

ROMANIAN MODERN ASSOCIATIONS (SPORTS CLUBS) FROM THE LATE 19TH CENTURY TO THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR I: TOURISM AND PUBLIC UTILITY

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Abstract: The Romanian elites, educated abroad, acknowledged the necessity towards major changes in different areas concerning the society and the state. Since the second half of the 19th century, the local elites following the European pattern, gradually, also founded associations (sports clubs) in order to get closer to the West, while also modernising the Romanian state. Our paper explicitly aims to investigate how particular associations (sports clubs) encouraged the development of tourism and public utility in modern Romania. Therefore, *Jockey Club Român* (1875) [the Romanian Jockey Club], *Automobil-Club Român* (1904) [the Romanian Automobile Club], *Liga Națională Aeriană* (1912) [the National Air League] were societies created by some ardent people, attaining a more consolidated position over time. Naturally, the leisure perspective was essential, but, gradually, the economic dimension found its place in the concerns of certain members of the Romanian elites. Helping the tourism and the public utility routes develop in the country was also present among the concerns of the Romanian leading classes.

Keywords: Romanian elites, 19th century, World War I, modern associations (sports clubs), tourism, public utility.

Inspired by the Western pattern, the Romanian elites aimed to reach a certain level of personal and social evolution, namely state organization, mentality etc., pursuing the modernisation of the country. In this matter, in the second half of the 19th century and especially at the beginning of the 20th century, we can detect various sports, social and political clubs, as key elements in this puzzle.

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Nevertheless, our interest is focused more on the following exclusive and modern associations: the *Romanian Jockey Club*, the *Romanian Automobile Club* and the *National Air League*. Over the years, certain papers were published, both nationally and internationally, analysing different aspects related to this issue, focusing on leisure activities, elites and personalities in the 19th and the 20th centuries or even on the competitions that were taking place within the sports clubs etc.¹. Recently, this topic has caught our attention and, although we approached it from different viewpoints on several occasions², the present paper has a different outlook. The main issue of our research paper is to analyse in what way these clubs fostered the development of tourism and public utility. Thus, it remains important to show the reasons that led to the foundation of these clubs. In this equation, is it relevant to analyse to what extent did the foreign influences, directly or indirectly, determine the creation of these clubs? We also approached the idea of tourism and if or how it was promoted through these clubs, and how Romania improves its image abroad. To put it in a nutshell, we aim to fully understand the benefits that these clubs possess for the entire Romanian society and whether they are seen as instruments of public utility. Furthermore, we discovered useful information by exploring various sources from the year reports up to general newspapers, memoirs etc.

Within the Romanian realm, the modern times were established simultaneously with the creation of modern associations (sports clubs), disposing of an institutional framework (institutional recognition, admission criteria, annual subscription, formal activities, donations etc.) which were later on recognised as legal entities. For instance, the leisure style of the

¹ Claymoor, *La vie à Bucarest. 1882-1883* (Bucharest: Imprimeurs – Editeurs Thiel & Weiss, 1883); Iulian, *Aviațiunea, Automobilul și toate sporturile* (Bucharest: Tipografia „Jockey Club” Ion C. Văcărescu, 1913); George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române* (Bucharest: Tip. Presa, 1944); Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, *Elita liberală românească (1866-1900)* (Bucharest: ALL Educațional, 1998); George Paul Sandachi, Dan Hadîrcă, *Prințul George Valentin Bibescu. Biografia unui călător* (Bucharest: Ed. Vivaldi, 2005); Emanuel Bădescu, *Bucureștii lui Mazar Pașa* (Bucharest: Ed. Vremea, 2014); Bogdan Popa „Diplomație, viață mondenă și sport în București la începutul secolului XX”, in *Diplomați, societate și modernități: sfârșit de „Belle Époque” în lumea românească* eds. Claudiu-Lucian Topor, Alexandru Istrate, Daniel Cain (Iași: Ed. Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2015), 91-100; Hans Kraus, L. Bachelin, *Bucarest et la Roumanie* (Bucharest: Socec & Bucarest 1902); Paul Painlevé, Émile Borel, Ch. Maurain, *L’aviation* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1923) etc.

² Cosmin-Ștefan Dogaru, 28-30 May 2017, Leuven, Belgium, *Workshop Elites and Leisure. Arenas of Encounter in Europe, 1815-1914*, KADOC-KU Leuven and MoSa-KU Leuven, paper: “The Romanian Jockey Club and the Conservative Club: Activities of Leisure and Sociability for the Romanian Aristocracy (1875-1914)”, Cosmin-Ștefan Dogaru, 29 August-1 September 2018, Iași, Romania, *Congresul Național al Istoricilor Români*, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Comitetul Național al Istoricilor din România, paper: „Cluburi sportive elitiste în România interbelică: o dimensiune social-politică și una economică” [Elitist Sport Clubs in Interwar Romania: A Social-Political Dimension and an Economic One] and Cosmin-Ștefan Dogaru, *Courses de chevaux et courses d’automobiles: les clubs exclusivistes roumains entre la fin du XIX^e siècle et le début du XX^e siècle* (Curse de cai și curse de automobile: cluburi exclusiviste românești la final de secol XIX și început de secol XX), in *Tyragetia*, Vol. XII [XXVII], 2, 2018, 149-158.

Romanian elites also took a different path thanks to the formation of important modern associations (sports clubs), which showed a strong elitist trait even at the beginning of their foundation. In this matter, the foreign connections also represented a huge impact in that era and, because Romania strived to be part of different international organizations, the country was sensible to those influences. So, in due time, the presence of various sports clubs or associations could be observed. In this regard, we can acknowledge that the *club* was an institution of Anglo-Saxon foundation, observing that other various sports clubs were gradually established³. Over time, other countries pursued this pattern and founded various sports clubs.

The *Romanian Jockey Club* was the first elitist and modern sports club, created in the second half of the 19th century, precisely on 8 January 1875, entitled the *Society for Encouraging the Improvement of Horse Breeds in Romania – the Jockey Club*. The association disposed at that time of two headquarters, one in Bucharest and another one in Iași, preserving also its regional influence (even though horse races had been taking place in Iași as early as 1862; the club was perceived as a modern association, a select place meant for the aristocracy of the region⁴). If we analyse the *Romanian Jockey Club*, we can indubitably establish that a direct foreign influence in the creation of the association was none other than the British consul in Bucharest (1874-1876), Hussey Crespigny Vivian, 3rd baron Vivian (1834-1893), who, at that moment, represented a determining factor⁵. Apart from a notable English influence, various members of the local elites, such as the political leader Ion Ghica (1816-1897) took part in the foundation of this club. The liberal leader had its own agenda that aimed to establish a balance between liberals and conservatives in the social and political life. Consequently, the National Liberal Party was created that same year, 1875, on 24 May. However, the formal reason for the creation of the *Romanian Jockey Club* was to support an equestrian sport in Romania, as it was simply mentioned in its description: “A society aspiring to encourage the improvement of horse breeds in Romania” (Art. 1)⁶.

Another important sports club was founded at the beginning of the 20th century – the *Romanian Automobile Club*, named the *Society for Encouraging the Improvement of Automobile Sport in Romania*. Thus, on 5 April 1904, some personalities, led by Prince George Valentin Bibescu (1880-1941), and driven by the desire to stimulate the taste for automobiles, created this club with the purpose of establishing “A society of encouragement that aimed to develop in this country the taste for automobiles and the movement of the automobile

³ Michaela Catargi, “Viața familiară în Anglia”, in *Anglia și poporul englez* (Bucharest: Ed. Casei Școalelor, 1928), eds. N. Iorga, Radu Rosetti, Michaela Catargi, Richard F. A. Hillard, 110.

⁴ Rudolf Șuțu, *Iașii de odinioară*, Vol. II (Iași: Viața Românească, 1928), 445.

⁵ Emanuel Bădescu, *Bucureștii lui Mazar Pașa*, 68; see also Radu Rosetti, *Relații anglo-române în perioada războiului din 1877-1878*, in *Anglia și poporul englez* (Bucharest: Ed. Casei Școalelor, 1928), eds. N. Iorga, Radu Rosetti, Michaela Catargi, Richard F. A. Hillard, 103.

⁶ *Dare de Seamă pentru Anul 1887 prezentată Adunării Generale a Membrilor Societății de Încurajare pentru Ameliorarea rasei cailor în România. Jockey Club* (Bucharest: Tipografia Curții Regale, 1888), 25.

industry and everything related to this sport" (art. 1)⁷. It was not just a desire, a mere passion of certain personalities, but also a necessity towards the modernisation of the country. Back then, the head office was located at the Grand Hotel du Boulevard, in Bucharest. In 1905, a new committee was organised and Prince Bibescu was elected president. In fact, he was the main and most influential personality and his role was recognised by everyone. For instance, Ion (Jean) Cămărășescu (1882-1953), admitted that Bibescu founded the club along with some of his friends⁸. The foreign connection was also visible in this case, because its founders were inspired by the *Automobile Club de France*⁹, created in 1895. Afterwards, the *Royal Automobile Club* was founded in 1897, with its headquarters in London. So, it was the first club of this type in our country and the tenth of its kind in Europe¹⁰.

The Romanian leading classes intervened and owing to the Law of the 28th of March 1892, the *Romanian Jockey Club* was acknowledged as a moral person¹¹, a legal entity. At that time, the conservatives were in power and the prime-minister was Lascăr Catargiu (1823-1899), who came from an old boyar family. It was not a coincidence because it was well-known that the conservatives managed to dominate this club in that time. The leadership of this club was assumed by important leaders of the conservatives, who also helped secure its consolidation. We can remember Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino (1832-1913), George Manu (1833-1911) and Alexandru Marghiloman (1854-1925), who had been vice-presidents of the club for a certain period of time. In addition, thanks to his passion for horses, the latter had a great influence in the operation of the club. Marghiloman not only attended frequently and entered his horses in the horse races organised at the *Băneasa Hippodrome*, but he also gave various awards on several occasions. He even had a distinguished shed and his horses were mostly procured from England and France. Later on, the *Romanian Automobile Club* was recognised as a moral person¹² in 1909, observing a transparent support of the liberal Ion I. C. Brătianu (1864-1927), who was prime-minister at that time and a member of the club as well. The club was recognised as a moral person by obtaining the vote in the Parliament (session 1908-1909)¹³; the political leaders, both liberals and conservatives, had come to an agreement.

Prince George Valentin Bibescu, a personality of that era, was not only interested in automobiles, but also in aircrafts, both being important in the development of a state, and

⁷ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate pentru încurajarea sportului automobil în România. Anuar 1905*, Grand Hotel du Bulevard (Bucharest: Inst. De Arte Grafice „Carol Göbl” 1905), 36.

⁸ “Cuvântarea Domnului Jean Cămărășescu rostită în fața Adunării Generale ordinară din 10 ianuarie 1906”, in *Revista Automobilă*, I, no. 1 (January 1906), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ George Paul Sandachi, Dan Hadîrcă, *Prințul George Valentin Bibescu. Biografia unui călător*, 45-46.

¹¹ *Dare de Seamă pentru Anul 1899 prezentată Adunării Generale a Membrilor Societății de Încurajare pentru Ameliorarea rasei cailor în România. Jockey Club* (Bucharest: Tipografia Curții Regale, 1900), 44.

¹² *Monitorul Oficial*, Nr. 283 from 19 March/1 April 1909.

¹³ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate de încurajare pentru dezvoltarea automobilismului în România. Anuarul Automobil-Clubului Român din 1911* (Bucharest: Tipografia F. Göbl Fii, 1911).

Romania had a lot of ground to cover in comparison with other European states. So, in 1909, he also created the *Romanian Aero-Club*, being affiliated to the *Aero-Club de France*. Prince Bibescu promoted the foundation of an aero-club in 1909. He also made a donation in 1906 for its creation¹⁴. The aim of the *Romanian Aero-Club* was to instruct future pilots and also witness international competitions in the field¹⁵. However, on 5 May 1912, Bibescu successfully founded another modern society – the *National Air League*, also drawing his inspiration from the Western pattern¹⁶. Thus, the *French National Air League* was created for the general public to understand the importance of aviation, to perfect it and so on¹⁷. Returning to the Romanian case, the main purpose of the club was to instruct the new Romanian pilots. Due to the war campaigns, Bibescu saw the necessity to build this society in order to consolidate the defence of our country, the organisation being more of an instrument of public utility, while also encouraging the aspects of leisure and tourism of the club. In this matter, the Romanian elites offered various donations in order to support this association. The main purpose of the *National Air League* was to instruct the future pilots from all social categories and, on a secondary plan, to build aircrafts in order to ensure the defence of the country. The society had a committee composed of both military and civil figures, yet the main role was played by Prince Bibescu. At the beginning, the association had two hundred founding members, being: “A society that encourages the evolution of aviation and aims to provide airplanes and well-trained pilots for the army”¹⁸. The president was Constantin P. Olănescu and Prince Bibescu was in charge of both the piloting school and the aerodrome, located in Băneasa. The society was recognised as a moral person in March 1914, and it was perceived to be a creation of public utility¹⁹.

Furthermore, the *Romanian Jockey Club* gradually strengthened its connections with different *Jockey-clubs*, while also allowing others members of foreign *Jockey-clubs* to attend the *Romanian Jockey Club*, for only one month (according to the statute), thus also encouraging tourism in a smart, yet subtle way, from both a diplomatic point of view, as well as an economic perspective. In spite of all that, they were not allowed to vote. Naturally, the club was affiliated to other *Jockey-clubs*. Also, the foreign diplomats that were officially accepted and welcomed in Romania spent agreeable moments as members in the salons of the *Romanian Jockey Club*, delighting themselves with various leisure and sociability activities (playing cards, attending to the lovely balls organised by the club etc.) encouraging the creation of various networks and consolidating our image abroad. A crucial step took place for the *Romanian Automobile Club* in December 1905. Then, the club joined the *International Association of Recognised Automobile-Clubs* [*Asociația Internațională a Automobil-Cluburilor*

¹⁴ “Știri diverse”, in *Revista Automobilă*, I, No. 3 (March 1906), 12.

¹⁵ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 44.

¹⁶ “Notițe”, in *Aviațiunea*, No. 5 (May 1912), 74.

¹⁷ “Reflecții. Liga națională aeriană”, in *Aviațiunea*, No. 6 (June 1912), 91.

¹⁸ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 146.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Recunoscute]. The association had been recently created, on 20 June 1904 to be precise, and its original members at that time were “France, Germany, England, Austria, The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, USA, Russia, Denmark and Portugal”²⁰. Afterwards, other countries followed the same path. Romania joined this prestigious association without delay, recognizing its importance and, naturally, desiring to be part of a notable international organisation; the association was reopened after the Great War in 1920, reaching a total of 34 clubs as its members by 1929²¹.

The *Romanian Jockey Club* had 90 founders (mostly political leaders, liberals and conservatives), the number increasing to 120 members by the year 1881 and over 200 members by 1912²². Also, when the *Romanian Automobile Club* was created, it only had 25 founding members, and 2 honorary members (the prefect of the capital police and the mayor of Bucharest). Shortly, the number increased to 67 members by 1 January 1905²³, and so the club managed to catch the attention. However, the personalities belonged to the Romanian *high-society*. Not only leaders from the liberal and conservative parties decided to join the club, but also officers and other social categories. In 1916, there were over 300 members²⁴. Judging by the total number of members listed before, one would be able to observe the aristocratic feature that these two clubs possessed. In comparison, the *National Air League* also had a few hundred members, but the future pilots who trained in the league’s civil school came from different social categories, the association thus being more open to the general public. An eloquent example remains the officer and pilot Andrei Popovici (1883-1967), who did not come from an old boyar family.

At that time, it is worth mentioning two women that were also members of the *Romanian Automobile Club*: Princess Martha Bibescu (1886-1973), the wife of Prince Bibescu, and Hélène Cămărășescu²⁵ (1876-1956). According to Article 10, women were allowed to be members of the club, yet they were not allowed to vote and be elected in the Committee²⁶. Later on, the wife of Ion Cămărășescu, an important figure of the *Romanian Automobile Club*, Yvonne Cămărășescu (1884-1971)²⁷, took part in a flight in 1910, even if the pilot was a man.

²⁰ “A 25-a aniversare de la întemeierea Asociației Internaționale a Automobil-Cluburilor Recunoscute”, in *Automobil&Sport*, III, No. 37 (October 1929), 6.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Dare de seamă pentru anul 1912 prezentată Adunării Generale a membrilor societății de încurajare pentru ameliorarea rasei cailor în România. Jockey Club* (Bucharest: Tipografia Jockey Club, 1913), 22.

²³ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate pentru încurajarea sportului automobil în România. Anuar 1905*, 22-31.

²⁴ *Automobil-Club Regal Român. Societate de încurajare pentru dezvoltarea automobilismului în România. Anuarul Automobil-Clubului Regal Român din 1916* (Bucharest: Tipografia „Jockey-Club” Ion C. Văcărescu, 1916).

²⁵ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate pentru încurajarea sportului automobil în România. Anuar 1905*, 29.

²⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁷ Yvonne Blondel was the daughter of Camille Blondel (1854-1935), the French Ambassador in Romania (1907-1916); her father joined the club in 1909.

Nevertheless, she became the first woman who had ever taken part in a flight. Later, in 1912, Elena Caragiani (1887-1929) flew accompanied by pilot Mircea Zorileanu (1883-1919). She followed the courses of the *National Air League*, but when she was rejected by the Romanian authorities, she went to France and obtained a pilot license²⁸ in 1914, becoming the first woman pilot from our country. These clubs tended in plain sight to encourage the *masculine sociability*. Nevertheless, allowing women into a club happened to be a novelty, and not only for Romania. Women's struggle should also be taken into account in this matter. Even though they were part of the *high society* as wives or daughters, they still wanted to integrate, especially by fitting in with these masculine clubs. Despite all that, in the *Romanian Jockey Club*, women could only attend certain activities that were open for the general public, such as: the famous horse races, organised at *Băneasa Hippodrome*, the weapon contests, located in the beautiful gardens of the club and the balls.

The *admission criteria* for the two clubs, the *Romanian Jockey Club* and the *Romanian Automobile Club*, was well-defined. For instance, if someone wanted to become a member of one of these clubs, the candidate had to obtain two recommendations from two members. Apart from the recommendations, a fee had to be paid, depending of the category of the member. The admission enhanced the elitist trait of these clubs in a subtle manner. It was certain that these clubs were supported by the Romanian elites (by both the *old elites* [old boyar families] and the *new elites*, namely, the lesser boyar, the bourgeois etc.).

Different leisure activities were visible in the *Jockey Club*, from card games (poker, bridge etc.) to billiard etc. Also, the Fencing room was established in 1881 with the support of Prince Gheorghe Bibescu, the son of the ruler (hospodar) Gheorghe Bibescu (1804-1873). In this regard, the French professor Augustin Michel arrived in Bucharest, aiming to help the club members by giving them a proper explanation of the sport. Besides this aspect, Augustin Michel was a pleasant presence in the capital, being indispensable at various events of the Romanian *high society*²⁹. Nevertheless, probably the most enjoyable activities were the horse races organised at the *Băneasa horse field*, that was created around 1881. The Romanian elites invested important resources in this area and, at the beginning of the 20th century, the *Băneasa Hippodrome* was created, being a modern venue, that also became an instrument of tourism. For instance, in 1911 to be more precise, Ethel Greening Pantazzi (1880-1961)³⁰ remembered, with plenty of delightful details, the horse races that she witnessed at the hippodrome. On Sunday afternoon, mainly in Spring and Autumn, the Romanian elites had the possibility to create various networks³¹ in this sociable space, encountering a large number of people, from members of the leading boyar families and members of the middle class, to

²⁸ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 179.

²⁹ Claymoor, *La vie à Bucarest. 1882-1883*; see also Constantin Bacalbașa, *Bucureștii de altă dată (1871-1884)* (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului „Universul”, 1935), Vol. I, 2nd edition, 305-306.

³⁰ Married to a Romanian officer, Vasile Pantazzi.

³¹ Ethel Greening Pantazzi, *România în lumini și umbre (1909-1919)* (Bucharest: Ed. Humanitas, 2015) (see also *Roumania in Light & Shadow*, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1921), 83.

foreign diplomats or even tourists. Undeniably, the most suitable person who could describe the pleasant atmosphere of that time with plenty of details, was Claymoor³². He used to often write about the horse races organized at the *Băneasa Hippodrome*³³ or the exquisite balls. Furthermore, pleasant evenings were organised at the Fencing room, where members of the Romanian *high society*³⁴ and various foreign diplomats (from different legations) gathered. For instance, Claymoor recalls that, in the tribunes, all the well-know people, both men and women, savoured the horse races, from sportsmen and diplomats, to ministers and officers³⁵. Various rewards were also given. In regards to the *Romanian Automobile Club*, the car races (automobile competitions) were the main attraction for its members. Still, other leisure and sociability activities were identified in the club, namely the Honour salon, the game salon, the gastronomy salon, the greenhouse and the bar³⁶, which were all part of the leisure registry. Also, the club was affiliated to other *Automobile-Clubs*, so its members could visit the automobile expositions organised by the other clubs (implying a reciprocity convention). Also, the club members had special discounts in various hotels, restaurants, shops and garages both nationally and abroad etc.³⁷. All in all, various tourists arrived in Romania. Even if their number was not that high, it was, however, more than enough for that era. The automobile races that were organised in the country enthused the audience and helped tourism. In addition, the Romanian car owners, who were also members of the *Romanian Automobile Club*, took part in several international competitions, improving the image of the country.

Therefore, leisure activities existed in both clubs, ineluctably contributing to the flourishing of tourism and, indirectly, to the progress of the state and its image abroad. Also, there was the *Great Prize of the Romanian Automobile Club* [*Marele Premiu al Automobil-Clubului Român*]. Concerning this matter, we recall that Ion Cămărășescu discussed with Ion I. C. Brătianu, who, at that time, was the Minister of Internal Affairs. In the end, the latter obtained an authorization from the government in 1907, allowing these races to be organised. Also, the winners enjoyed different prizes³⁸. Furthermore, we can observe two types of schools, namely two types of races: speed races [*curse de iuțeală*] and tourism races [*curse de turism*]: “both types of contests were created with a linear aim: in the first case, to improve the horse breeds, and in the second, the automobile construction [industry-n.n]”³⁹. Gradually, in order to also promote this sport to the general public, the *Romanian Automobile Club*

³² Mihai (Mișu) Văcărescu (1843-1903), known as Claymoor, was a journalist, writer, leaving behind important memories of the time.

³³ Claymoor, *La vie à Bucarest. 1882-1883*, 171-172.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 347.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 451-455.

³⁶ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate de încurajare pentru dezvoltarea automobilismului în România. Anuarul Automobil-Clubului Român din 1911.*

³⁷ Ibid., 84-85.

³⁸ “Marele Premiu al Automobil-Clubului Român”, in *Revista Automobilă*, II, No. 19 (July 1907), 10.

³⁹ “Două Școli. Cursă de Iuțeală! Cursă de Turism!”, in *Revista Automobilă*, II, No. 21 (September 1907), 1.

organised its first athletics competitions at *Băneasa Hippodrome*⁴⁰, having the support of His Royal Highness Ferdinand (1865-1927), heir to the Romanian throne and honorary president of the club (since 1907). On the other hand, King Charles I (1839-1914) was the honorary president of the *Romanian Jockey Club*, and Prince Ferdinand was an honorary member of the society.

Subsequently, the history of aviation was long and complex, and many authors devoted their time in order to explain its complexity⁴¹. Perhaps the most prominent personality that influenced the field of aviation was the French pilot and constructor Louis Blériot (1872-1936), who also arrived in Romania in October 1909, at the invitation of Prince Bibescu. He flew in our country at *Băneasa Hippodrome* on 18 October, displaying a marvellous aviation show. Bibescu even had to negotiate with Marghiloman in order to organise an aviation show there. The event brought many spectators from all over the world, even foreigners (approximately 40.000)⁴², thing which represented a good start for the Romanian tourism. On a global scale, aviation meant progress and, what is more, the Romanian elites saw this as an opportunity towards the modernisation of the country. In June 1910, pilot Aurel Vlaicu enchanted the audience with his majestic flight performance⁴³. He performed in a *Great Air Meeting* [*Marele Meeting de Aviație*], which was organised on 17 October 1910, on the *Băneasa Hippodrome*⁴⁴ field, and others flights also followed⁴⁵. Moreover, Prince Bibescu delighted the audience with his own aviation acrobatics. In 1911, his interest in this sport brought him the *superior license of military-pilot*⁴⁶. Having a close connection with France,

⁴⁰ *Istoricul Activității Automobil-Clubului Regal Român de la 5 septembrie 1904, data înființării sale, până astăzi* (Bucharest: Tipografia Ion C. Văcărescu, 1940), 10.

⁴¹ Thus, various personalities were caught up on the field of aviation, namely engineers, inventors and pilots: Otto Lilienthal (1848-1896), Octave Chanute (1832-1910), Wright brothers – Wilbur (1867-1912) and Orville (1871-1948) Clément Ader (1841-1925), Alberto Santos-Dumont (1873-1932) etc.; in this regard, Romania had greatly contributed to the field of aviation, with its engineers and pilots, such as Traian Vuia (1872-1950), Aurel Vlaicu (1882-1913) and Henri Coandă (1886-1972). Before Blériot reached the English Channel, Vlaicu flew his own airplane, sustained by Transylvanian peasants before it took off (see George Vasiliu-Belmont, *Cum s-a născut zborul mecanic: originea și evoluția lui* (Inspectoratul General al Aeronauticii ord. no. 450/1929); Aurel Vlaicu, *Aeroplanul Vlaicu* (Bucharest: Atelierele grafice Socec & Comp., Societate anonimă, 1911), 15).

⁴² *Istoricul Activității Automobil-Clubului Regal Român de la 5 septembrie 1904, data înființării sale, până astăzi*, 9; see also George Vasiliu-Belmont, *Cum s-a născut zborul mecanic: originea și evoluția lui*, 47; for Bibescu, that event signified the need of creating a *Romanian Aero-Club*, inspired by the *Aero-Club de France* which was created in 1898 and became an inspiration for various clubs of this kind: *Aero Club of Great Britain* (1901) etc.; he detected the importance of this sport and its benefits towards tourism, while also deeming it an instrument of public utility (especially for the national defence etc.).

⁴³ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 89.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁵ "Notițe", in *Aviațiunea*, No. 4 (April 1912), 63.

⁴⁶ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 134.

Bibescu tried to create different networks, especially with Louis Blériot, and others as well⁴⁷. In 1910, he brought from France in Romania an airplane called *Voisin*. He also bought another airplane, namely *Blériot*. Prince Bibescu acknowledged the importance of aviation, not only as a sport or as a general leisure activity, but also as a means of travel and an instrument of national defence⁴⁸. In this direction, Bibescu was an official delegate of the *Aero-Club de France* and had “the right to provide international licenses to his students, being later confirmed in France”⁴⁹. Thenceforth, he urged the development of an aerodrome in Băneasa⁵⁰. Around the same time, Romania was represented by Aurel Vlaicu at the Vienna competition in 1912, establishing ourselves as equals to other European countries⁵¹.

Over time, various aviation demonstrations were arranged and these led to the creation of the *Chitila Aerodrome* in 1910, which functioned only for a short period of time. Starting with 1911 a *Piloting School* began operating next to the capital, being supported by the lawyer Mihai Cerchez (hangars were built in order to accommodate the airplanes, and a factory was created as well). As a result, this modern aerodrome allowed passenger flights to take off⁵². Also, another *Piloting School* started functioning in 1911 at Cotroceni, led by Prince Bibescu⁵³. The Romanian state saw the importance of aviation in regards to the progress of the country, and the Minister of War created the *Cotroceni-Bucharest Piloting Military School* [*Școala militară de pilotaj de la Cotroceni-București*], set off in 1913⁵⁴ (Royal Decree No. 1953, March 27/April 8, 1912). The *Romanian Automobile Club* supported the formation of the *National Air League* in 1912, with Bibescu’s role being the decisive factor. In order to encourage the tourism and the connection between Romania and other European states, on 15 November 1913, an important *meeting* (an acrobatic flight) was performed by the famous French pilot and air instructor Adolph Pégoud (1889-1915), on the *Blériot* monoplane⁵⁵ (an event that was considered an aviation show in the epoch). In addition, in early 1914, Prince Bibescu arranged an annual competition for transcontinental airline flights and, as a reward, a *Cup* (meant a trophy and a sum of money) was granted to the pilot (be him Romanian or French) who “would be able to complete the flight from Bucharest to Paris and return in the quickest possible time”⁵⁶.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 44-47.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 45-46.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 46-47.

⁵¹ Gh. Negrescu, *Problema industriei aeronautice în România* (conference attended under the patronage of the *Romanian Royal Aero-Club* in the Auditorium of the “King Carol I” University Foundation, at 18 February 1931) (Bucharest: Aero-Clubul Regal al României, 1931), 11; see also George Vasiliu-Belmont, *Cum s-a născut zborul mecanic: originea și evoluția lui*, 50.

⁵² Ibid., 9; see also, “Notițe”, in *Aviațiunea*, No. 2 (February 1912), 26.

⁵³ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁴ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 184.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 182.

Therefore, aviation started as a novelty, as a sport activity, but then it grew to be an instrument of public utility, while also having military purpose. At that time, several attempts were notable, thanks to the construction of various airplanes, the training of pilots, organizing different flights etc. This spark was seen not only in the West, but also in Romania, since aviation was being highly promoted by several personalities of the era. We agree that aviation started as a sport⁵⁷, with its splendid worldwide competitions at the beginning of the 20th century, a sport that eventually led to the development of another domain – the aviation industry. For that era, this concept meant development, not only in the area of leisure activities: «si le sport d'aviation est particulièrement noble, c'est qui ne contribue pas seulement à donner une sensation complexe d'élégance et de danger; il vise plus haut, et l'on ne peut prévoir l'importance que pourra avoir son essor sur l'avenir de l'humanité /.../ Les promenades aériennes sont cependant bien séduisantes /.../ le plaisir qu'on y trouve pourrait conduire beaucoup de personnes riches à avoir leur aéroplane comme elles ont leur automobile»⁵⁸.

As we have seen earlier in the article, these societies were created for various reasons, becoming venues of leisure and also sociable spaces that encouraged tourism, associations that gradually became useful in another manner while the time drew closer to the Great War. Thus, these clubs, especially the *Romanian Automobile Club* and the *National Air League*, also had a strong dimension of public utility. The founders of the *Romanian Automobile Club* believed in the role of the automobile as a mean of transportation, and from there on, the idea of the automobile industry surfaced⁵⁹. At that time, in Romania, few automobiles existed. Nevertheless, the creation of the *Romanian Automobile Club* led not only to a wide range of leisure activities, but also towards the progress of the country from several points of view: the increasing number of automobiles, tourism development⁶⁰, infrastructure and also means of public utility. In addition, this club disposed of its own periodical paper, *Revista Automobilă* [*Automobile Journal*] and it also issued a sort of guidebook, *Călăuza Automobilistului* [*Driver's Guide*], with the purpose of helping tourists. It contained a map with the national roads, information or various tips and tricks for beginner drivers⁶¹. In order to develop this sport, the club organized various bimonthly conferences in its salons, but the most

⁵⁷ Paul Painlevé, Emile Borel, Ch. Maurain, *L'aviation*, 173; for instance, we can observe the first flight attempts in 1903, conducted by the Wright brothers, the official flight executed by Santos Dumont in 1906, the attempts made by Traian Vuia in the field of aviation in 1905, the achievement of Prince Bibescu the moment he received the pilot airplane patent number 20 in 1910, while not forgetting about the ingenious Aurel Vlaicu, who also tried and eventually succeeded in creating various aircrafts (see Gh. Negrescu, *Problema industriei aeronautice în România*, 8).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁹ *Istoricul Activității Automobil-Clubului Regal Român de la 5 septembrie 1904, data înființării sale, până astăzi*, 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

important fact was that, in 1906, the club created a specialised school destined for those who want to learn to drive and it operated until 1914⁶².

In 1904, it was of great improvement and public utility when the capital police prefecture applied a *Regulation for automobile traffic in Bucharest* [*Regulament pentru Circularea automobilelor în București*] (no. 165 from 10 April 1904)⁶³, due to the increasing number of automobiles in the city. It was a novelty in this field, because it was the first in the country⁶⁴. Also, the involvement of the state was visible, applying different traffic regulations in that period. Regarding the economic perspective, in 1906, the *Romanian Automobile Club* intervened on another scale, communicating directly with the Minister of Finance, suggesting a convenient gasoline price. In addition, the club undertook several measures in order to promote the automobile industry, and, in this regard, the *Steaua Română Factory* had the monopole for selling gasoline. The director of the factory, George Spies, was a supporting member of the club and took canisters of gasoline in several cities, that were chosen by the club's committee⁶⁵. Another aspect taken into consideration was the improvement of our roads and, in this regard, the club's funds were redirected for this cause in order to support the state⁶⁶, becoming "a necessary and useful institution to the country"⁶⁷.

Apart from this, the private sector was in full change, observing that various hotels and garages were under the patronage of the *Romanian Automobile Club*, some of them were located in the capital, the most important at that time being Hotel Boulevard, Auto-Garage etc., while others were located in various cities in the country, such as: Botoșani, Brăila, Dolj, Ialomița, Mehedinți, Prahova etc.⁶⁸. In parallel, the *National Air League* disposed of a park with 12 aeroplanes, ready to intervene in case of any military conflict⁶⁹ (see the Second Balkan War). It also bought various aircrafts, while concerning itself with instructing the future pilots, several of whom took part in different missions abroad⁷⁰. Also, the *Cotroceni Military Piloting School* received an important place in the state at that time, because the military aviation was of great importance in that delicate period. Various drills started in 1914 under the surveillance of Andrei Popovici⁷¹.

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate pentru încurajarea sportului automobil în România. Anuar 1905*, 92.

⁶⁴ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate de încurajare pentru dezvoltarea automobilismului în România. Anuarul Automobil-Clubului Român din 1911*, 11.

⁶⁵ „Cuvântarea Domnului Jean Cămărășescu rostită în fața Adunării Generale ordinară din 10 ianuarie 1906”, in *Revista Automobilă*, no. 1 (January 1906), 5-6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7-8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Automobil-Club Român. Societate pentru încurajarea sportului automobil în România. Anuar 1905*, 126-134.

⁶⁹ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 47.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 182-183.

⁷¹ Ibid., 189.

Another concern of the Romanian elites was the international circulation and, for that reason, in 1911, the Parliament voted the *International Convention regarding the automobile circulation*, [*Convențiunea Internațională privitoare la circulația automobilelor*] “signed at Paris on 28 September/11 October 1909 by all the delegates of the adherent states”⁷². In addition, at the aerodrome of the *National Air League*, citizens of the capital and various tourists (from other cities and also from abroad) gathered in the evenings in order to witness the splendid aviation show performed by the league pilots, event that helped raise donations almost immediately⁷³. Nevertheless, the leisure activity was replaced with a more practical use and, in January 1913, the league members voted its statutes to be a *work association and patriotic contribution* [asociație de muncă și de contribuție patriotică], stating that, in time of war, the league will provide the army its pilots and aircrafts; also, the *National Air League* disposed of a photo laboratory⁷⁴. Due to the outbreak of the World War I, the *National Air League* had a more practical purpose, offering its support to the army. Also, in the head office of the *Romanian Automobile Club* (named the *Romanian Royal Automobile Club* after 1914), operated as a hospital, that supported these humanitarian actions with their personal funds. Also, numerous wives of the club members got involved and worked at the hospital in that difficult period⁷⁵.

Conclusion

In that era, these clubs maintained their aristocratic feature, particularly the *Romanian Jockey Club*, providing leisure and touristic activities. However, gradually, these tended to reveal and practice a strong form of public utility, especially the *Romanian Automobile Club* and the *National Air League*, in order to form a stronger connection with the general public. Overall, while the horse races had a long tradition in many countries, the automobile and the airplane races represented the novelties of the 20th century and managed to place Romania in a reputable position in that period. Regarding this concept, the Romanian elites tried and managed, over time, to diminish the gap between our country and other European states, encouraging the operation of these associations towards leisure, tourism as well as, and most importantly, towards public utility, ensuring Romania’s evolution in the field of economic development and national defence.

⁷² *Automobil-Club Român. Societate de încurajare pentru dezvoltarea automobilismului în România. Anuarul Automobil-Clubului Român din 1911*, 101.

⁷³ George Costescu, *Începuturile aviației române*, 148.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 150-152.

⁷⁵ *Istoricul Activității Automobil-Clubului Regal Român de la 5 septembrie 1904, data înființării sale, până astăzi*, 10.