

# THE URMÁNCZY CASTLE AND THE MUNICIPALITY OF TOPLIȚA

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**Abstract:** The study shows the connection between the Urmánczy Castle and the municipality of Toplița. Its urban development in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was clearly influenced by the two grand estates of the Urmánczy and Bánffy families. During communism both had to suffer, but mostly the historical ensemble of the Urmánczy Castle located in the centre of the settlement. The park of the estate offered an “ideal“ available building place for the development of the city. The new administrative centre was built here together with a four-story hospital and several blocks of flats. These changes, and what pupils in the communist era were taught in school about the Hungarian counts who “exploited” the inhabitants of the settlement, drastically changed the perception of the castle in the community. Nobody was aware of the architectural value of the “only 100 years old” building. In 2009, the building was returned to the descendants of the Urmánczy family, the legal heirs, but the state continued to rent it until 2013. Currently, the castle is managed by the Positive Transylvania Association founded by the owners. From July 2020 it can be visited with guided tours.

**Rezumat:** Studiul prezintă conexiunea între castelul Urmánczy și municipiul Toplița. Dezvoltarea localității în secolul al XIX-lea a fost clar influențată de cele două moșii mari aparținând familiilor Urmánczy și Bánffy. În timpul comunismului, ambele au avut de suferit, mai ales ansamblul castelului Urmánczy situat în centrul localității. Parcul monumentului istoric a oferit un loc de construcție liber, „ideal” pentru dezvoltarea orașului. Noul centru administrativ a fost ridicat aici împreună cu mai multe blocuri și spitalul municipal. Camuflarea urbanistică a castelului împreună cu tot ce elevii din epoca comunistă au învățat la școală despre „grofii” maghiari care „exploatau” locuitorii așezării, au schimbat drastic percepția monumentului în comunitate. Nimeni nu cunoștea valoarea arhitecturală a clădirii „veche de doar 100 de ani”. În 2009, clădirea a fost retrocedată urmașilor familiei Urmánczy. Statul a continuat să o închirieze până în 2013. În prezent, castelul este administrat de Asociația Positive Transylvania fondată de proprietarii castelului. Din iulie 2020 poate fi vizitat cu ghidaj de specialitate.

The study focuses on the relationship of the local community with the Urmánczy Castle situated near the centre of Toplița. The historic monument was a private house only for a short period. After the confiscation, the building had different functions dedicated to the community: maternity, museum, cultural centre. We can consider both positive and negative impacts. Currently it is retroceded to the legal heirs. In the future the owners, through the Positive Transylvania Association that they have founded, intend to find a communitarian use of the monument, which can cover its maintenance costs, at the same time providing a cultural experience, offering a place where people can spend quality leisure time, raising the standard of living in the area.

## I. House of the Urmánczy family

The castle in Secession Style was built in Toplița between 1903 and 1906 to serve as residence of the Urmánczy family. It was commissioned by Jeromos Urmánczy, a landlord of Armenian origin. This first period was interrupted by the events of World War I; the building was overtaken to serve as headquarters for the fourteenth infantry division of the Romanian army. The family moved back to the castle only in the late 20s. The land reform from 1921 clearly weakened their position as landlords. Other assets of the family, such as the so-called row of Urmánczy Houses in the centre of the city became victims of the wars, and were left as ruins for many years. The owners could enjoy further living in the castle for only around 20 years.

The memory of this glorious period has faded by now. The beneficial and charitable acts of different family members are mainly forgotten. Basically the families of former servants preserve stories from the old times, today part of the collective memory.<sup>1</sup> The descendants of the Urmánczy family do not own any original objects from the castle, only two photos are known from the interior, showing the same hall. The last member of the family who had spent their holidays in the castle as a child, died 10 years ago. The information is already indirect, the oldest living descendants were born after 1945, in a time when their parents avoided speaking about old times. By 1989, all these stories seemed to be in the category of fairy tales, especially for the

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<sup>1</sup> Czirják 2012, contains recollections of the former servants.