

## BOOK REVIEW

Horel, C. (2023). *Multicultural Cities of the Habsburg Empire 1880-1914. Imagined Communities and Conflictual Encounters*. Budapest, Vienna. New York: Central European University Press. 556 p. ISBN: 978-963-386-289-6.

The book by French historian Catherine Horel offers an original approach to the history of urban spaces, conducting a comparative investigation of cities from various parts of the Habsburg Empire with the aim to analyze the manifestations of multiculturalism in the context of mobility intensified by industrial development, railway system expansion, educational opportunities, urbanization, and constant changes in the landscape.

The research is focused on twelve cities across Austro-Hungary: Brno and Bratislava in the west, Lviv (Lemberg) and Czernowitz (Cernăuți) in the north, Oradea, Arad, and Timișoara in the east, Szabadka (Subotica), Sarajevo, Zagreb, Fiume (Rijeka), and Trieste in the south. These cities are mid-sized, with populations ranging between 50,000 and 200,000. The author chose more cities from the Hungarian part of the empire because, on one hand, the military border and colonization favored multiculturalism, and on the other hand, there is less research dedicated to cities in Transleithania. The capitals (Vienna, Prague, Budapest) were excluded because they have already received considerable attention from numerous researchers. Additionally, another consideration was the necessity to represent all nationalities of the monarchy (Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Ruthenians, Romanians, Serbs, Croats, Italians, Slovaks, Slovenes) and all the religious denominations (Jews, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Muslims, etc.).

The comparison of the cities was based on aspects regarding daily life: the spoken language, religion, associations, the school system, arts, political implication, urban development. The author took into consideration, in addition to the specific methodology of history, approaches from the perspectives of geography, anthropology, literature, and art history, conducting interdisciplinary research. The sources used were numerous and varied. Reports and other materials published by the cities themselves, city council debates, and publications from local associations show how the city chose to communicate and present itself.

The scientific works of local historians and scientists highlight how they perceived the city as a meeting point between diverse concepts and ideas. An important part of the research was the discourse analysis, from which the image of the cities emerged, with the main source for this being the local press.

The book is structured into eight chapters, supplemented by annexes that provide relevant statistics, a bibliography, and an index of names and key terms.

The first chapter provides an overview of the legislation from both the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the empire concerning municipalities and addresses the status of each of the 12 cities, some of them capitals of historical provinces (Brno, Lemberg), others of hereditary crown lands (Zagreb), or more recently conquered provinces (Cernăuți, Sarajevo). Each of the twelve cities holds its own historical, political, cultural, economic, and religious significance, but what distinguishes the cities of Cisleithania from those of Transleithania is primarily the population size, with cities in the Austrian part of the empire having a larger population. Also, Austria was conceived as a dynastic state, with provinces belonging to it, but in Hungary prevailed the idea of a centralized state. The author analyzes the evolution of each city from 1880 to 1914, with urbanization, industrialization, and intense migration from the countryside to the city shaping the urban space.

The second chapter, titled *Austro-Hungarian Tower of Babel: The City and Its Languages*, addresses one of the main elements of multiculturalism: linguistic diversity. While the linguistic landscape of the city (reflected in street names, shop signs, etc.) was a subject of controversy between nationalists and representatives of minority groups, linguistic loyalty was characterized more by fluidity, oscillating depending on age, gender, status, profession, etc. The soundscape of the cities was polyphonic, with interactions between various linguistic groups shaping dialects and influencing the aspects of spoken languages, beyond the school system.

A form of identification much less malleable than language was religious affiliation, with confessional diversity being the theme of the next chapter. Churches of different denominations and synagogues played a very important role in giving the urban landscape a multicultural aspect. Traditionally, churches promoted loyalty to the state and the emperor; however, religion has been given national implications, so the construction of as imposing and representative places of worship as possible in the most favorable parts of the cities has become a matter of national pride.

Religion was no longer a sufficient element for defining identity; language and culture tended to surpass it in importance. Chapter 4, aptly titled “*Schools: Places to Learn Multiculturalism or Factories of the Nation?*”, addresses how political discourse transformed the education issue into a nationality problem. The city's elite held language hegemony and enforced it in schools, and every city wishing to present itself as a promoter of education strove to build new schools. This was a crucial aspect for minority groups too, who were eager to refute the inferiority label imposed by the nationalists from the majority group. The school issue evolved into a competition among various national groups for access to culture and the right to establish institutions promoting national consciousness. Despite the intense and widely expressed controversy, citizens were not as eager to embrace the educational cause as nationalists desired, accepting the promotion of cultural diversity in schools.

Chapter five analyzes cultural institutions in cities from the perspective of multiculturalism and national discourse. The constitutional era that began in 1867 favored the proliferation of cultural, economic, and sports associations, the construction of theaters, as well as the printing of periodicals. Although nationalists tried to give a national color to these projects, the new schools and theaters, regardless of the group that initiated them, were often perceived by citizens as expressions of modernity and motives for city patriotism. Newspapers belonging to various interest groups identified dangers everywhere, but they did not always succeed in mobilizing citizens as they would wish.

Between 1880-1914, the landscape of cities underwent radical changes. They expanded, suburbs were united with the city, new streets were built, old ones were asphalted. Additionally, the cities were connected to the railway network and equipped with train stations, wider boulevards were created, parks were established, imposing buildings were constructed, and monuments were erected. The sixth chapter focuses on the comparative approach of these changes, discussing them both as expressions of the zeitgeist (modernization, sanitary progress, etc.) and of local ambitions and political objectives, as they were implemented by various actors such as the state, municipality, ethnic and confessional groups. Undoubtedly, there are similarities in the shaping of urban space, stemming from the use of the same architects for representative buildings, through the imitation of a common model (usually the capital), by imposing political visions (mainly those of the dominant nation), but there are also buildings that symbolized the presence of certain national groups.

The political landscape, analyzed in the next chapter, completes the image of the cities and shows the increasingly strong manifestation of national conflicts, while local authorities sought to encourage dynastic and provincial patriotism to temper nationalist manifestations.

The last chapter deals with the mechanisms of integrating the new city dwellers and promoting city patriotism, aiming to unite all citizens, regardless of language and confession. Loyalty towards the city, the province, as well as towards the dynasty, were forms of identification that transcended national identity and were promoted by the urban elite. In the case of the cities of Cernăuți and Sarajevo, central authorities made efforts to build “Habsburg cities” and implement the imperial model through institutions and monuments, in a blatant colonizing approach.

In conclusion, “the world of the Habsburg cities was a dynamic space where many models coexisted and created vitality, emulation, and conflict”. Multiculturalism manifested in various forms (languages spoken, religions, cultural associations, schools, art, periodicals, etc.) in a continuously changing urban landscape, where national conflicts coexisted with a sense of city, regional, and dynastic patriotism.

From reading the book emerges the image of a multiethnic empire that was neither a “graveyard for nationalities,” nor an ideal space for the expression of multiculturalism. The author proposes a balanced approach, well-documented and presented in an engaging style, making the work an original and highly valuable contribution to the history of urban space in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

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