

HISTORICAL SCIENCES

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING OF EDITORIAL OFFICES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY JOURNALISM: THE CASE OF *DEBRECZEN*

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21411819>

Abstract

This study examines the organizational structure and operation of editorial offices in twentieth-century Hungarian journalism through the example of the *Debreczen* daily newspaper. It explores the internal organization of newspaper editorial offices, focusing on the roles of editors-in-chief, managing editors, assistant editors, section editors, and reporters, as well as the everyday processes involved in newspaper production. Particular attention is devoted to the career of József Pálffy, the newspaper's long-serving editor, and to the activities of other members of the editorial staff. The study also analyzes different forms of reportage and their appearance in the pages of *Debreczen*, while providing an overview of the newspaper's technical production process and the significance of advertising in its economic operation. The research highlights how local newspaper editorial offices adapted to the professionalization of journalism, changing market demands, and the evolving political environment during the interwar and early post-war periods.

Keywords: Debreczen, editorial history, József Pálffy, reportage, provincial daily newspapers, interwar Hungary, press history

The press is a reflection of the society in which it exists.¹

Introduction

In the first third of the 20th century, journalists viewed themselves as representatives of public opinion. Through the routine operation of newsrooms, work processes were divided, and newspapers became distributed products in accordance with the principles of the news trade. Journalists adapted to readers' demands; their role took shape as a fast-paced, high-output "journalistic wage laborer", whose performance was rewarded with a fee rather than being viewed as a community leader. The greatest challenge for journalists was to strike a balance between providing the public with credible information and serving business interests.² As the role of the press changed, so did the composition of newsrooms. The increased size of newspapers and the accelerating pace of news delivery led newsrooms to employ more and more people, who divided various tasks into smaller categories, and a broader hierarchy also emerged.³ The size of the editorial staff depended on several factors, such as the publication's position in the market. The spectrum ranges

from a one-person editorial office handling multiple journals to a professionally structured editorial department.⁴

The editor-in-chief and the managing editor

Every publication had a responsible leader: this was the editor-in-chief or the managing editor. In some publications, where the scale of the operation required it, both roles were present: both an editor-in-chief and an editor-in-charge, or a deputy editor-in-chief appeared in the masthead instead of the editor-in-charge. Additionally, an editorial board was involved in the editorial work of certain media outlets.⁵

Initially, a daily newspaper such as *Debreczen* employed a maximum of three staff members in addition to the "gatekeeper," i.e., the editor, for both the weekday and Sunday editions.⁶ Later, for a 4–8-page issue, it employed 10–12, and even up to 16 staff members.⁷ The editorial staff changed frequently, but the editor-in-chief⁸ remained in his position almost until the end of the paper's operation.⁹

József Pálffy

József Pálffy served as the editor-in-chief of *Debreczen* for 25 years, from the newspaper's launch on March 15, 1924, until August 1, 1949.¹⁰ József Pálffy

¹ Lajos Biró: On the Psychology of the Press. 30.

² Journalism sought to meet both the demands of the press market and society's need for information about public life, which required constant adaptation on the part of editorial staff and publishers. Balázs Sipos: The Press and Power in the Horthy Era. 200.

³ Cs. L. The Provincial Press, No. 7. 1–6.

⁴ Claudia Mast: The ABC of Journalism. An Introduction to Editorial Work. 56.

⁵ Pál Gombó: Introduction to Media Studies. 122.

⁶ Pálffy Papers – Wage Conditions. 2.

⁷ In "the old days," each newspaper had only 2–3 "official" staff members; the rest were merely "friends of the paper" or "freelancers." Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 6.

⁸ The managing editor is the direct supervisor of editorial work at the newspaper. At local newspapers, this role is usually filled by the editor-in-chief. Dániel Lovas: The ABC of the Local Press. 166.

⁹ At the time when the Trans-Tisza Book and Newspaper Publishing Joint-Stock Company was publishing two daily and two weekly newspapers, it employed a total of 10–12 staff members in the editorial office.

¹⁰ On March 7, 1924, the mayor of Debrecen issued a resolution announcing the Trans-Tisza Book and Newspaper Publishing Joint-Stock Company's declaration that it would launch a political daily newspaper titled *Debreczen*. Journalist József Pálffy was appointed as editor-in-chief. Pálffy Papers – The First Ten Years. 1.

was born on April 20, 1888, in Debrecen. He began his career in commerce, but even as a young man, at the age of 16–17, he wrote articles on economic topics for Debrecen newspapers; then, in August 1906, the daily newspaper *Szabadság* [Freedom] hired him as a journalist.¹¹ The following year, after *Szabadság* ceased publication, he joined the old *Debreczen*, which was then edited by Zoltán Szathmáry, and later Pál Móricz took over the position. In 1909, he was drafted into the army; as a result of a penalty imposed on him in a press lawsuit, he lost his right to volunteer and had to serve for three years; he was eventually discharged as a sergeant. At that time, in October 1912, Gyula Than, the editor and owner of *Debreczeni Ujság* [Debrecen Newspaper], hired him. Pálffy handled the police and society columns, just as he had at his previous papers. The World War that broke out in the summer of 1914 called him back to uniform, and until October 1918 he performed military service partly on the battlefield and partly in the rear. After returning to Debrecen, he became a member of the Soldiers' Council and also returned to the editorial staff of *Debreczeni Ujság*, which, following the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, was renamed *Népakarát* [The Will of the People].¹²

When the Romanian army marched in, *Népakarát* ceased publication, and the newspaper reverted to its former title and returned to its original owner, Gyula Than. It was at this time that the daily newspaper *Egyetértés* [Consensus] was launched by the City Printing House, following the political line of Bishop Baltazár. Pálffy was then lured to the editorial staff of the newly launched paper with a higher salary. He worked at this paper until February 1921, when he became the managing editor of the newly launched *Tiszántúli Hírlap* [Trans-Tisza Gazette], and then, from March 15, 1924, to August 1, 1949, the editor of *Debreczen*.¹³ When he signed his contract with *Tiszántúli Hírlap*, he agreed with the newspaper company's director, Gyula Szigethy, that they would gradually phase out the paper's extreme counterrevolutionary and "awakening" spirit and steer the paper toward more liberal waters.¹⁴ This is exactly what happened; in fact, when the publishing company's morning paper, *Debreczen*, began publication, it struck a liberal and "moderately" democratic note right from its inaugural issue and maintained this tone throughout the German occupation, until it was banned in May 1944; after liberation, it served the political agenda of the Independent Smallholders' Party.

In June and July 1944, Pálffy was unemployed as a result of the newspaper's ban; in August, he signed a contract with *Magyar Lapok* [Hungarian Papers], published in Nagyvárad, with the mandate to tone down the paper's extreme stance and steer it in a more moderate direction. He had little time for this, however, as the newspaper's publishing company ceased publication as the Soviet army approached. He moved from Nagyvárad to the village of Tahi near Budapest.¹⁵ From there, he was only able to return to Debrecen in mid-March 1945, at which point he resumed editing *Debreczen*.¹⁶ As an explicitly party-affiliated newspaper, it had to strictly follow the party's instructions, which were conveyed more specifically by Gyula Szigethy, the director of the publishing company,¹⁷ and the representative for Hajdú County during his two terms. The party's shifting policies were reflected in the newspaper's columns, from Ferenc Nagy to István Dobi, ranging from the advocacy of bourgeois democracy to the policies of the People's Front. The role of the editor-in-chief ceased to exist during this period; the paper had to be edited strictly according to the party's instructions. In July 1949, publication of the paper was taken over by the State Newspaper Publishing House. At that time, the party's press department urged Pálffy, in view of his advanced age, to request retirement based on the decision of the interministerial meeting. This is exactly what happened. The Journalists' Pension Fund, of which he had been a member for twenty years, placed Pálffy on the retired list starting in August 1949.¹⁸

As an editor, Pálffy initially received a monthly salary of 300 pengő, then 400 pengő, between 1926 and 1938. An exception to this was the inflationary years following the First World War, when his monthly income first reached the thousands and then the hundreds of thousands. Due to inflation during the years of the Second World War, his salary rose again, reaching as much as 800 pengő per month at that time. In the inflationary period following liberation, his salary fluctuated again, rising to 600 and then 800 forints per month after the introduction of the Hungarian forint. When the collective multiplier system was applied to journalists' salaries as well, the editor-in-chief's salary jumped to 2,300 forints.¹⁹

In addition to journalism, Pálffy also wrote literary works, primarily novels. In his younger years, he wrote the youth novel *Bandika naplója* [Bandika's Diary] for the *Debreceni Ujság*, the war novel *Hideg a vasút, de meleg a szív* (*katonadolog*) [The Railroad Is Cold, but

¹¹ The actual editor of this paper was Imre Gáspár, one of the well-known poets of his time; the nominal editor was József László, the paper's publisher and owner.

¹² József Pálffy: The History of the *Debreczen Keletmagyarországi Napló*. Members of the *Debreczen* Editorial Staff. Ms 11/1:3 (hereinafter: Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff). 1.

¹³ In March 1921, the *Tiszántúli Hírlap* was published, operating at that time as an afternoon paper. In addition to its publication, plans were also made to launch a larger morning paper, as they saw greater business potential in this than in an afternoon newspaper with a more limited circulation. At the same time, strengthening his rural positions was an important part of Bethlen's increasingly agile press policy, which offered an opportunity to establish a pro-Bethlen press organ in Debrecen.

¹⁴ Although many considered the shift between newspapers of different political leanings to be a mere change of allegiance, it was common in those days for a professional journalist to move from a pro-government paper to an opposition one and vice versa. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 2.

¹⁵ He worked as a farm manager in the garden of the son-in-law of Ernő Dezső, a newspaper reporter and staff member of *Magyar Nemzet*.

¹⁶ The paper had actually been able to launch earlier, on February 18, as the press organ of the Smallholders' Party.

¹⁷ Pálffy Papers – The History of *Debreczen*. 2–3.

¹⁸ The Journalists' Pension Fund set his monthly pension at 335 forints starting in August 1949. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 3.

¹⁹ Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 4.

the Heart Is Warm (A Soldier's Tale)] for *Debreczen*, and later other novels, such as *Száz kéz nyúl egy leány után* [A Hundred Hands Reach for a Girl] or *Csalfa délibáb* [Deceptive Mirage], and a couple of other shorter novels. These appeared in serial form in the newspapers and were later published in book form. These are not particularly ambitious works, nor do they possess great literary value, but at the time they captured the public's interest.²⁰

At *Debreczen*, he almost always wrote the editorials, which were generally published anonymously. In addition, he wrote or reviewed the newspaper's political section. He was forced to read every manuscript, making changes to them or omitting parts, since the editor-in-chief was held accountable before the courts and the authorities. He often spent 12–14 hours a day on a single piece, and it was not uncommon for him to write on various topics, such as a police reportage or city hall news, whenever a colleague was absent, filling in whatever was missing. Since *Debreczen* was a morning paper, editing often lasted until 2 or 3 a.m., as they had to wait for the latest news and ensure the paper did not "miss out" on any particularly interesting stories.

On June 1, 1949, the publishing rights of *Debreczen* were transferred to the Smallholders' Party. The party then sent István Bolgár, an employee of the Hungarian Telegraph Agency (and a member of the National Assembly at the time), to Debrecen to oversee the newspaper's financial and editorial operations. Although István Bolgár had his name listed as editor-in-chief on the paper, he never actually performed any active editorial work. His appointment ended two months later when the State Newspaper Publishing House took over the paper; at that time, the paper's longtime staff member, István Kiss, became the editor-in-chief. István Kiss held the editorial position until October 1950, when he was transferred to the *Friss Ujság* [Fresh Newspaper] in Budapest. Following István Kiss's departure, the party appointed Antal Koncz, who had previously worked for the party's newspaper in Szeged, as editor-in-chief. He was the paper's last editor-in-chief; his name appeared in the masthead until the paper's closure in March 1951.²¹

Editorial Boards, Assistant Editors

Some newspapers had editorial boards to assist the editor-in-chief. These boards can be classified into two types. The first group consisted of editorial board members who served as permanent staff, continuously participating in shaping the newspaper's profile and in the

day-to-day development of its content. Their responsibilities included specific columns, their management, and representation at editorial meetings. The other type were advisory editorial boards composed of external public figures, which met only occasionally, and their tasks were limited primarily to matters of editorial principles, profile-shaping, and thematic issues.²²

Within the editorial staff, there were also assistant editors, who essentially handled smaller tasks. They reviewed every manuscript, but they could also rewrite articles, make cuts, request additions, and even change titles and subtitles. They were often involved in the final layout of the paper, maintaining direct contact with the layout editor, with whom they collaborated to make the final adjustments before the daily's publication.

In the case of *Debreczen*, Andor Székely was one of those who filled this role. Andor Székely had been a staff member of *Debreczen* from the very beginning. He moved to Debrecen from Arad; he first worked as a stenographer at the Debrecen branch of the Hungarian Telegraph Agency, and later joined *Debreczen*. Thanks to his outstanding stenography skills, he provided significant assistance to the editorial staff, particularly in the accurate recording and reporting of meetings and interviews. It was precisely through these abilities that he became involved in the disciplinary cases initiated in 1934 against Mayor Vásáry and the city's senior officials, as he also assisted in documenting their trials and hearings.²³ Until early 1944, he headed the city hall and Reformed Church sections, and for an extended period, he was also responsible for editing the county news section. At that time, due to the prohibitions of the anti-Jewish laws, he had to temporarily leave the editorial staff, but the company continued to pay his salary, so he was able to remain in Debrecen and rejoin the workforce after liberation. In 1945, he moved to Budapest, took a position at the Trade Union Center, and then retired in the early 1950s. Andor Székely replaced Pálffy in the early days and held the position of assistant editor. His monthly salary during that period ranged from 240 to 320 pengő.²⁴

Zoltán Szathmáry

Among the staff of the newspaper, the tragically fated writer Zoltán Szathmáry held a prominent place. Zoltán Szathmáry was born in Debrecen in 1872;²⁵ the newspaper company hired him in 1925. A significant portion of his work consisted of writing theater reviews and reports. He earned particular acclaim for his series of articles titled *Régi debreceni alakok* [Old Figures

²⁰ The publisher did not pay separate honorary fees for the novels, but instead printed the books at a lower cost. The serialized novel installments published in the newspaper were set aside, "reformatted" into book form, and the book pages were printed that way. This made production significantly cheaper. In addition to novels, he occasionally published short stories, but otherwise his editorial duties kept him fully occupied. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 4.

²¹ Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 5.

²² Gombó 124.

²³ He took shorthand notes for the city leadership on the entire proceedings of general assemblies, smaller meetings, and major committee sessions. Since the position of stenographer was not a regular one at the city, the leadership compensated Székely by providing him with a city apartment in one of the

villas in Nagyerdő at a lower rent and by having alterations and renovations carried out in the apartment at the city's expense. Of course, this did not exactly constitute "overpayment", but this matter was nevertheless raised as irregular against the Mayor and Chief Clerk József Zöld. His wife, Anna Bészler Székely, distinguished herself in the field of fiction, having written several novels.

²⁴ Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 6.

²⁵ He completed his secondary education in Debrecen and showed an interest in literature even as a student. Influenced by Gyula Róvicsky, he wrote poems; his first published poem was written on the occasion of the poet's death and appeared in the daily newspaper *Debreczen* on July 24, 1889. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff.

from Debrecen].²⁶ Due to his liberal views, he quickly became a target of the far-right press. He was repeatedly attacked in the newspaper *Hajdúföld* [Hajdú Land], especially when the theater revived Szathmáry's play *Enyingi Török Bálint* [Bálint Török from Enying], which was set in Debrecen. *Hajdúföld* unfairly lambasted the play, and during the ensuing controversy, a libel suit was even filed against him. The attacks against him took a heavy emotional toll on Szathmáry. According to the recollections of his contemporaries, his mental state gradually deteriorated, and he repeatedly voiced his fear that he would not be able to withstand the pressure weighing on him.

In mid-February 1927, the theater staged Zoltán Szathmáry's award-winning play, *Enyingi Török Bálint*, which had been a great success at the time not only in Debrecen but also elsewhere. Mihály Kolosváry Borcsa published a review of the performance in the pages of *Hajdúföld*, in which he criticized the play with unusual vehemence and, on several points, unfairly, while sparing no criticism of its author, Zoltán Szathmáry. The heated newspaper controversy ended up in court; Mihály Kolosváry Borcsa filed a libel suit against Szathmáry, who filed a counterclaim. The newspaper attacks and the difficulties associated with the libel suit took such a toll on Zoltán Szathmáry's nerves that on July 8, 1928, in a fit of nervousness, he drank denatured alcohol and died.²⁷

Sections and Section Editors

Newspapers also employed section editors, who were permanent staff members and professional journalists.²⁸ Together with their subordinates, they planned, wrote, and then pre-edited and co-edited the foreign affairs, domestic affairs, and economics sections – in short, all those columns that, in accordance with the newspaper's profile, had a fixed column space. They made suggestions to the editorial leaders regarding the content of the sections, then professionally and qualitatively evaluated, reviewed, and edited the materials belonging to the section. They strove to ensure that the individual materials of the section were handed over to the assistant editor in a form as ready for printing as possible, having been carefully selected.²⁹

At the *Debreczen* editorial office as well, the individual sections and their editors were clearly distinguished. Pál Benyovszky, for example, headed the legal, social, and literary sections; he also participated in editing the children's supplement and was a long-time contributor to the paper. He moved to Debrecen from Szatmár. He was born in Szatmárhegy in 1899; his father served as police captain in Szatmár. Following the political changes after the First World War, he was repatriated in 1919, after which he moved to Debrecen. He first joined *Tiszántúli Hírlap*, then became a member of the editorial staff of *Debreczen*. He headed the court, social, and literary sections. He was a well-known poet; he published two volumes of poetry and a short-lived literary journal titled *Alkotás* [Creation]. He was elected secretary of the Trans-Tisza Guild of Fine Craftsmen and edited the Guild's Almanac. At *Debreczen*, he was the editor of the children's supplement under the pseudonym "Uncle Pali."³⁰

Dr. József Pálffy, the son of the elder József Pálffy, joined the paper in 1940 as a trainee journalist. Initially, he worked on church and social news coverage; in addition, he wrote humorous sketches, and after liberation, he led the highly popular humor column titled *Debreceni Szabadszág* [The Outspoken Voice of Debrecen]. By this time, he was already performing more significant editorial duties. Following Andor Székely's departure, he took over the role of city hall and county reporter; in addition, news coverage related to the coalition parties was also among his responsibilities. In the summer of 1943, the National Press Chamber sent him to Berlin.³¹ He spent nearly six months in Germany; he witnessed the devastating air raids on Berlin, Hamburg, and other cities, about which he later wrote interesting and exciting reports.

During the German occupation, when *Debreczen* was banned, he worked for a time at the *Tiszántúli Déli Hírlap* [Trans-Tisza Midday Gazette] alongside Imre Sarkadi. After the paper ceased publication, he went with his father to the village of Tahi, but from there he was conscripted into the army. He returned home after a year in a prisoner-of-war camp, at which point he re-joined the editorial staff of *Debreczen*, where he remained a staff member and, in his final years, served as

²⁶ He had been passionate about acting his entire life; it bothered him that cinema had become a fierce competitor to the theater, and in the columns of *Debreczen* he suggested that the city should acquire the license and operating rights to one of Debrecen's movie theaters, using the theater's net profits to supplement the theater's revenue.

²⁷ The death of the highly popular Zoltán Szathmáry deeply shocked the majority of the Debrecen public. Tens of thousands attended his funeral, which amounted to a veritable demonstration; liberal and progressive circles turned out in huge numbers for the funeral. Szathmáry's body was laid in state in the theater lobby, a gesture signifying that the deceased had lived and died for the theater his entire life.

²⁸ The editor of the letters-to-the-editor section, for example, was not only responsible for compiling the section but also handled the letters received by the paper. Gombó 126.

²⁹ The staff members of each section were referred to as internal staff. Their main tasks were gathering information, reporting, and working as reporters and section editors. They dealt

exclusively with the topics relevant to them, maintained contact with the responsible persons in each section, and collected topic suggestions. Gombó 125.

³⁰ Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 7–8.

³¹ His father, József Pálffy Sr., later recounted the circumstances of his study trip to Germany. According to his recollection, the opportunity was originally reserved for a "favored" candidate supported by the Press Chamber. However, due to the increasingly intense Allied bombing of German cities, the person in question withdrew from the trip, so the Chamber ultimately nominated József Pálffy Jr. for the assignment. According to Pálffy, the assignment represented both a professional opportunity and a personal risk under wartime conditions. His father, József Pálffy Sr. – who was then working as a correspondent for *Magyar Nemzet* in Debrecen – sought the opinion of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky on the matter. According to Pálffy's recollection, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky advised him to accept the assignment, saying, "You must accept the assignment; at least we will have an objective person out there." Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 7–8.

assistant editor. Eventually, he became the Paris correspondent for the Hungarian Telegraph Agency.

The paper also employed external contributors. This group included anyone who submitted material more or less regularly. These included, for example, contract staff who undertook and fulfilled certain regular obligations, staff from other newspapers, and so-called freelance journalists, who were not employed by the newspaper but generally submitted similar types of material to multiple newspapers. This group also included correspondents who provided regular reports on specific fields of expertise, regions of the country, or life in foreign countries. They were not all journalists: the paper also employed graphic designers, photographers, crossword puzzle creators, various specialists, cartoonists, and other external contributors.³²

Dr. István Szabó was a staff member of *Debreczen* from May 1924 to June 1925. He first worked at the City Archives, then joined the editorial staff from there. He stood out primarily for his valuable articles drawing on the city's past, and he also handled the city hall news column.³³ Imre Szalayosy Rácz was a staff member of *Debreczen* from 1928 to March 1944. He is considered the first village researcher; his reports from the Hajdúság region preceded those of the more famous folk writers. He also wrote interesting literary articles; he felt a deep affinity for the Ady family and published several valuable interviews with the poet's mother. He launched popular columns in the paper, such as *Jegyzőkönyv* [Minutes] and *Jegenyefák* [Poplar Trees], and also wrote many articles on social issues. His polemic with university professor Richárd Huss regarding the Volksbund is also noteworthy.³⁴

Richárd Römer was a staff member of the paper for five years, handling the police and sports columns; he was also an outstanding sports expert. He died tragically on December 20, 1933.³⁵ Mihály Bencze took over his position, with the exception of the sports section; however, he managed the *Tiszántúli Kisgazda* [Trans-Tisza Smallholder] page, which served as a supplement to the newspaper. Over time, he became a true agricultural expert and rendered significant services to the farming community. The supplement regularly published expert advice, as well as explanations and interpretations of regulations concerning agriculture.³⁶

László Tamássy was a staff member of the paper for 12 years, handling the legal and sports sections. In the latter, he launched several initiatives that generated significant interest. He remained on the staff until the paper ceased publication, after which he joined the postal service.³⁷

István Kiss was a staff member of the paper for 15 years. He initially wrote police news, but also produced reports in other areas, primarily in literature and the arts; in addition, he served as a theater critic for a time, with an exceptionally prolific output.³⁸ Dr. László Nyíri joined the editorial team in 1929.³⁹ He traveled abroad on several occasions, producing reports of outstanding quality, which he published in the newspaper.⁴⁰

The permanent workforce of the newspaper also included delivery workers and newspaper hawkers,⁴¹ whose numbers ranged on average between 80 and 120. They received a fixed salary, but also earned a 10% commission on the number of copies sold or delivered. Their earning potential was thus exceptionally favorable, and many of them were able to purchase their own family homes with their savings.⁴²

Reportage as a Journalistic Genre

"Without reporters, there is no newspaper."⁴³ The reporter, the most important figure in the modern press, emerged from the demand for immediacy and credibility. By the turn of the century, leaders of the Hungarian press had already realized that the press – especially the daily press, which had played an educational, instructive, and guiding role – was increasingly being pushed into the background. The focus shifted to conveying the bare facts as quickly and accurately as possible. They knew that a time would come when we would have to acknowledge that it was no longer publicists who were at the center, but reporters. Indeed, we can say outright that the function of entertainment has increasingly taken the place of information and opinion-forming. While these changes freed the press from the direct influence of political parties, the pursuit of business success soon began to raise concerns among those in the media.⁴⁴

Reportage can be described as factual or fact-based writing with a personal dimension, recounting

³² *Debreczen* had numerous freelance contributors and columnists; they did not receive honoraria, nor did they really ask for them. The exception was the music critic, who, in addition to free admission tickets, received a small monthly stipend – an average of 40 forints – to cover out-of-pocket expenses (clothing allowance, transportation costs).

³³ Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 8.

³⁴ Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 9.

³⁵ He was born on May 20, 1901, in Debrecen. His death was tragic: he collapsed and died at the Csokonai statue. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 10.

³⁶ Born in Debrecen in 1902. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 10.

³⁷ Born on July 18, 1901, in Debrecen. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 10.

³⁸ He was the first person to fly over Debrecen in an airplane. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 10.

³⁹ He worked at the newspaper until 1935, when he passed the bar exam and opened his own law firm.

⁴⁰ He was born on August 2, 1905, in Debrecen. Pálffy Papers – The Editorial Staff. 12.

⁴¹ According to the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Hungarian Language*, the term *rikkancs* refers to a mobile street newspaper vendor who loudly calls out the news or headlines. "There are all sorts of people who work as newspaper hawkers. It is not uncommon to find someone with a diploma, nor is it rare to find someone who once rode in a carriage and could call themselves the owner of a well-kept estate or a business with a substantial income. (...) There are also old, stooped grannies, young brides with small children, and cripples in wheelchairs, but the majority of newspaper hawkers were still agile children aged between ten and twelve. It was they who, with their incessant clamor, earned the name newspaper hawker." *Vasárnapi Ujság*, July 21, 1901.

⁴² Pálffy Papers – Wage Conditions. 3.

⁴³ Izidor Kálnoki: *School of Journalism*. 45.

⁴⁴ Géza Buzinkay: *History of Hungarian Newspapers, 1848–1918*. 100–101.

specific actions or events.⁴⁵ The reportage contains three important elements. First, it belongs to genres that convey or emphasize facts; fundamentally, it can therefore be considered news, which is why the journalist must gather material for the report with the same thoroughness. Second, the difference from news becomes apparent in the requirement for a personal experience. The journalist must immerse themselves in the story in order to convey it to the reader from a truly authentic perspective. Third, actions and events are the typical hallmarks of a feature story; thus, the journalists themselves become active participants in the story.⁴⁶ The reportage became an increasingly significant factor in the newspaper, and the reporter became an increasingly important figure in the newsroom. Soon, newspapers' editorial offices consisted of little else but reporters: police, economic, theater, court, stock market, and literary reporters.

Statistical data also confirm the growing importance of reporters. In 1890, a total of 454 newspaper reporters were registered in Hungary, which represented nearly a twofold increase compared to figures from a decade earlier. By 1900, their number had risen to 884, while in 1910, 1,201 newspaper reporters were registered.

The reportage evolved from the communication of information. Its purpose is to provide a realistic portrayal of an original event. It is a complex genre that utilizes elements from nearly all journalistic genres. Like the interview, it serves as a bridge between the reporting of facts and the expression of opinions. Even today, it remains one of the most prestigious journalistic genres. It contains numerous subjective elements, as the event reaches the reader through the reporter's mediation; moreover, the journalist is often a participant in or a shaper of the events themselves. It is one of the most unique journalistic genres, as the reporter must, to a certain extent, identify with the world they are writing about. Through their personal experiences, they recount the events and present the fates and experiences of the characters. The reporter can decide for themselves which aspects of the event to emphasize, which is why several types of reportage have emerged.

An event reportage is produced in connection with a significant event or at its location. A sociographic reportage presents the situation of a social group through specific human stories, or sheds light on a particular social problem or phenomenon. The travel reportage is an experiential, often cinematic account that captures the events and experiences of a journey. In the case of the investigative report, the journalist works to uncover a significant issue or problem, publishing their findings and research results in articles or series of articles.⁴⁷

Event Reportage

The event report is the type of report for which it is easiest to find examples. Essentially, it means that

whenever something happens anywhere in the world that is likely to be of great interest, the reporter covers it and presents it to readers. The event may be pre-planned, such as the Olympics, an election, or another major public event, but it may also be unexpected, such as a terrorist attack, a serious accident, a mining disaster, a train crash, or another extraordinary event. This category also includes movements of great social significance, such as demonstrations, riots, or wars.

Since these events are of particular public interest, the press typically covers them in numerous news stories and reports. These reports primarily convey the most important facts and figures, which reporters present based on their on-site experiences. At the same time, the reports mostly maintain the perspective of an outside observer.

However, simply presenting facts and figures is not enough to hold readers' attention. It is also necessary to place events within a broader context. For this very reason, event reporting does not merely present the event itself, but also explores its background, antecedents, and consequences. The reader is not only curious about what happened, but also about what lies behind the event, what processes led to it, and what its implications might be for the future.

A good example of this is the article titled *Eszméletlen leány a Petőfi-kertben* [Unconscious Girl in Petőfi Park], published in *Debreczen* under the subtitle *Titokzatos eset* [Mysterious Case], which reported on a young woman's sudden illness under mysterious circumstances. The article sought to maintain readers' interest by presenting details of the location, the circumstances of the event, and the police investigation. It clearly illustrates the fundamental characteristics of event reporting: the presentation of a fresh, unexpected event, the communication of on-site information, and the emphasis on the uncertainty and tension surrounding the story.⁴⁸ Another example is the article titled *Korányi Zoltán nyilatkozik a Debreczen-nek az ejtőernyős ugrásról* [Zoltán Korányi Speaks to Debreczen About the Parachute Jump], which reported on a parachute jump performed at the Debrecen airport. The article provided a detailed account of the circumstances of the event and the technical details of the jump, and also featured an interview with the protagonist. The piece effectively captures one of the key characteristics of event reporting: the focus on on-site experiences, personal impressions, and the spectacle, which allowed readers to feel as though they were part of the event themselves.⁴⁹ Reports on criminal incidents were also popular features of the paper. This is illustrated by the report titled *Verekedők véletlenül leütötték Kovács Aladár vendéglőst* [Fighters Accidentally Knocked Out Restaurant Owner Aladár Kovács], which covered a brawl that broke out among soldiers in a Debrecen restaurant. The article provided a detailed account of the

⁴⁵ The original meanings of the word *report* include: 1. to report, to give an account, to break the news; 2. a report, an account; 3. a gunshot. According to the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Hungarian Language*, a *riport* 'report' is "a newspaper, radio, or television report prepared on-site or based on on-site experience." Lajos Domokos: Press. The Theory and Practice of Print and Electronic Journalism. 28.

⁴⁶ Claudia Mast: The ABC of Journalism. 172.

⁴⁷ Tamás Harle: The Craft and Art of Journalism. 91–92.

⁴⁸ The framing of the "mysterious case" clearly served to heighten readers' curiosity, while the paper, in the absence of the results of the police investigation, suggested several possible explanations. *Debreczen*, May 28, 1924. 6.

⁴⁹ *Debreczen*. September 23, 1924. 3.

circumstances of the incident, the actions of those involved, and the police intervention. By building on unexpected twists and the dramatic elements of the conflict, the piece sought to capture readers' attention while presenting an ordinary local event in a news report format.⁵⁰

Travel Reportage

The travel report is a dynamic, exciting, entertaining, and plot-rich genre. It can be considered one of the oldest types of reporting in journalism, as even during the age of great geographical discoveries, detailed travelogues were written in which travelers shared their adventures and experiences with readers. Even accounts of the discovery of America, in many respects, can be considered precursors to the travel report. The purpose of the travel report is for the reporter to present distant regions, their culture, natural environment, and the daily lives of the people living there through their own experiences. The reader not only receives information about a given place but also gets to know the atmosphere, customs, and way of life of the region through the reporter's personal experiences. A distinctive feature of the genre is that, in addition to factual reporting, personal impressions and experiences play a significant role. The reporter recounts the things they saw, the people they met, and the events and experiences they encountered during their journey. Thus, the travel report serves simultaneously as a genre that informs and conveys experiences.

An example of travel reportage is the article titled *Egy magyar művész viszontagságos életútja Hajdúböszörményből Párisig* [The Eventful Life Journey of a Hungarian Artist from Hajdúböszörmény to Paris]. Through the life journey of painter Zsigmond Pál Nagy, the report presents the foreign locations and experiences that played a defining role in his career. By describing the stops along the journey and recounting the protagonist's experiences and trials, the author employs the characteristic tools of the travelogue genre.⁵¹

Sociographic Reportage

In many respects, the sociographic reportage can even be considered a literary work. It employs rich descriptions, detailed character portrayals, and powerful atmosphere-building, often making the stories presented an immersive experience for the reader as well.⁵²

However, a key difference from literary works is that every claim in a report must be based on real facts. The genre presents the everyday lives and fates of real people, depicting their stories in actual locations and under real-life circumstances. The reporter's task is not to create fiction, but to present social reality in an authentic and vivid manner, while drawing attention to broader social phenomena through human stories.⁵³

The article titled *Nagyarányú segélyakció a szegény gyermekeknek* [Large-Scale Relief Effort for Poor Children], though not considered a classic report, is nonetheless a good example of how social issues are

covered in the press. The report details the relief efforts of an association dedicated to child protection and draws readers' attention to the problem of poverty.⁵⁴

Investigative Reporting

A significant portion of investigative reporting actually differs from the classic reporting genre. While traditional reporting is primarily based on on-site experiences, personal impressions, and the direct presentation of events, investigative reporting focuses on uncovering a phenomenon, case, or problem. This type of reporting is based on extremely thorough data collection, document analysis, interviews, and extensive research. The journalist's goal is not merely to present events, but to uncover connections, identify underlying causes, and reveal information previously unknown to the public. As a result, investigative reporting often lies at the intersection of reporting and fact-finding journalism. One of the genre's most important characteristics is that it presents a thoroughly researched phenomenon or problem while striving for an authentic and verified presentation of the facts.⁵⁵

The report titled *Nyíregyházán merényletet akartak elkövetni Horthy kormányzó ellen* [An Assassination Attempt Was Planned in Nyíregyháza Against Governor Horthy] can be considered an early form of investigative or fact-finding reporting. The article not only reports on the alleged assassination attempt but also details the information uncovered during the investigation, the suspects' confessions, and the police measures taken. The purpose of the piece is not merely to record the event, but to uncover whether there was indeed a threat of an assassination, who might have been behind it, and what evidence supports the suspicion. In this way, the article already exhibits the characteristic features of an investigative report.⁵⁶

The article titled *Újabb terhelő vallomások a bombapörben* [Further Incriminating Testimonies in the Bombing Trial] can be classified as an investigative report on a criminal topic, as it provides a detailed account of the testimonies given during the trial, the defendants' contradictory statements, and the evidence uncovered during the investigation. The report's aim is not merely to document the event, but to present the background and context of the case, thus going beyond the scope of traditional court reporting.⁵⁷

The Technical Background of Debreczen's Production

The scope of operations of the Trans-Tisza Book and Newspaper Publishing Joint-Stock Company, the publisher of *Debreczen*, was quite diverse. Administration, the editorial office, the publishing office, the printing press, distribution, zincography, and bookbinding all constituted separate divisions within the joint-stock company.

At the height of its prosperity, the printing staff numbered as many as 32–34 members. The smallest

⁵⁰ *Debreczen*. August 5, 1924. 4.

⁵¹ *Debreczen*. November 24, 1924. 4.

⁵² Harle 97.

⁵³ Harle 100.

⁵⁴ The article's subject matter relates to the social issues examined in later sociographic reportages, but it lacks the on-

site experiences and depictions of personal fates characteristic of the reportage genre. *Debreczen*. September 12, 1924. 4.

⁵⁵ Harle 101.

⁵⁶ *Debreczen*. November 12, 1924. 2.

⁵⁷ *Debreczen*. November 22, 1924. 1.

workforce was during wartime, when only 12–16 people were employed. The *Debreczen*, which was published with a pictorial supplement on 16 pages on weekdays and 32 pages on Sundays, was typeset daily by five typesetters; during the period of reduced page count, three typesetters worked on its publication. Furthermore, the so-called “pre-typesetting” was also used for the Sunday edition. In addition to the typesetters, there was a page compositor who assembled the pages of the paper; moreover, advertisements were typeset separately by one or two hand compositors.⁵⁸ In the 1930s, typesetters’ wages were 65–70 pengő per week, and the page compositor’s were 90–100 pengő.⁵⁹

Debreczen was produced on a rotary press. The rotary press could print, fold, and count 12,000 copies per hour. The press operator in charge of the rotary press had the highest salary, which could reach 110–120 pengő per week. The production of the newspaper included a typesetting shop, which was managed by a typesetter and an assistant. Moulds were made from the composed pages, and stereotype plates were then cast for the rotary press.⁶⁰ The number of employees in the bookbinding department varied, as did that of the so-called commercial shop, which produced commercial forms to order.

Advertisements

Changes in the press’s genre and structure were accompanied by shifts in power.⁶¹ Business-oriented newspaper publishing went hand in hand with an increase in the number of advertisements.⁶² It was the Légrády brothers who introduced an important innovation through the *Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Gazette]; this is how classified ads emerged, which, instead of advertising products and companies, turned newspaper readers into advertisers, thereby fostering a closer connection with the paper.⁶³

⁵⁸ A collective agreement guaranteed the printers’ wages and working conditions. The collective agreement established the minimum work output, i.e., how many characters a typesetter was required to set. Generally, even the weakest typesetter met this requirement, which was checked only in the rarest of cases. There was no major friction between the company management and the printing staff; at most, there were occasional disputes regarding overtime.

⁵⁹ The workday was set at eight hours, but half an hour of that was for dinner.

⁶⁰ The stereotyper’s weekly wage was approximately 100 pengő.

⁶¹ Advertising and promotional revenue played a crucial role in the financing of media enterprises. In many cases, various advertisements and promotions provided not only the largest but also the most significant portion of the newspapers’ income. Claudia Mast: *The ABC of Journalism*. 31.

⁶² Even before the First World War, the term “business press” was not an accurate description. With a few exceptions, virtually the entire world press of the time fell into this category. Such exceptions included specialized scientific journals, periodicals dedicated to social progress in their own way, and socialist newspapers. In addition to subscriptions, advertising revenue was the most important source of income for the press. Géza Lengyel, *Hungarian Newspaper Magnates*. 5–6.

⁶³ Buzinkay 100–101.

⁶⁴ For example, in 1907, 65 of the 160 pages of *Az Újság* [The Newspaper] were filled with advertisements. Buzinkay 101.

⁶⁵ Buzinkay 100–101.

After the turn of the century, the number of advertisements began to grow rapidly, driven not only by economic factors but also by other reasons. Act X of 1900 abolished the special tax levied in the form of an advertising stamp, leading to rapid and dramatic changes in place of the often-repeated press advertisements that had previously occupied a maximum of one or two pages.⁶⁴

In the eyes of readers, the pages containing the advertising section were clearly distinct, but in reality, the truth was that the main editorial content of the daily newspapers was closely linked to the evolution of the papers’ spirit and content. By the early 20th century, economists and journalists had risen to become the most influential members of the editorial staff, many of whom went on to become prominent politicians and members of parliament.⁶⁵

The Thematic Structure and Economic Context of the Advertisements

To gain a comprehensive picture of how advertisements appeared in the pages of *Debreczen*, it is useful to examine one complete issue as a case study. Take, for example, the issue published on April 6, 1924, which clearly illustrates the newspaper’s early structure and content organization.⁶⁶

In this eight-page issue, editorial content and advertisements present a relatively balanced picture; however, it is clear that advertisements played a significant role even during the launch period. The first five pages were devoted almost entirely to public affairs, political, economic, and local news, while on the sixth page, advertisements appeared in a significant proportion alongside the economic and sports sections.⁶⁷ The sev-

⁶⁶ The classified ads section played a key role in the competition among Debrecen’s daily newspapers, serving as an important platform for information and networking for the readership of the era. In this regard, *Debreczen* was initially at a disadvantage compared to its main competitor, *Debreceni Újság*, which already had a significant advertising base. To break this monopoly, Gyula Szigethy, the director of *Debreczen*, employed an innovative solution: he entered into an agreement with the other papers under his management stipulating that any classified ad placed with any of them would be published in all four papers at the same price and in the same format. This strategic move significantly increased the reach and readership of the advertisements, as the combined audience of four papers provided a much wider reach than a single newspaper, no matter how popular. The initiative proved successful: advertisers gradually shifted their support to the press network centered around *Debreczen*, which ultimately gained dominance in the classified ads market. These developments proved so effective that, starting in late March, one full page of the eight-page paper was devoted exclusively to advertisements, while the remaining pages also featured them sporadically.

⁶⁷ Given the nature of the paper, public affairs, political and economic news dominated the content, together accounting for approximately 70% of the newspaper’s total volume. These two main categories can be further divided into three subcategories each, depending on whether the news was of local, national, or international relevance. Articles on political topics were placed on the first three pages of the newspaper, which clearly demonstrates their prominent role and central

enth and eighth pages served almost entirely as advertising space, so advertisements occupied approximately one-quarter to one-third of the issue's total volume.⁶⁸

The editorial practice of placing advertisements corresponded to the solutions generally applied in provincial daily newspapers of the era. Political and public affairs content was placed on the front pages, while advertisements were gradually pushed to the back of the paper. This editorial principle ensured both the primacy of news content and the availability of advertising space necessary for commercial revenue.⁶⁹

Advertisements can also be grouped by topic. The vast majority were linked to local businesses, but they also represented clothing and textile stores, haberdasheries, fur and fashion retailers, restaurants, pharmacies, advertisements for various tradespeople, as well as real estate and other classified ads. One example of a clothing and fashion advertisement is that of Hajdúság Men's Clothing, which offered a wide selection of spring clothing for men and children at 67 Piac Street. The hospitality industry was represented by Fest-Mos Coffeehouse on Csapó Street, while the Arany Angyal Pharmacy advertised pharmaceuticals and health products.

The Geographical Ties of the Advertisements

The geographical ties of the advertisements clearly linked the paper to Debrecen's economic life. Since the newspaper was published in Debrecen, the majority of advertisers were also drawn from the ranks of local merchants, entrepreneurs, and service providers. This is well illustrated by the fact that the advertisements almost without exception listed Debrecen addresses: the Hajdúság Men's Clothing Store on Piac Street, the Lipcsei Fur Shop on József királyi herceg Square, the Fest-Mos Coffeehouse on Csapó Street, while the Merino Cloth Trading Co. also operated on Piac Street. This also suggests that *Debreczen*, even in its early days, sought to establish close ties with the city's business community and involve them in the newspaper's operations.⁷⁰

Characteristics of the Advertising Language

The language of the advertisements fitted well with the characteristics of contemporary advertising communication. The ad copy was generally short, concise, and attention-grabbing, with the primary goal of capturing the interest of shoppers. Recurring phrases such as "attention", "cheap", "reasonable price", "latest", or "wide selection" were common, emphasizing the favorable qualities of the products or services in question. A good example of this is the advertisement for Hajdúság Men's Clothing, which highlighted its selection of "the latest spring fashions for men and children", as well as the advertisement for Merino Cloth Trading Co., which sought to pique shoppers' interest with the slogan "spring novelties have arrived."⁷¹

importance in the paper's editorial principles. Following the political content, though occasionally appearing on earlier pages as well, articles on economic topics appear.

⁶⁸ *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 1–8.

⁶⁹ *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 5–8.

⁷⁰ *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 5–8.

⁷¹ The language of the advertisements was direct and easy to understand, primarily aiming to highlight practical benefits.

The Target Audience and Social Background of the Advertisements

The advertisements – like the articles appearing in the paper – were tailored to the needs of the presumed readership. The clothing, haberdashery, pharmaceutical, and household goods advertisements appearing in the issues primarily reflected the needs of the urban bourgeoisie, the middle classes, and merchant and entrepreneurial groups.

At the same time, advertisements related to agricultural products, land, and farm equipment also appeared in the newspaper's columns. This suggests that *Debreczen* sought to reach not only the urban audience but also rural farmers and landowners among its readership. Notable examples include an advertisement for Pyramis Hungarian Landowners' and Tenant Farmers' Trading Joint-Stock Company, which dealt with grain, forest, and land transactions, as well as various classified ads for land sales and leases. In addition, some of the advertisements offering agricultural machinery and seeds were also aimed at the farming public.⁷²

Women's Roles and Ideals of Womanhood as Reflected in Advertisements

An interesting angle for examination is the analysis of what insights the advertisements provide into the ideals of womanhood and perceptions of women's roles during that era. In the early issues of *Debreczen*, female readers were often addressed directly, as indicated by advertising slogans such as "Attention, ladies!"

A significant number of the advertisements promoted fashion items, furs, hats, textiles, and household goods, specifically targeting women as consumers. These advertisements not only served commercial purposes but also indirectly conveyed the social expectations and images of women of the era. Good examples of this include the advertisement by the firm of Leopold Weisz and Entner, which promoted women's fashion items and fabrics; the advertisement for the Lipcsei Fur Shop; and the advertisement by Merino Cloth Trading Co. showcasing its spring novelties.⁷³

Seasonal and Holiday Advertisements in the Pages of *Debreczen*

Like the rest of the paper's content, advertisements were adapted to the seasons, holidays, and economic cycles. In the issue examined, for example, advertisements related to Easter fairs, Easter food, and spring merchandise had already appeared. This suggests that merchants deliberately tailored their advertisements to the consumption habits and needs of the given period. In the examined issue dated April 6, 1924, for example, advertisements related to the Easter holiday season had already appeared. A good example of this is the advertisement titled *Nagy húsvéti hírijság* [The Great Easter Newsletter], which promoted products related to the Easter shopping season, as well as

The advertisements were not intended to provide detailed information, but rather to attract attention and encourage the intent to purchase. Accordingly, the texts were based on short, assertive statements that conveyed the message to readers quickly and clearly. *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 5–8.

⁷² *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 5–8.

⁷³ *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 5–8.

the advertisement with the headline *Húsvétra!* [For Easter!] which recommended festive foods and various consumer goods to readers. In addition, several retailers based their advertisements on the start of the spring season, such as Merino Cloth Trading Co., which advertised its new inventory with the slogan *Tavaszi újdonságok érkeztek* [Spring novelties have arrived].

An analysis of seasonal advertisements offers an opportunity to explore which holidays, events, and periods played a decisive role in consumer culture. Furthermore, it is possible to examine which products individual merchants associated with specific holidays, seasons, or times of year, as well as how the composition of advertisements evolved over the years.⁷⁴

Advertisements as Sources of Urban Modernization

Finally, it is important to note that advertisements also provide an excellent source of material for studying the city's modernization processes between the two world wars. The advertisements featured new products, services, business models, and consumption patterns that clearly reflected the evolution and development of urban lifestyles. The emergence of modern commercial methods, specialized stores, contemporary fashion items, technological innovations, and evolving services can all be interpreted as signs of urbanization and the rise of the middle class. Thus, advertisements not only stimulated consumption but also reflected social and economic changes.

The advertisement for the Lipcsei Fur Shop can be interpreted as a sign of the emerging urban lifestyle, as it appeared in the newspaper's columns as a specialized store. The installment payment options featured in the advertisements, the emphasis on a wide selection, and the increasingly specialized commercial offerings also point to the spread of modern commercial methods. The presence of the developing service sector is also evident in the advertisements for pharmacies, the hospitality industry, and various service businesses. Advertisements for the Arany Angyal Pharmacy or the Fest-Mos Coffeehouse indicate that specialized services and businesses built on consumer needs played an increasingly significant role in the daily lives of the urban population.

The study of these advertisements is therefore significant not only from the perspective of press history, but also from the perspectives of urban and social history. With their help, it is possible to reconstruct how Debrecen's consumer culture, economic structure, and daily life evolved during the period under examination.

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⁷⁴ An analysis of advertisements from this perspective not only provides insight into changes in commercial practices,

but can also offer important data on the consumer habits, lifestyles, and social values of the era. *Debreczen*, April 6, 1924. 5–8.

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