

Imperial Cities: The Tsarist Empire, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire in Comparison

Veranstalter: Association of Historians on East Central Europe (VOH); German Association for East European Studies (DGO); German Historical Institute, Moscow (DHI); Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe – Institute of the Leibniz Association; University of Vienna, Institute for Eastern European History

Datum, Ort: 26.04.2018–27.04.2018, Moscow

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What is an imperial city? What makes a city imperial? And how can studying cities help us to learn more about empires or vice versa? These were the questions targeted at the conference. Referring to existing concepts of colonial, port, or emerging cities, ESZTER GANTNER (Marburg) and ULRICH HOFMEISTER (Vienna) argued in their opening that a broader definition of an imperial city is needed since the dichotomy between colonial and imperial does not work in the three focused-upon empires, where many cities featured both characteristics. Therefore, they proposed a new approach connecting urban and imperial history, which was the setting of the conference. According to this approach Gantner and Hofmeister suggested *imperial city* as an umbrella term which firstly stands for a point of view or type of research, and secondly for a specific kind of city. They understood an imperial city as a place where the empire manifests itself, and which is marked by the imperial form of the state. They argued that a transnational comparison between cities in the three empires and the transfer of knowledge and knowhow from emerging to imperial cities or between empires as such is the main focus of the conference.

The first panel focused on cityscapes, because imperial cities claimed to represent the empire and provided space for different population groups. Therefore, questions of the extent of this claim or interaction between segregated areas or socially entangled areas were central. The panel was opened with

a keynote by ILYA GERASIMOV (Chicago), who focused on the optics of imperial cities through which they are recognized as such. From a social sciences point of view, he argued that the consideration of cityscapes is essential to understand the production of social space and the characteristics of each city, since Russian imperial cities at the turn of the 20th century were often migrant cities.

CLEMENA ANTONOVA (Sofia) also explored the question of different ethnic groups in her talk about Jewish cityscapes in Saint Petersburg and Vienna. She argued that empires were more successful in integrating them than nations using the concept of „selective integration“ by Benjamin Nathans.¹ According to Antonova, this policy was a good first step to integrate a small part of the minority groups, but in the end it prevented integration of the whole community and even created a wedge within the Jewish community. Unfortunately, she did not clarify the distinct „imperial“ character of the applied concept.

A different approach to the topic of cityscapes was presented by FLORIAN RIEDLER (Giessen), who focused on architecture as a special form of representation. He argued that border cities – in his case Niš, which was alternately part of the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empire – can show the transfer of ideas and influence they have across borders. According to him, the imperial character of the city – or its fortress in particular – was created in exchange and was even more important to both sides than imperial rivalry.

A similar approach was presented by GULCHACHAK NUGMANOVA (Moscow), who talked about the Russian city of Kazan' and the architectural visualization of the empire in the province. She presented different narratives that the empire tried to manifest via architecture, and argued that this was the quickest and most accessible way of implementing the imperial idea in the province of the empire.

ROBERT BORN (Leipzig) connected the two previous presentations to some extent when he argued that the imperial representation in the Banat region as a provincial border

¹ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale. The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, Berkeley 2002.

region manifested itself in architecture and the restructuring of the city of Timișoara. Furthermore, according to Born, the Banat can be viewed as an example of „colonialism without colonies“ of the Habsburg Empire and the restructuring of the city as a result of the narrative about the successful transformation of the area by the Austrians.

Since the imperial imprint of a city often outlives the demise of the empire, the second panel was dedicated to the afterlife of the empire and questions on how the imperial heritage was and is being dealt with. The panel was opened with a keynote by HEIDEMARIE UHL (Vienna), who talked about the changing views on Vienna in historiography over time. She presented different perspectives on „Vienna 1900“, which culminate in the anniversary of 2018. In her opinion, the Habsburg Empire already shifted to a *lieu de mémoire* in historiography.

In her talk, NİLAY ÖZLÜ (Istanbul) focused on the palaces of the three empires – Kremlin, Topkapı and Hofburg – which she understood as dynamic entities and a part of urban development. She further argued that they represent the empires' ability to transform themselves. Although the Kremlin and the Topkapı palaces were abandoned in favor of more modern places, they were still used for ceremonial or symbolic events and remained imperial spots. In addition to that, the palaces can be understood as agents and showcases for Modernization, Westernization and Urbanization because of touristic reasons, since some of them were already turned into museums during late imperial times. Özlü showed that all three palaces were reopened as museums after the empires' collapses, and that their legacies were exploited as strategies of the new regimes.

JOVANA KNEŽEVIC (Stanford) also argued that imperial practices were continued under new regimes yet showed that this is not only the case in empires but also in national states. Referring to her case study on Belgrade, which was first on the border between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empire, and then on the border between the Serbian national state and the Habsburg Empire, she showed how the Habsburg occupying forces during World War I strove to reimperialize the

city using various strategies.

OLGA ZABALUEVA (Linköping) focused on the imperial heritage of Zaryadye, a district of Moscow close to the Kremlin. She showed that over time different sovereigns tried to construct, deconstruct or reconstruct the imperial power, using the imperial narrative in their favor.

PIRO REXHEPI (Göttingen) talked about the politics of postcolonial erasure in Sarajevo. By reference to the reconstruction of the National Museum and the City Hall – former Habsburgian buildings –, he argued that politicians today try to link the imperial heritage to a national identity. But exactly these imperial markers have become instigators of civil protest, because the pre-Ottoman Bosnian national identity is being left out.

Modernization was the key word of the third panel, as capital and industry were often accumulated in imperial cities. Although they often presented themselves as sites of social and technological progress, the question is to what extent these endeavors manifested itself and how successful they were. EDHEM ELDEM (Istanbul) opened the panel with a keynote about the three empires in comparison while paying close attention to the question if they were really comparable. On the basis of Constantinople, he then argued that the Ottoman Empire maybe was not a real empire, since at the end of the 19th century it had gained a semicolonial status and its capital had also been peripheralized. He further reasoned that the three empires were not really comparable, especially regarding the infrastructure where the Ottoman Empire was always last.

ALEXIS HOFMEISTER (Basel) then analyzed four different port cities in relation to their economic function for the empire and their influence on its modernization. The cities were heavily affected by in-migration, which had an impact on the spatial order of the port cities. He argued that different groups of in-migrants had different functions in the imperial context, which also reflected on the public spaces and the imperial playground.

AIDA MURTIĆ (Heidelberg) on the other hand followed an architectural approach to analyze the modernizations of first the Ot-

toman and then the Habsburg Empire in Sarajevo. Her main assumption was the importance of urban fabric in order to understand modernity. With the focus on the Ottoman market area *Baščaršija* and two major fires in the city's history, she showed that both imperial approaches aimed for homogenizing the city and that the Austrian model preserved the matrix of the particular part of the old city as we know it today.

MICHEL ABESSER (Freiburg) presented two imperial cities in the Russian periphery – Rostov and Nakhichevan – that were nationally divided trading hubs with two different political and social structures. Over time the two cities slowly merged via infrastructure, but not on governmental level. He argued that in this particular case one should better talk about an imperial region instead of imperial cities since Rostov and Nakhichevan merged for the benefit of their economies. For this reason, he concluded that economic reasons were much more important than nationality.

In a closing résumé Eszter Gantner and Ulrich Hofmeister stated that the main questions of the conference were answered in different combinations or stress on the outcome. The interaction of the imperial framework and the settings in each city, however, were pointed out in almost every presentation. Referring to Henri Lefebvre's concept of city space², Gantner and Hofmeister finally suggested the three following coordinates by which imperial cities can be approached: physical space, social space, and the experienced level of the empire. Most of the findings of the conference are related to these three categories, which help to grasp the imperial character of a city.

The aim of the conference was not to define the term *imperial city* but to look for coordinates which make a city imperial. The approach of connecting imperial and urban history was truly not fulfilled in every presentation: some were more imperial, other more urban. Nonetheless, the conference showed that the topic of imperial cities linked to urban history in general has experienced increased interest. Especially the multilayered and interdisciplinary approaches – history, art history, architecture, and urban planning – helped to gain a broader first insight into the complexity

of the topic and methodology.

Conference program:

Opening:

Sandra Dahlke (DHI Moscow): Welcome

Eszter Gantner (Herder Institute, Marburg) and Ulrich Hofmeister (Vienna University): Introduction

Panel 1: Cityscapes

Ilya Gerasimov (Ab Imperio, Chicago): Key Note: The Elusive Metropolis: Seeing the Forest for Trees (and the City for the Buildings)

Clemena Antonova (Sofia University): Jewish Cityscapes in St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Istanbul as Models of In/ex/clusion

Florian Riedler (Giessen University): Niš as an Imperial Border City between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans

Gulchachak Nugmanova (Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and Town Planning, Moscow): Imperial Power, Imperial Identity and Kazan Architecture: Visualizing the Empire in 19th Century Russian Province

Robert Born (Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Leipzig): Divide et impera? Imperial Representation of the Banat Capital during the 18th Century and its Legacy

Panel 2: Afterlife of the Empire

Heidemarie Uhl (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna): Keynote: Changing Views on Vienna in the Historiography

Nilay Özlü (Boğaziçi University Istanbul): The Imperial Palaces in Comparative Perspective during the 19th and Early 20th Centuries: The Topkapı Palace, the Kremlin Palace, and the Hofburg Palace

Jovana Knežević (Stanford University): From Imperial Outpost to Multinational Capital: The Transformation of Belgrade, 1860s-1930s

Olga Zabalueva (Linköping University): (De)constructing Imperial Heritage: Moscow Zaryadye in Times of Transition

²Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford 1991.

Piro Rexhepi (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious / Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen): The Politics of Postcolonial Erasure in Sarajevo

Panel 3: Modernisation

Edhem Eldem (Boğaziçi University Istanbul):
Key Note: Imperial Cities – Three Empires in Comparison

Alexis Hofmeister (Basel University): Four Situative Cosmopolitan Cityscapes – one Paradigm? Ethnic and non-Ethnic Spaces in Late Imperial Riga, Salonika, Trieste and Odessa

Aida Murtić (Heidelberg University): Reconfiguring the Urban and the Monumental: (Bi)imperial Modernisations in Sarajevo

Michel Abesser (Freiburg University): Imperial Cities Merging – Rostov and Nakhichevan in the 19th and early 20th Century

Conclusion:

Eszter Gantner (Herder Institute, Marburg) and Ulrich Hofmeister (Vienna University):
Concluding Remarks

Tagungsbericht *Imperial Cities: The Tsarist Empire, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire in Comparison*. 26.04.2018–27.04.2018, Moscow, in: H-Soz-Kult 11.07.2018.