Austria-Hungary and its imperial challenges in the 19th and early 20th century: Nationalism and Rivalry in the Habsburg Empire, in Europe and around the world

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2nd Annual Conference of the Max Weber Foundation, 28th-30th November 2016, Warsaw
Max Weber Foundation / German Historical Institute Warsaw and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War Graz, in cooperation with the GrazMuseum / City Archive Graz.
Concept: Stephan Lehnstaedt (DHI Warsaw), Bernhard Bachinger (BIK Graz) and Dornik (Stadtarchiv Graz).

The multiethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire was one of the dominating powers in Central Europe during the "long 19th century". Austria-Hungary was able to continue its territorial expansion up to 1912 and even during the First World War. Nonetheless, throughout the whole period its status as a Great Power was challenged on many fronts. From the outside rivals such as Imperial Germany, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire exerted pressure, whilst internally ever-increasing nationalism presented the Habsburg Empire with challenges that were to prove insurmountable.

Research on this aspect of European history has been given far too little attention over the years. On the international scene, it is ethnic tensions that have attracted the bulk of research. In Germany, research on Austria-Hungary has largely been limited to key areas such as Galicia. Whilst other countries are more forthcoming - the Polish Academy of Sciences for example, maintains a research institute in Vienna, Germany has - with the exception of the DHI in Warsaw - no analogous presence in any of the succession states of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

In the light of these findings the Max Weber Foundation – spearheaded by the DHI Warsaw and in cooperation with the two co-organizers – would like to gather scientific evidence to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and set up an international network to stimulate new theses and projects. In pursuit of these aims advanced research into nationalism will be set against the background of international politics, a correlation which has often been overlooked in recent times. Such an approach will enable a step by step examination of the main challenges faced by imperial powers.

We are looking to provide an extensive range of geographical examples to provide a rich and varied source of data for comparison. With this in mind we especially welcome papers which include a comparative approach of their own. We are careful not to lay down any methodological straitjacket -
there are many different disciplines that could address the topic. Cultural history, history of reception or perception, research on nationalism, postcolonial studies and transnational history all offer possible avenues of approach, but this list is far from exhaustive. Particularly when addressing points 3 to 6 we must be careful not to restrict our perspective to the capital cities (Vienna/Budapest). Rather, we must look at the topic from the point of view of those various groups, nations or states which have been in conflict-ridden relations with the central government and its representatives.

By 31 May 2016, we aim to solicit proposals for several 20 minute oral presentations addressing questions from (at least) the following range of topics:

1. How did Austria-Hungary function as an empire? What effects did German supremacy have on policies relating to nationality and on the bi-lateral relationship with Hungary? Was Habsburg colonialism perceived differently in Europe and in Asia? What have scholars had to say on the matter?

2. What did Austro-Hungary’s foreign policy rivals think about the Habsburg Empire? What were their interests and how did they seek to implement them? What were the main points of dispute - particularly with regard to national issues?

3. What were the dynamics developed by the various national movements within the Dual Monarchy? What was the relationship between periphery and center? How did they respond to the politics of difference - how did they adapt? What stakeholder groups were active, what did they do and how successful were they? What were their various strategies?

4. What role did transnational groups (such as the workers' movement) play in the resistance against the centers of power in Vienna and Budapest? What united them? Was there genuine cooperation against the center between different nationalities within the Habsburg Empire? What was its agenda, and how did it cope with mutual differences? How did it formulate policy? What role did national relations within the Habsburg Monarchy play in context of the constellation of powers or strategies of powers? What lessons can be learned from a comparison of how the Habsburg Monarchy dealt with ethnic and cultural diversity and how other Empires managed this area? Can any common patterns be discerned?

5. What was the role played by towns in providing common living space for different cultural milieus? Does each town influence the views taken by its populace concerning national hegemony and national homogeneity? How were disputes resolved? How did regional commercial and administrative centres interreact with the twin capitals of the Monarchy?

6. How can the imperial challenges faced by the Habsburg monarchy be compared with those of other empires? Of particular interest might be examples of similar or different strategies dealing with particular problems. This should facilitate the development of a global perspective.

Travel costs for participants will be provided, as will accommodation and meals in Warsaw. As well as agreeing to give a presentation, participants should submit a 20-25 page article for the planned anthology by the end of 2016. Simultaneous translation is provided at the conference for German and English, so presentations may be given in either language.
Proposals should be sent by April 30, 2016 to Stephan Lehnstaedt (lehnstaedt@dhi.waw.pl) and to Bernhard Bachinger (bernhard.bachinger@bik.ac.at) who will be happy to answer any questions.

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