to the radio in the traditional way, by broadcasting over the radio waves.<sup>39</sup> In order to tune into the station quickly, and to make the sacral act more complete, some people have a separate set, a “Maria radio” used only for that station. Examining their personal life space, we find revealing signs confirming that praying with the radio has become a daily habit. A rosary kept within reach beside the radio can also be an indication that the owner often performs the rosary devotions with the radio. An entry in a prayer book recording the date on which the station was launched shows that this was an important event on the life of the author.<sup>40</sup>

While the influence of the radio is generally and strongly felt in their individual prayer practice, it can hardly be felt in community practice. The spread of the radio did not lead to a reduction or disappearance of the earlier community prayer occasions. The village’s rosary confraternity groups still meet in private homes for prayers. During Lent they pray the stations of the cross and at Advent the prayers for the occasion. A number are also members of other religious communities. The Camillian and Scapular groups meet once a week, the atonement group three times a week. At present there are close to 50 rosary confraternity groups active in the village, and of these only one has regular contact with the Șumuleu Ciuc studio. It undertook prayer service on two occasions in 2016.

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39 After 24-hour broadcasting was launched, a special group of volunteers in the village helped those in need of assistance to tune their sets to the station.

40 This can be compared to the old practice of entering the birth dates of family members on the last pages of prayer books.



A "daily listener" with her radio. Sândonic.  
Photo: Gabiella Fábán, 2016.



Prayer duty.  
Photo: Gabiella Fábán, Sândonic, 2016.

## **The role of Radio Maria Transylvania in the individual and community prayer life of Roman Catholics in the Székelyföld region**

The family of Radio Maria Transylvania now comprises several hundred volunteers and thousands of listeners, many of whom experience it as an intimate relationship. There are also many listeners who are able to be in contact with the radio's staff only virtually, using interactivity to share their own opinions, experiences and thoughts.

The media has an outlook to all four Transylvanian dioceses<sup>41</sup>, and to the whole territory of historical Hungary; this helps as a guide to matters of current concern, it can also contribute to raising Transylvanian Hungarian and Hungarian national awareness, and to strengthening the sense of belonging together. In addition to covering the local dioceses it also reports on news from the world church, which can strengthen listeners in their Catholic Hungarian and universal Catholic conviction, the awareness that they are all members of a church that is present in the whole world. The presence of programmes of other denominations and the broadcasts from ecumenical events can help listeners to think in terms of Christian unity. The inclusion of representatives of spirituality movements helps to spread news about them and can lead to the formation of new local groups and to greater diversity in local religious life. By giving air time to the Transylvanian monastic orders (Franciscans, Helping Sisters) it enables listeners to learn more about them and can even lead to a calling to a priestly or monastic life.

The digital possibilities for broadcasting, the station's modern internet presence (Facebook, website), and the opportunities for voluntary work of a kind that is closest to the young age group (such as handling digital technology) are helping to create the possibility that the present programme director would like to achieve: bringing the future generation closer to the media.

During the decade of its existence it has created directly and indirectly, in many directions new opportunities and tasks for Catholic communities in the Székelyföld region.

Experience to date suggests that Radio Maria has had a greater influence mainly on the forms and time structure of individual religious practice. It has brought a qualitative change in the religious life of lonely elderly and sick persons living alone; Radio Maria represents company for them, a human voice, helping to bring them closer to God and their Church.

Its influence on community prayer life can be observed in a much smaller circle. However for a narrower circle, the groups who join in the radio's devotions, it offers a new way of experiencing the rosary prayers and the opportunity

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41 The four church dioceses also have a common portal and Facebook page, where visitors can regularly gain information on current matters and the life of Transylvanian Catholics. <https://romkat.ro>; <https://www.facebook.com/romkatweb>

to become acquainted with a different form of transmission, communication via radio. The demand for their service can give them justification, help them to increase in numbers and strengthen, and give them greater recognition in the eyes of their local communities. The influence on consciousness of the fact that the community keeps Radio Maria alive with its own sacrifices should not be underestimated either. This is an expression of their vitality and will to live.

I examined the organisation of the prayer groups in two of the six studios of Radio Maria Transylvania. In forming their network of prayer groups the studios in the Székelyföld region for the most part were able to build on living communities without the need for special efforts. In contrast, research in the Vojvodina region shows that this was a bigger task for Radio Maria Serbia because there were no such communities there on which it could build. As a result the prayer groups were formed mainly of members of the rosary confraternities that once existed there, and especially of their leaders. However, those groups do not carry out other collective activity,<sup>42</sup> while for the prayer groups in the Székelyföld region the radio rosary prayers are only a small part of their group activities. In the Vojvodina region in almost all cases these groups are linked to the former rosary confraternities; in the Székelyföld region too this is the commonest association form, but there are also other religious communities present to different extents in the case of the two Székelyföld workshops. A high percentage of the prayer groups of the Şumuleu Ciuc workshop belong to this form of association that has been present in the region for several centuries and is the only one that survived the years of socialism on a larger scale.<sup>43</sup> Because of the Catholic religious homogeneity of the area and the traditional religiosity that can still be found there<sup>44</sup> the spirituality movements have been less able to take root. This is probably also the explanation for their very limited representation.

The very big audience of Radio Maria Transylvania in the Székelyföld region and the support for it is related to the centuries-old veneration of Mary among the Catholic Székely people, bound by many ties to the Şumuleu Ciuc shrine and its miracle-working votive statue.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Cf.: BESZÉDES 2013. 21–27.

43 Continuity is characteristic not only of this region, but of the whole of Hungary. The present rosary confraternity form is connected to the Living Rosary Confraternity established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For a monographic study, see: BARNA 2011.

44 Cf.: FEJES 2014. 182–186.

45 On the veneration of Mary in Şumuleu Ciuc, see: TÁNCZOS 2016. 27–64.

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## PLACE NAMES IN ROMANIAN

County abbreviations: AB – Alba (Alsó-Fehér), BC – Bacău (Bákó), BH – Bihor (Bihar), HR – Harghita (Hargita, int he past Csík), CV – Covasna (Kovászna, int ha past Háromszék), IS – Iași (Jászvásár), MM –Maramureș (Máramaros), MS – Mureș (Maros), NT– Neamț (Neamț), SJ – Sălaj (Szilágy), SM – Satu Mare (Szatmár)

Alba Iulia, AB (Gyulafehérvár)

Bacău, BC (Bákó)

Baia Mare, MM (Nagybánya)

Blaj, AB (Balázsfalva)

Cluj Napoca, CJ (Kolozsvár)

Iași, IS (Jászvásár)

Leliceni, HR (Csíkszentlélek)

Odorheiu Secuiesc, HR (Székelyudvarhely)

Oradea, BH (Nagyvárad)

Roman, NT (Románvásár)

Sândominic, HR (Csíkszentdomokos)

Sângeorgiu de Mureș, MS (Marosszentgyörgy)

Sfântu Gheorghe, CV (Sepsiszentgyörgy)

Șimleu Silvaniei, SJ (Szilágyosmlyó)

Șumuleu Ciuc, HR (Csíksomlyó)

Târnăveni, MS (Dicsőszentmárton)

Tășnad, SM (Tasnád)

Zalău, SJ (Zilah)