

East Central Europe In The First Half Of The 20th Century – Transnational Perspectives

Veranstalter: Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas an der Universität Leipzig (GWZO); Ústav pro soudobé dějiny (ÚSD), Prague; Association Internationale d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Europe (AIHCE)

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In January 2016, the project group 'Transnational Contemporary History' at the GWZO Leipzig, together with the Prague Institute for Contemporary History (ÚSD) and the Association Internationale d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Europe (AIHCE) organized an international conference to explore the transnational history of East Central Europe (ECE) in the first half of the 20th century. The program was divided into five panels: economic entanglements, international organizations, migrations, cultural transfer processes, and territorialization. The project group has already applied this design to the region's late imperial history up to the First World War. Each panel started with an introduction from the researcher responsible for the particular dimension in the project group, to be followed by four to five presentations. Half of the conference participants came from countries of the region in question.

After some words of welcome, FRANK HADLER (Leipzig) and MATTHIAS MIDDELL (Leipzig) introduced the conference topic, emphasizing the importance to explore transnational aspects and relations in different areas and for different historical actors. An inspiring discussion followed the presentation by OLDŘICH TŮMA (Prague), who detailed how the term „contemporary history“ is perceived in Czech historical research, in which 1945 represents a turning point. Frank Hadler argued that not only the interwar period, but also the years of World War I should be included in the complex of the contemporary history even (and especially) within the Czech context. The discussion about the

term's inconsistency pointed out that „contemporary history“ in Holland, for instance, is understood to be the period after 1871. It was argued that the question when contemporary history actually starts may actually be somewhat more provocative when it is directed to the broader public rather than to historians.

UWE MÜLLER (Leipzig) was in charge of the panel on economy. He demonstrated that historiography related to global history often neglects East Central Europe (ECE). However, as a result of World War I, a peculiar „European Third World“ was formed on the ruins of the old empires. One of the consequences of the imperial disintegration was the formation of national economies. This has, in turn, resulted in the disintegration of wider markets and a decline of foreign trade. According to Müller, much of the structural weakening was also caused by the decisions of individual participants. For example, extensive land reforms, adopted in many ECE countries, had a significantly positive (calming) effect from a political perspective, but the economic consequences were predominantly negative. Domestic and foreign policy thus disregards economic needs. Post-war „deglobalization“ in the region therefore led to the disintegration of individual markets. However, transnational entanglements did not lose their relevance. Müller also pointed out the absence of some kind of a recovery program for ECE after World War I (unlike the situation after 1945). He also mentioned the remarkable element of continuity, for example, from the state interventionism of the 1930s, to the German war economy, and to the centrally planned economy introduced in East Germany.

ŽARKO LAZAREVIĆ (Ljubljana) spoke about peasant's debts in Southeast Europe in the interwar period, mainly drawing on comparisons of basic statistical data. ROMAN HOLEC (Bratislava) addressed industrial developments from the perspective of post-WWI changes: one of the two large industrial areas on pre-1914 Hungarian territory now became part of Romania, while half of the other was added to Czechoslovakia (particularly, to Slovakia). The supranational ambitions of two large Bratislava-based companies (Dynamit Nobel and the Apollo Re-

fineries) witnessed a difficult business development environment during 1918–1945, including the changes in capital ownership and market orientation. EDUARD KUBŮ and JIŘÍ ŠOUŠA (Prague) focused on the role of the Czechoslovak delegation at the First World Economic Conference in Geneva in 1927. JAROMIR BALCAR (Berlin) compared the „Protectorate“ as the „arms factory of the Reich“, with Czechoslovakia’s essentially identical role within the developing Eastern Bloc.

The panel on International Organizations was introduced by KATJA NAUMANN (Leipzig), who underlined the fact that these organizations are usually seen as phenomena emerging after World War II. However, during the twenty years of the interwar period, international organizations were highly significant. Some organizations (mainly veterinary, medical and union organizations) were established even earlier; nonetheless, the Paris Peace Conference became a milestone in this respect. The foundation of a relatively high number of new nation states might be interpreted as a de-globalization process. On the other hand, it was the result of this new division that planted the seeds for a new European if not global setting around the League of Nations. The role of ECE in this process was significant.

ONDŘEJ MATĚJKA (Prague / Geneva) brought the example of Czechoslovak students working within the frame of YMCA to show how Central European minorities has been dealt with and how American sponsors demonstrated that the efficiency of the YMCA’s „civilization and stabilization mission“ is based on cooperation, understanding and education. Matějka sees a transnational aspect in the way the originally asymmetric nature of relations changed as the YMCA needed ECE to prove its supporters and donors that their activities were important. KATEŘINA ČAPKOVÁ (Prague) pointed out similarities between the state of minority rights before World War I and after the end of the Cold War. Using the example of Czechoslovakia and Poland, she demonstrated the dynamics within this field. Generally speaking, sympathies towards the Wilsonian principles of minority rights pre-

vailed after World War I. At the same time, it was clear that these principles might not be adopted in the reality created by new political borders and new countries. MARTIN KOHLRAUSCH (Leuven) widened the spectrum of presented views with perspectives on architecture and urbanism.

In introducing the panel on migrations, MICHAEL G. ESCH (Leipzig) characterized the 20th century as a century of refugees. ANDREA KOMLOSY (Wien) talked to the question how internal migration became an international issue after the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy. ANDREAS FAHRMEIR (Frankfurt am Main) tackled the shift from imperial to post-imperial citizenship and its implications for migration control. His paper was followed by PETER BENCSIK’s (Szeged) comparison of border regimes in the Dual Monarchy, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The critical residential situation that arose in Budapest during the first years after the war was analysed and impressively visualized by FRIEDERIKE KIND-KOVÁCS (Regensburg). ADAM WALASZEK (Kraków) dealt with Polish migration and Polish diaspora in the US during the long period from 1870 until the outbreak of World War II. The discussion mainly focused on a conclusion put forth by Peter Bencsik: the border-crossing arrangements that Czechoslovakia and Hungary had introduced in the period of 1918–1938 when they were enemy states were paradoxically more liberal than those in operation during 1948–1970, when the two countries were allies and friends. While a gradual „nationalization“ of citizens was taking place in individual countries from 1918 on, this process escalated after 1948.

The panel on Culture was opened by BEATA HOCK (Leipzig); her talk highlighted a duality defining the interwar period: while nation-centred cultural discourses persisted, the artistic avant-garde in each ECE country carried a cosmopolitan orientation and had strong links to a transnational cultural scene. SARAH M. SCHLACHETZKI (New York) addressed the transnational reach of the International Style in architecture, focusing on the case of Wrocław’s / Breslau’s architectural modernity to show how this spread played out in the region. GYÖNGYI HELTAI

(Budapest) presented detailed views on the transfer techniques in the theatre industry between Budapest, New York, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna while she also considered theatre as a form enterprise needing to react to challenges brought by the Great Depression. FEDORA PARKMANN (Paris) presented the Czech worker photography movement as an instance of non-Western-oriented transfer in which the Soviet Union featured as the source of inspiration and learning. The block was concluded with a comment by PETER ZUSI (London). He pointed out that a transnational approach presents different challenges in the area of culture than those offered by political or social history. One can seek transnational aspects in culture through measurable connections, and not only through personal ones. Zusi referred to the relation between Franz Kafka and Richard Weiner who could and should have known each other and had certainly influenced each other, yet they have never mentioned each other. He reminded us that there may have been many similar transnational connections that we have no record of, which have certainly existed yet.

In her introduction to the panel on territorialization STEFFI MARUNG (Leipzig) stressed the power of statistics and maps. Focusing on the Belarusian-Latvian borderland in the decades before 1924, CATHERINE GIBSON (Firenze) showed how maps documented „national“ structures. She spoke of the techniques of cartography, from the mere manner of capturing a line to the selection of colors. REINER FENSKE (Dresden) showed up the German „Ostbund“ and its „Kulturpolitik“ as an important tool for regaining lost territories: the non-acceptance of the German-Polish border was only a continuation of the original idea that the Germans actually have no border in the east, and the „frontier“ mentality was artificially created with the idea of a revision. ÁKOS BARTHA (Budapest) presented the ideas of a single political personality (Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, 1886–1944) and called for internationalized conceptions of national territorialisation in Hungarian foreign policy after World War I.

The final discussion focused on methodological issues. Most importantly, participants agreed that the topic is well identified

since transnationality does characterize the East Central European region in the period under consideration, and beyond. The conference clearly demonstrated the opportunities transnational history offers in broadening and redirecting traditional views and master narratives.

Conference overview:

Opening and Introduction

CHRISTIAN LÜBKE (Director GWZO Leipzig)

JOHN KEIGER (President AIHCE)

FRANK HADLER (GWZO Leipzig): What is a Transnational Perspective on East Central Europe?

OLDŘICH TŮMA (Prague): What is Contemporary History in the Czech Context?

Panel I – Economy

UWE MÜLLER (GWZO): Introduction

ŽARKO LAZAREVIĆ (Ljubljana): Peasant's Debts in Southeast Europe in Interwar Period (Cases of Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria)

ROMAN HOLEC (Bratislava): Capital in the shadow of the policy. Business at the Crossroads of Central European Development

EDUARD KUBŮ / JIŘÍ ŠOUŠA (Prague): Between Autarchy and Liberalism. Czechoslovakia on the First World Economic Conference in Geneva 1927

JAROMIR BALCAR (Berlin): From Market to Planned Economy (1938–1948). Czechoslovakia as a Special Case in East Central Europe?

Evening Lecture

ISABEL WÜNSCHE (Bremen): The Presence of the East Central European Avant-garde in the Great Berlin Art Exhibitions of the 1920s

Panel II – International Organizations

KATJA NAUMANN (GWZO): Introduction

ONDŘEJ MATĚJKA (Prague/Geneva): The Constitution of a Transnational „epistemic community“: Czech Barthians between East and West 1920s–1950s

KATEŘINA ČAPKOVÁ (Prague): Pitfalls of Minority Rights in East Central Europe. Ger-

man and Jewish minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia

MARTIN KOHLRAUSCH (Leuven): The Experiment of 'Ciam-Ost': Urbanism and Regional Development Against the Background of Postimperial Structures, National Agendas and the Lure of Internationalism

Panel III – Migration

MICHAEL G. ESCH (GWZO): Introduction

ANDREA KOMLOSY (Wien): From Imperial to National Scale: How Internal Migration Became International after the Collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy

ADAM WALASZEK (Kraków): Transnational Aspects of Migration. Polish Lands and Polish Diaspora in the United States 1870–1939

ANDREAS FAHRMEIR (Frankfurt am Main): From Imperial to Post-Imperial Citizenships: Implications for Migration and Migration Control

FRIEDERIKE KIND-KOVÁCS (Regensburg): Refugee Slumming: Budapest's Housing Crisis after the Great War

PÉTER BENCSIK (Budapest): Border Regimes in the Dual Monarchy, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. A *longue durée* Perspective

Panel IV – Culture

BEATA HOCK (GWZO): Introduction

SARAH M. SCHLACHETZKI (New York): International Style on the Margins. Wrocław's/Breslau's Architectural Modernity in Transnational Perspective

GYÖNGYI HELTAI (Budapest): Budapest-New York-Paris-Berlin-Vienna. Transfer Techniques in the Theatre Industry (1930–32): The International Artistic and Business Network of Vígszínház

FEDORA PARKMANN (Paris): An Example of Interwar Czech-Russian Cultural Transfer. The Czech Worker Photography Movement

PETER ZUSI (London): Comment

Panel V – Territorialization

STEFFI MARUNG (Leipzig): Introduction

IRYNA VUSHKO (New York): Lost Father-

land: Europe Between the Empire and Nation States, 1900–1939

CATHERINE GIBSON (Firenze): Discrete vs. Thick Borders. Imperial and National Symbolic Geographies in the Belarusian-Latvian Borderland, 1864–1924

REINER FENSKE (Dresden): Imperial Societies Against Territorialization. The Example of the German „Ostbund“

BARTHA ÁKOS (Budapest): Internationalized Conceptions of National Territorialization? Foreign Policy of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky (1886–1944)

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