

ABSTRACT

At the advent of electric lighting, in the early era of electrification, the market for lighting systems – candle, oil, kerosene, gas, acetylene, and electric light – resembled a battlefield, with significant consequences for the fortunes of many towns. Yet as electric lighting began to prevail, internal challenges also surfaced, and their resolution could extend over decades. What forms did these challenges take, and what solutions were proposed in response? More broadly, which of these debates and experiments have since faded from collective memory? To illuminate the issues involved in the introduction of a new technology, the book traces the history of electric lighting and offers a detailed analysis of its adoption in a range of Transylvanian settlements.

Focusing on eighty major towns in Transylvania, the book reconstructs the process of electrification from the initial proposal of the idea, through the obstacles encountered and the translation of plans into practice, to their eventual realisation.

In parallel with this historical survey, the volume also charts the social reception and diffusion of electricity as a new source of energy. Numerous quotations drawn from the contemporary press enable the reader to apprehend the atmosphere at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the patterns of thought of citizens and politicians, their motivations in relation to this subject, and, more generally, their attitudes towards technological innovation. It is both instructive and revealing to observe how earlier generations responded to epoch-making inventions and how they positioned themselves with respect to modernisation and an industrial revolution in the making. Through its detailed presentation of events, supported by period journalism, the book also depicts the transition between two industrial revolutions, from steam power to electricity.

The volume provides insight into urban life in the early twentieth century: the operation and technical capacity of the companies that shaped these towns; the assumptions – and even the motives – of municipal leaders in matters of governance; and, not least, the everyday priorities of urban residents and journalists.