

## Conference

# Paths of Transition / Transformation. Local Societies in Southeastern Europe in Transition from Empires to Nation States after World War I

(23-24 November 2017, Graduate School for East and South East European Studies)

## Abstracts

Gefördert von:

**Paths of Transition / Transformation.**  
**Local Societies in Southeastern Europe in Transition from Empires to**  
**Nation States after World War I**

The dominant understanding of the end of WWI in Southeastern Europe is still marked by the emergence of nation states, rashly nationalizing institutions, space and people at the ruins of empires. The fall of empires certainly meant the end of a specific experience of state building and configuration, one based on the dominance of a metropolitan centre over peripheries that were ruled in a differentiated way. The prevailing system relied upon middlemen and the co-optation of local elites, the use of imperial figures, individuals with specific knowledge, experience and symbolic power to connect distant spaces. Although the empires turned to nationalizing themselves under the pressure of and challenge by the nation-state model, they still left a legacy that new nation states, also imperialising entities, could not easily dispose of. The events of WWI in Southeastern Europe enhanced these effects; military occupation and separate peace treaties opened up the way to colonial rule, wanton reconfiguration of boundaries and states, warlordism and adventurism, but also to ethnic engineering and ethnic cleansing usually associated with the toolkit of nation state rule.

The ensuing revolutions with their intent to empower new social groups and promote new habits and practices, just as the peace settlements favouring the establishment of nation states, seemed to promise a profound change in terms of claims for and methods of rule, delegitimising imperial order - the "empire ways" - of state management. With the new idea and legitimacy of statehood and the new, uniform and "homogeneous" states in the making, local societies had to face a period of transition, a systemic change that aimed at the profound reconfiguration of state and social relations. However, what seemed as a straightforward development at the general level did not necessarily mean a similar transformation (comprehensive and sustainable social change) for local and regional societies.

Uneven transition can be explained with a broad range of factors. Revealing how and why these were effective in certain cases and failed to have an effect on other ones is a key issue for understanding the transition process. Comparison of such disparate (or even similar) stories across space would allow for revealing these factors behind different local outcomes and paths of transition. The types of change in local societies, the potential to gain agency, the significance of the changes for individuals with varying social backgrounds are just a few of the many themes that can be brought to the fore when the focus rests on local cases and they are analysed through a comparative lens. Therefore, the conference attempts to bring together a wide range of case studies that present material for further comparisons and the comparative study of certain problems.

**Călin Cotoi (Bucharest)**

**Social Modernity and International Hygiene Conferences:  
Nation Building and Public Hygiene in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Romania**

In Central and Eastern Europe, a number of inter-mingled modern entities – nation, state, science, and the “social” – emerged, in new configurations, at the end of the nineteenth century. These modern-looking entities travelled through various transnational and imperial networks: as discourses; political, financial, and scientific elites; diplomas and certificates; technologies, practices, habits, and fashions. All these fragments were reassembled in local contexts by elites anxious to solve their local problems but also to retain enough resemblance with how these entities were deemed to look in their original places of origin.

I analyse a series of projects that created and instituted, locally, the social and the national as a series of failed but productive attempts. Their productivity is part of their failure, which is, usually, framed as such by later projects. These projects of social modernity, coalesced individuals, technologies, diplomas, and professional competences created in imperial contexts turned into local nation-building projects before WWI.

Border quarantine against cholera on the Prut river (part of a larger attempt by the Russian Empire to create epidemiologically safe border zones) failed from the perspective of public hygiene and sanitary policy, which attempted a neoquarantinist and sanitationist approach. By being framed as failing, quarantine opened a huge social space for the intervention of medicine and hygiene that was populated by Habsburg and French empire-bred professionals that spearheaded a project for the nationalization of the medical sciences. When public hygiene was seen as unable to solve the divides between nationalized profession and national body, or between rural and urban, new spaces of discourse and intervention opened up. In the cracks exposed by the failure of the public hygiene project there emerged the problems of the ethnic and racial constitution of the Romanian people and ways to manage it.

The International Sanitary Conferences – which were part of an important wave of internationalization at the end of the nineteenth century – were an attempt to create a commonly regulated European epidemiological space that would provide safe venues for commerce by dismantling internal quarantines and controlling external ones. I argue that these conferences created a space of legitimation for nation-building public hygiene strategies but also created a transnational (and trans-imperial) image of epidemiological Europe.

## **Enikő Dác (Munich)**

### **Transylvanian Local Society in Transition: Braşov and Sibiu**

In contrast to the national narratives, analyses on the local level show a nuanced picture of the realities of Greater Romania after WWI, where the established mechanisms of the local societies persisted and collided with the interests of the new state and interest groups.

Based mainly on the archive materials of the Directorate of the Police and General Safety (Siguranța) in Braşov for the transitional period 1919–1925, the Saxon National Council in Sibiu, and the local press, this paper focuses on the activity of the Siguranța and police agents in Braşov, one of the most important industrial centres, and Sibiu, temporarily the political centre of Transylvania.

The paper is concerned with the main strategies and mechanisms of the local authorities in keeping law and order and the way the local societies adapted to the new situation. Special emphasis is placed on the relationship of Siguranța with the Saxon National Council and the Kreisausschuss (District Committee) that represented the interests of the Saxon political elite.

## **Gábor Egry (Budapest)**

### **Shoulder to Shoulder? Local Professional Networks and Institutions, Local and Regional Solidarity in the Emerging Romanian Nation State 1918–1925**

Canonical narratives of the emerging Greater Romania emphasise the nationalizing character of the state, highlighting measures (legislation, administrative orders, human resources policy etc.) that discriminated against or were detrimental to national minorities. This paper examines the role professional networks and institutions established before the collapse of the Monarchy played in the way certain local societies dealt with those efforts. The two examples, secondary school teachers in Sigethu Marmatiei and public notaries in the Banat, represent different social contexts and milieus, but they both reveal subtle social factors behind the actual outcome of nationalizing policies that were rarely in line with the goals of nationalist activists.

Nevertheless, the examples provide an opportunity to evaluate the differences too. While the public notaries could use their interethnic network and corporatist institutions to safeguard their advantageous position and profitable jobs against the efforts of Bucharest to deprive them of their exclusive rights to issue authentic legal acts of private transactions, teachers in north-eastern Romania could only manage to acquire state employment in a thoroughly reformed education system, and this only at the price of pretending to adhere to the nationalizing politics. Still, these cases reveal how certain factors constrained the state and offered agency for individuals and institutions to promote their own interests, often at the price of deliberately sabotaging nationalizing actions.

## **János Fodor (Cluj-Napoca)**

### **György Bernády: A Case Study of a Post-Imperial Biography**

This paper summarizes the political activity of György Bernády (1864–1938), while discussing the importance of political biographies in the context of post-imperial transition. Bernády has become known to posterity as mayor of Marosvásárhely/Targu-Mures, prefect and prominent Transylvanian politician. His legacy can be analyzed in two major segments: during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (before 1918), where he was an important part of the Hungarian government's local executives, and as a liberal politician who had a great deal of experiences (growing up in an ethnically mixed area of Transylvania, his trip to the United States, etc.). Another major part of his political activity took place during the transition period, and in the Hungarian Party in Romania. After the revolutions, in 1919 he returned from Budapest to Romania, where he served as a leading figure of the Hungarian minority party. However, he was rather the representative of Budapest and also a middleman between the Bucharest elite and Hungarian capitalists. Besides his political connections, he represented the missing link in the minority party, which connected the middle, and working-class workers to the aristocratic and landed leadership. He had learned how to navigate between a distant center and a hostile local elite by drawing their attention to modernization efforts. This way his inter-state connections and his local knowledge made him an important figure during the years of political passivism, and his interactions with the new local elite and social groups made him an important asset to the community.

## **Johannes Gleixner (Munich)**

### **From the Countryside into the Center: Czech Progressives and the Notion of "Czech Socialism" as Republican Ideology**

By 1900 the "social question", which dominated the second half of 19<sup>th</sup>-century politics, had also produced several answers, leading to "socialism" as a host of ideas, which to most contemporaries seemed as inevitable as it was vague. The (self-declared) liberal and progressive part of Czech society had since the 1890es challenged the national (bourgeois) consensus by pointing precisely to the social changes within Czech society. Sympathetic as they were to Social Democracy, however, they never completely identified with the workers' movement and the system of international socialism.

Instead, they started to rely on a vague idea of Czech Socialism that brought with it certain political implications like a more aggressive anticlerical stance or the desire to transcend both liberal-bourgeois and socialist thinking within the framework of a new democratic nation. The progressives viewed themselves as engineers of a not only political, but also social as well as cultural transformation of Czech society as a whole long before the year 1914. In an era of mass politics, however, they lacked the political strength and leverage to bring about this change.

Already in 1917, before the final collapse of Austrian rule, they started to rally around the renewed idea of Czech Socialism as a future path for the nation, gathering mass appeal. When on the 28th of October 1918 the Czech national movement took matters into its own hands and created the new state that was to become Czechoslovakia, these ideas seemed to express the spirit of the time: to build a new, progressive, democratic, socialist nation. What heretofore had been a slow process of transformation accelerated into a rapid transition that called for the realization of political ideas. In my talk, I would like to show the build up to this notion of a transformative Czech socialism/progressivism and its temporary downturn before 1914. Principally, however, I would like to focus on the reactivation of these revolutionary ideas and attempts to implement them. Though not very numerous, the Czech progressives composed a surprisingly coherent revolutionary elite, shaping the image of a progressive society. At the same time, they had to tackle their old problem of lacking mass appeal. Further, I therefore would like to explore this tension between elite transition and mass transformation, which lay at the core of building a new progressive "Czech" ideology.

## **Ivan Jeličić (Trieste)**

### **Political Elites and Counter-Elites in a City Searching for a Place in the Post-Habsburg Era**

The city of Fiume (now Rijeka) was plausibly one of the territories facing the most complex position after the end of First World War. The breakup of the Monarchy was closely followed by national councils struggling for annexation to respective nation-states. Fiume was a place where D'Annunzio and his followers established a singular political project and, furthermore, a city with a solid tradition of autonomy that had a role in the creation of a short-lived independent state. Therefore, the transition from the (Austro-)Hungarian context to the Italian fascist nation-state was extremely complicated. Thus, it is not only difficult to trace the institutional continuity, but the heterogeneity of political forces does not facilitate potential studies. Before addressing the question of who is the new elite of 1924, the question is: what is it? Is it an expression of an Italian irredentist minority or the old municipal elite able to maintain its position, transforming itself in an expression of Italian nationalism? What if the dichotomy between Yugoslavs (Croats) and Italians was disputed even by local forces that were against any annexation?

Starting from a database of figures involved in the political life before and after 1918, the aim of the research is to address these questions. Particularly, how much continuity was there between the city council from 1901--1911 and the Italian national council in 1918? Do the members of the Italian national council have to be traced among the pro-government city council from the last years of Hungarian rule? What about the Constitutional Assembly in 1921, who were the figures involved in it and what happened to them after the annexation in 1924? More generally, are we faced with the emergence of a new political elite or are we unraveling an attitude of an old elite that opportunistically changed sides? The social extraction and social networks of figures of the local pre- and post-1918 political elites can give a more detailed answer to that question.

## **Ota Konrád (Prague)**

### **Violence, Nation and the New Order: The Bohemian Lands and Austria during the Transition Period, 1917–1923**

As part of the tumultuous post-war transition period, violence played an important role in the Habsburg successor states. With respect to violence in the immediate post-war period, research has focused on the phenomenon of paramilitary violence, especially when it comes to the region of East Central and Eastern Europe. Far less, if any, attention has been paid to other forms of violence in countries including Czechoslovakia and Austria, where fantasies of paramilitary violence did not materialize to the same degree as they did in Hungary, Upper Silesia or in the Baltic region. That being said, the diverse forms of violence were integral to shaping the post-war identities of countries across the European continent. The same is true for the analysis of violence. Scholarship on violence leaves little space for the less brutal violence of “ordinary people”. As I argue, however, going beyond paramilitary violence could shed light on specific notions about the forming social order. As such, popular violence can serve as a lens for the analysis of mentalities during the period of transition.

Based on this theoretical framework, my paper focuses on the regions of Bohemian Lands/Czechoslovakia and Alpine Lands/Austria between 1917 and 1923. Before 1918, both of these regions shared one common state framework. As a consequence, the popular violence was shaped by social issues and communicated protest against existing order equally in both territories. For Austria, the end of the war gave grounds for a post-war culture of defeat. In Czechoslovakia, conversely, the political and cultural elites of the new state saw the national state of the “Czechoslovaks” as being the winner of the war.

How, then, was this transition understood and articulated by “ordinary people”? As the paper suggests, while in Czechoslovakia the framework within which people were learning to understand the new world was shaped by the national and republican discourse oriented to the future, in Austria the collective identities and mentalities were being formed along the lines of particular party-political blocks. However, even if both countries left the war with divergent perspectives, the violence remained part of political culture, ready to be mobilized when needed. From this point of view, the period of transition appears crucial for both countries, shaping the understanding of the new order, the political culture as well as the new collective identities and their ruptures in the long term.

## **Jernej Kosi (Ljubljana/Graz)**

### **Transforming Local Identities: Prekmurje after the Dissolution of Austria-Hungary**

After the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, and subsequent years of revolution and counter-revolution that struck the Kingdom of Hungary, with the Treaty of Trianon (1920) “the great powers” decided to hand the western Hungarian region to the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. As one can imagine, Slovene nationalists organised massive festivities celebrating

the decision, and interpreted it as an annexation of their finally redeemed compatriots, who after 1,000 years of life under Hungarian serfdom had been allowed to unite with their “brothers” in the newly established political entity. However, as it soon came to the fore, the social and cultural reality of the region that was now officially recognized under its new name of “Prekmurje”, did not quite fit the ethnolinguistic premises held by the Slovene officials, who were sent there in order to establish a new administration and initiate the process of integration. The idea of Slovene ethnolinguistic unity, the very idea that was at the core of the Slovene national movement throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the heart of the Slovene state administration in the Kingdom of SHS from 1918 on was not always accepted with open arms and much enthusiasm by the finally liberated “brothers” in the region of Prekmurje.

The officials very soon became aware of the fact that many locals of Prekmurje were actually able to use a written language that they themselves recognised as Slovene. Yet, their Slovene was neither the same as the one the officials used nor did the locals recognize the language of the officials as Slovene. On top of that, the officials soon found out that the inhabitants of Prekmurje did in fact consider themselves to be Slovenes, but not in the way the officials expected they should. The local inhabitants, however, called the Slovene officials that were sent to the region “Slavs” or “Slavci”, and not Slovenes (“Slovenci”).

In this paper, I limit myself to the peripheral region of Prekmurje in the first years of its life in the newly established state, but seek to explain two broader and intertwining problems. Firstly, the persistence of the knotted local ethnic boundaries after the transition. And secondly, the processes of nationalization imposed by the Slovene officials who took over the administration in the newly acquired territory. The new Slovene administrative apparatus aimed to nationalize their new compatriots – the Slovenes, but then again not the same Slovenes. Unsurprisingly, the process was carried out mainly by schools and supported by newly established Slovene nationalist voluntary associations. On the whole, by analysing regional administrative sources and ego-documents written by locals, I wish to elaborate on the persistence of older ethnic categories and the role of the administration, which attempted to transform how the locals identified themselves.

## **Ségolène Plyer (Strasbourg)**

### **The Goodness of the Monarchy, the Gains of 1918.**

#### **German and Czech Change Experiences on a Regional Scale in Bohemia, 1914–1924**

Caught up in obvious institutional changes during the decade of the war (at the end of which the new Czechoslovak state considered the transition to be achieved), local actors of the semi-peripheral region of Eastern Bohemia also underwent long-term social transformations which have left traces in their dealing with public matters.

So the archives of local linen companies allow insights into the “total war” on a regional scale. The same orientation of views and targets led the administration and the manufacturers to cooperate closely in order to keep business going, including a risky expedition to Ukraine in the spring of 1917 to buy staples. This almost autarkic dealing of local matters resulted in the conviction that the

small, nearly monolingual entities (*Bezirke/okresy*) forming the region were able to gain some independence from the authorities on the national scale.

Another factor of change compared to 1914 was the complete democratization of political life after 1918. Wishing to avoid the Communist Party, local politicians therefore reorganized the balance of power in order to integrate former radicals, repressed before as enemies of the Austrian state (Czech anarchists, active in Náchod and Dvůr Králové around 1908, and German nationalists). Because they seemed to lack relevance on a national level, these regional shifts have been overlooked by the existing historiography, although they can partly explain how the political spectrum developed in the thirties.

The democratization extended to women, who gained the right to vote. Influenced by national differences between German-speaking and Czech-speaking groups, these new voters appear in public records from 1917 (demonstrations against food shortage) onwards (claim for better recognition of war invalids). Their demands, being at the crossroads between political (systemic) transition and social transformations, help to analyse the respective rhythms of changes on a regional level during the war and the first years of the Republic.

## **Julia Richers (Bern)**

### **Identifications in Transition: Interwar Biographies in Carpatho-Ukraine**

The paper is part of a research project on the transnational history of the Eastern Carpathians, a region considered the borderlands of both empires and new-born states. It explores the short-term and long-lasting effects the ever so often shifting borders had on the local population. Carpatho-Ukraine had been part of the Kingdom of Hungary for centuries. After World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it sought independence and proclaimed a Hutsul Republic. After six months, the short-lived republic failed when it was temporarily occupied by Romanian troops in June 1919. With the Paris Peace Treaties the whole Transcarpathian region was integrated into the First Czechoslovak Republic. The dismantling of the region – now called Podkarpatská Rus – started with the First Vienna Award in November 1938, when Hungarian-speaking areas had to be ceded to Hungary. On 15 March 1939, the remaining territory – calling itself Carpatho-Ukraine – declared its independence. The new-born republic was most likely the shortest-lived state in history, existing for a mere 27 hours. The very same day, the Hungarian army annexed the entire territory. This was a reoccurring experience for the local population. No less than six times in a lifetime, people changed the country they lived in, *nota bene* without once setting foot beyond their Carpathian town. The main objective of the research project is to analyse the Carpathians as a region beyond the nation-state. It asks for the impact of shifting borders on the local population. How did the ever-changing administrations impose their rules, how did they crave for loyalties? And in what way did the local population react towards the various nation-building projects? The paper will present a multi-level case study of the heterogeneous population having to readjust to constantly shifting boundaries and affiliations.

## **Attila Simon (Komárno)**

### **Alternativen des Machtübergangs. Kaschau 1918–1919**

Die Anatomie des Machtübergangs nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg in Mitteleuropa ist bis heute nicht genau beschrieben, und die lokalen Ereignisse sind nur partiell offengelegt. In meinem Vortrag stelle ich das Beispiel von Kaschau vor und schildere die dortige Variante des Machtübergangs.

Man kann sagen, dass so wie die tschechische politische Elite ihren eigenen Willen bezüglich der Staatsgrenzen durchsetzte, verwirklichte sie auch den Machtübergang nach eigenem Drehbuch. Prag entwickelte zwei Strategien: Nach der Besetzung von Oberungarn bevorzugte man vor allem die Lösungen ohne Gewalt, um den Widerstand der örtlichen Bevölkerung zu vermeiden. Später hielten man sich jedoch in der Anwendung von Gewalt nicht zurück. Der Grund war in beiden Fällen die einseitige Geltendmachung der tschechoslowakischen Interessen sowie die Ablehnung der konsensualen Lösungen.

Der Fall Kaschau ist insoweit bemerkenswert und einzigartig, dass dort der Konsens zwischen der örtlichen Bevölkerung und der neuen Macht eine Zeit lang möglich zu sein schien.

## **Rok Stergar (Ljubljana)**

### **"We will make fools of ourselves if nothing comes of Yugoslavia"**

#### **Transition from the Habsburg Empire to Yugoslavia from a Native Perspective**

On October 29, 1918, the establishment of a new State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was proclaimed in Ljubljana and Zagreb. The new state was supposed to comprise all the former territories of Austria-Hungary inhabited by South Slavs and was to be their independent nation-state.

It quickly established its organs of power and governmental agencies and tried to gain control of all the territories it claimed for itself. Symbols of Habsburg rule were swiftly removed and replaced by new flags and statues. The transition—the so-called national revolution—proceeded rapidly and almost unopposed.

However, a changed perspective shows a slightly different picture. What looks like a clean break in retrospect did not appear so straightforward at the time. Observing this process 'from below', from the 'perspective of natives', we can see a time of uncertainty, a longer period of transition. Also, it becomes clear that the outcome was far from certain.

Using the diary of Fran Milčinski, a judge and a writer from Ljubljana-Laibach, and a number of similar sources, I will re-examine the established interpretation of the transition from the Habsburg Empire to Yugoslavia, as the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was often called, and put forward a more nuanced telling of the story.

## **Svetlana Suveica (Regensburg/Chişinău)**

### **(Post-imperial) Identities on the Russian-Romanian Borderland: The Biography Twists of Panteleimon V. Sinadino**

In 1918, the former Russian gubernia of Bessarabia changed its political status to that of an autonomous republic, then into a province of Romania. New political circumstances forced the representatives of the local elite to review their political and social affiliations, resolve loyalty dilemmas, experiment with adaptation and resistance strategies, embrace new mobility choices, and review their feelings of belonging. The case study of the former mayor of Chisinau and landowner Panteleimon V. Sinadino, researched based on personal correspondence and other primary sources, shows that under new political and social circumstances, which bore expectations as well as disappointments, he performed a dual role: while remaining an eager and engaged supporter of the restoration of Greater Russia and the return of Bessarabia to its pre-war borders, he assumed new political roles and public duties under the Romanian regime.

## **Thomas Varkonyi (Vienna)**

### **“Galicia” as an anti-Semitic code in Hungary (and Austria) during and after The Great War**

One of many pejorative code-names for Jews in Hungarian – even today – is the moniker of ‘Galician’, often in connection with the description as the ‘Legion’ or ‘Horde’ of ‘Galician Riff-Raff’. The ‘Galicia’ moniker first came into prominence during and after The Great War, when refugees from Galicia came to Hungary and Austria. Both Hungarians and Austrians at that time used ‘Galician’ to pejoratively denote Jews. In Austria this term disappeared in the years after the Shoah. In Hungary it did not. The related discourse between 1917 and 1925 provides fascinating insights into the needs of politicians and the media to solve a problem that was far greater in the imagination than it was in fact.

This paper focusses on the historic development of the ‘Galician Problem’ in the wake of The Great War, its role in the establishment of ‘new’ nation states, and hints at some possible answers to why historic developments differ so much in the eponymous successor states of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

**Eric Beckett Weaver (Debrecen)****The Nation that Was Not to Be. Reactions of Bunjevci and other South Slavs in Hungary to Revolution and State Change at the End of the First World War**

Throughout the First World War, enormous pressure was exerted on national and ethnic minorities in the Kingdom of Hungary to conform to demands for fealty to both the Habsburg imperial ideal and the Hungarian state. These demands were couched in terms of the greater good for the empire and state, and those who were seen as falling short of such demands were subject to the most brutal treatment, including arrest, internment, and even summary execution. While the war brutalized the entire population regardless of ethnicity, minorities – and above all certain suspect groups of Slavs – were particularly damaged. The general exhaustion, and accompanying demand for revolutionary change, noted throughout the old monarchy, might therefore be expected to have been much more intense among minority groups. But a closer examination of the micro-level among certain Slavic minorities living within Hungary, particularly South Slav groups who might have been the most brutalized, reveals more nuanced and compromising attitudes toward revolutionary changes in state and society. A micro-examination of one South Slav minority in particular, the Bunjevci, who lived scattered throughout old Hungary, reveals a wide range of attitudes, hopes, and fears related to change, and – more than any clear idea of how things must change – an abiding and general insecurity toward a kaleidoscope of authorities regardless of the direction of change, that was presented by these very authorities, time and again, as occurring for the benefit of the minorities in general and the Bunjevci in particular, and the states in which they were to live.