

# Urban Sociability and the Kolping Associative Model in Timișoara (1859-2022)

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**Abstract:** In the mid-19th century, the model of Catholic journeymen's associations founded by Adolph Kolping spread rapidly from Germany to Central and Eastern Europe. For his contribution he was surnamed “the journeyman’s father” (Ridder, 1956). This study analyses the emergence and evolution of the Catholic Journeymen's Association in Timișoara in the broader context of urban industrialization and social change in the Banat region. Founded in Timișoara in 1859, it was the first association in Banat, Transylvania, and Bukovina, after the one established in Bucharest in the same year. The association was closely linked to the Catholic Church and benefited from the support of the clergy and local economic elites. Particular attention is paid to the role of the association in integrating young craftsmen into an urban society in the midst of industrialization. The religious, civic, and professional training of its members can also be found in the period after 1989, in the associations called the Kolping Family, which took the name of the founder. Based on archival documents, press sources, and specialized literature, the research highlights the importance of an associative model that generated sociability, education, and civic training in Timișoara's urban society.

**Keywords:** Timișoara, Banat, Catholic Journeymen Associations, Kolping, Urban Sociability, Industrialization

## Introduction

The emergence of Catholic journeymen's associations in 19th-century Europe must be understood in the broader context of industrialization, urbanization, and the gradual transformation of the traditional guild system. These associations were strongly influenced by the ideas of Adolph Kolping, who promoted the Catholic social organizations to support young craftsmen both professionally and morally. After the first associations were founded in Elberfeld-Wüppertal (1847) and Cologne (1849), they spread throughout Germany and later to Central and Eastern Europe. The main objective was to support journeymen who migrated to the cities in search of work and who often faced social and economic difficulties. The associations offered opportunities for vocational training, access to libraries, religious education and cultural activities, contributing to the social integration of their members and the forming of a civic identity (Feldmann, 1991).

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, these organizations played an important role in the social and cultural life of urban communities. In the Banat region, characterized by ethnic diversity and accelerated industrial development, such associations developed into networks of sociability and professional solidarity. The Association of Catholic Journeymen of Timișoara is a relevant example, established in a city undergoing rapid industrial expansion, becoming one of the most important Catholic social organizations in the region.

## Methodology and sources

The present study is based on a qualitative historical analysis of archival documents, press sources and specialized literature on Catholic journeymen associations in Central and Eastern Europe. The research combines the perspective of institutional history with elements of social and urban history, in order to understand the role played by the Catholic Journeymen Association of Timișoara in the broader context of industrialization and urban sociability.

The primary sources are mainly archival materials kept in the National Archives of Romania, including documents from the funds of the municipal administration of Timișoara and government documents from the interwar period. These documents provide valuable information on the legal status of the association, its organizational structure and the relations

between the organization and the state authorities. Additional archival sources were consulted in the chronicle of the Kolping organization in Romania, which preserves reports and internal documents relating to the activities of the associations.

Articles published in the German-language newspaper *Rheinische Volksblätter* provide early references to the founding of the association in Timișoara and provide clues to the wider network of Catholic journeymen associations in Europe. These publications illustrate the transnational character of the Kolping movement and its role in promoting cooperation between the various local associations. The study also draws on the literature on the development of the Kolping movement, on urban social structures in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and on the history of Catholic associations in Central Europe. Such works help situate the Timișoara case within a broader historiographical context and allow for a comparative perspective on the role of journeymen associations across regions.

By combining archival research with historiographic analysis, the article aims to reconstruct the institutional evolution of the Catholic Journeymen Association of Timișoara and to evaluate its social, cultural and educational impact on the urban community.

### **The urban and economic context of Timișoara**

In the mid-19th century, Timișoara was an important administrative and economic center of the Habsburg Empire. Following the imperial decree of 1849, the city was administered both militarily and civilly, being the capital of an imperial province. The official language of the administration was German.

The privileged status of the city and its administrative role favored economic and industrial development. Numerous factories and workshops were established, especially in the fields of leather, textiles, metalworking and brewing. Soap, candle, carpet and other products factories contributed to the industrial dynamics of the city. The Fabric district became the main industrial center of Timișoara. A large Catholic population, estimated at approximately 17,000 people, was concentrated in this area. The presence of a large number of craftsmen and apprentices created favorable conditions for the emergence of professional organizations such as the Catholic Journeymen Association.

### **Establishment of the Catholic Journeymen Association and institutional consolidation**

The establishment of a journeymen's association in Timișoara took place on May 29, 1859 (*Rheinische Volksblätter*, 1859), being the first in the historical regions of Banat, Transylvania and Bukovina. A decisive role in its establishment was played by the bishop of Cenad, Sándor von Csajághy, who offered moral and financial support for the establishment of a library for the association's members. His initiative was followed by contributions from the clergy and local civil elites. At the time of its foundation, the association had 102 members, of whom approximately two-thirds were Germans and one-third Hungarians.

An important moment in the evolution of the association occurred in 1897, when the Catholic Journeymen's House, purchased with the support of Bishop Alexander Dessewffy of Csernek et Tarkeő (*Rheinische Volksblätter*, 1897), was inaugurated. At the same time, the association's statute was recognized by the Hungarian administrative authorities, after its reestablishment in 1896 (County Timiș Directorate of National Archives, 1896). The document was written in Hungarian, reflecting the administrative context of the time.

### **Social structure and networks of the association**

The ceremonial flag of the association, preserved in the Millennium Church in Timișoara, represents an important symbol of this period. On one side is depicted Saint Joseph, the protector of workers, and on the other, Jesus Christ blessing a kneeling journeyman (Kiss, 2017). The social structure of the association reflects the diversity of the urban society of Timișoara. On the flagpole are mounted metal plates containing 432 names, sometimes accompanied by the professions of

the individuals concerned. Among the individuals mentioned are numerous members of the clergy, including the future bishop Augustin Pacha. Also, important political and social figures appear, such as Baron Géza Fejérváry, former Prime Minister of Hungary, Baron Dániel Ernő, Minister, or Count Nándor Zichy (Kolping Romania Archives, n.d.).

Most of those mentioned fall into the category of honorary members, along with priests, industrialists, politicians, bank directors, and institutions such as banks, factories, workshops, and manufactures are also mentioned. Timișoara, at that time, had 62 factories, over 11,500 students, 17 printing houses, and was considered by Murgescu (2007) to be one of the most modern eastern cities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The association maintained relations with approximately 25 similar associations within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as with the Central Association of Catholic Journeymen in Budapest and, later, with the one in Oradea. Another characteristic is the ability to collaborate with other associations, such as the guilds of clothing manufacturers, carpenters, furriers or industrialists. Along with the over 62 priests, teachers, community judges, librarians, bank managers, construction engineers, and hoteliers are mentioned (Kolping Romania Archives, n.d.).

The main objectives are the spiritual, professional and civic training of the members, so that they become skilled and honest foremen. In the statutes and on the membership cards, the motto was used: "religion and virtue, diligence and skill, harmony and love, good mood" (Snagov, 1982) for the association in Bucharest. In Timișoara we find a certain consistency through the organization and participation of both the members, the clergy, but also other political figures and economic circles, the association manages to implement its established program. In order to ensure stability, a Protection Committee is introduced in the operating statute, composed of personalities of the time, in order to represent and support it.

Even though the First World War saw a period of stagnation in the association's activity, after 1924 it was re-established and recognized by the new Romanian administration (County Timiș Directorate of National Archives, 1924). In the interwar period, there was a revival of the association in terms of culture, organizing theater performances and artistic events. Around 1935, the Association of Catholic Journeymen of Timișoara, headquartered on 7 Tigrului Street, became the best-known and most numerous association (Billedi, 1992), out of the approximately 20 existing in Banat.

Historical events and administrative changes have certainly influenced the Kolping activity, but the multicultural background has ensured continuity. Over time, we find different names of the association in Timisoara. In 1859, the number of members of German ethnicity was in the majority, the name being "Katholischer Gesellenverein Temeswar" (Association of Catholic Journeymen Timișoara), and later, on the flag dated 1897, the inscription "Temesvar-gyárvárosi rom. kath. Legényegylet" (Association of Roman Catholic Journeymen from Timișoara-Fabric, in Hungarian) appears. After the re-establishment in 1924, this time being on the territory of Greater Romania, in 1933, the name "Societatea Tinerimei Rom. Cat. Timișoara Fabric." appears. Even though during the communist regime of 1948-1989, the functioning of the associations was prohibited, continuity was ensured by the support of the Kolping network in Western Europe.

Starting with 1991, two associations called Kolping Family were established in Timișoara, continuing a tradition dating back to 1859, and in 2022, the project called Journeymen's House in the Fabric neighborhood was reopened, entering the collective consciousness of the city (Kolping Romania Archives, n.d.).

### **Urban sociability and the Kolping associative model**

The emergence of Catholic journeymen associations in Central Europe must be seen in the broader context of social transformations brought about by industrialization and urbanization. In rapidly developing cities, the migration of young craftsmen from rural areas or other regions

generated new social challenges, such as the lack of support networks, difficulties in integrating into the urban environment, and the risk of social marginalization. In this context, organizations inspired by the Kolping model represented an important form of urban sociability.

The concept of urban sociability refers to the set of relationships and forms of association that facilitate the integration of individuals into the life of the urban community. In the case of Catholic journeymen associations, sociability was manifested through regular meetings, educational activities, conferences, cultural events and participation in the religious life of the community. These activities contributed to the consolidation of the sense of belonging and the development of a collective identity based on religious, professional and moral values.

The Kolping association model promoted a vision of the training of young craftsmen that combined the professional with the religious and civic dimensions. In this sense, the associations were not only professional organizations, but also spaces for moral and social education. Through libraries, courses and organized conferences, members had access to knowledge that went beyond the strictly field of their profession, thus contributing to the development of a civic culture.

In the case of Timișoara, these forms of urban sociability were favored by the multicultural character of the city and the existence of a large Catholic community. The Catholic Journeymen's Association functioned as a meeting place between different social categories, bringing together young craftsmen, members of the clergy, teachers, industrialists and representatives of the local administration. Through this diverse social structure, the organization contributed to strengthening relations between the different groups of urban society.

### **The role of Catholic associations in the modernization of urban society in Banat**

Catholic associations of journeymen played an important role in the process of social modernization in the cities of Banat. In the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, urban modernization was manifested not only through the development of infrastructure and industry, but also through the emergence of new forms of social and cultural organization.

In this context, confessional associations contributed to the formation of an active urban civil society. They provided spaces for meeting and cooperation for different social categories and promoted values such as solidarity, civic responsibility and professional discipline. The educational activities organized by these associations played an important role in increasing the level of training of young craftsmen and in adapting them to the requirements of the industrial economy. Another important aspect of social modernization was the integration of young migrants into the urban environment. In cities such as Timișoara, industrial development attracted numerous workers from other regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Journeymen's associations provided an organized framework in which these young people could find social support, professional guidance, opportunities for personal development, and cultural integration.

Also, the collaboration between the clergy, the economic elites and the local administration contributed to the stability and efficiency of these organizations. By involving political and economic figures in the leadership structures or among honorary members, the associations managed to create support networks that facilitated the implementation of educational and cultural projects.

### **Conclusions**

The Association of Catholic Journeymen of Timișoara played an important role in the professional and civic training of young craftsmen in a period marked by industrialization and urban development. Through educational and cultural activities, the association contributed to the

consolidation of civic and religious values among its members. The support provided by the Catholic Church and local elites allowed the development of an institution that became a significant actor in the social life of the city. Even though the association was dissolved in 1941 by the Security Police (ACNSAS, 1941), its tradition continued to influence subsequent social and religious initiatives, even after 1989.

Modernity can be perceived and assimilated as a fairly broad process of integration, of professional specialization until reaching civic standards. In addition to the two aspects, we also refer to the protection offered to young people and the manifestations that had sociability in the foreground. We thus identify a possible social model in which the migration of young people and their integration is treated from several angles that would confer the development of industrial processes and stability to society.

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