

BOOK REVIEW

CATHERINE HOREL, *Multicultural Cities of the Habsburg Empire 1880–1914. Imagined Communities and Conflictual Encounters*, Budapest – Vienna – New York: CEU Press, 2023, 556 p.

Urban history is more than just a biography of a city: it is a lens through which one can view a particular section of a society. In conjunction with modern historiographical approaches, urban history has emerged as an innovative micro-historical perspective. It helps us to analyze e.g. political and social modernization in the 19th century and goes far beyond the narration of chronological developments in a city or its legal setting. It contributes to research of the societal, cultural and even economic vibrancy or its failure in urban environments, since cities are always hubs of communication because of their dense population. Moreover, its perspective on the microlevel of a society even allows us to develop counter-narratives to the national ones from a bottom-up perspective. In this respect, the multiethnic cities of Eastern Europe have become a special focus of historical research, in which the multi-layered ethnic and denominational structures are examined – numerous innovative studies have been published in recent years. Less attention has been paid to the smaller provincial capitals and especially to the cities of the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, not least because of the multiple language skills which are necessary for reading sources. For the author, this was therefore an important incentive to carry out a “comparative study of the entire Habsburg Empire as a common space in which multiculturalism was expressed in the life of the cities,” as the national struggle was also a “struggle for the city.” Important for the evaluation of urban history is her starting premise that “the city can be seen as a mental map and as a product of culture” (p. 3).

In her magnum opus, Catherine Horel presents a comparative study of 12 multiethnic cities from all regions of Trans- and Cisleithania, examining the development of urban societies as special “imagined communities” and their “conflictual encounters” in eight main chapters. Starting from the premise that the understanding of empire was shaped by the associated territory and the ruling dynasty, Horel uses the analytical concept of “multiculturalism” in her study to characterize the coexistence of different languages and religions. Cities are therefore multicultural “when groups gathering along these different affiliations are visible and audible in the landscape” (p. 13). The study therefore focuses on four “midsize” Cisleithanian cities (Brünn/Brno, Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv, Czernowitz/Cernăuți/Černovici, and Trieste/Trieste/Trst) and

seven Transleithanian cities (Poszony/Pressburg/Bratislava, Nagyvárad/Oradea/Arad, Temesvár/Temeschburg/Timișora/Temišvar, Szabadka/Maria Theresiopol/Subotica, Sarajevo, Zagreb/Agram/Zágráb, and Fiume/Rijeka) at the height of political, cultural and socio-economic modernization and its consequences for urbanization.

Horel first characterizes these cities by outlining their legal foundations and urban development. She discusses the language problem in Austria-Hungary, multilingualism, and professional mobility, before finally outlining the “language(s) of the city,” the city-specific hybrid forms resulting from multilingualism. Horel then devotes the next main chapter to multi-religiosity, its representation in the public sphere, and the question of the particularities of conversions and mixed marriages. In the fourth main chapter, the author asks whether schools were “places of learning multiculturalism or factories of the nation,” before describing cultural institutions such as theaters, choirs, and the press as specific agents of nationalization in the fifth main chapter. The sixth main chapter then deals with urban development and the modernization of urban space, before Horel discusses “politics in the city” in the seventh main chapter, focusing on the rising politicization of the population. The title of the eighth main chapter, “Sharing the City,” refers to the possible coexistence in cities, for example with regard to urban patriotism and expressions of loyalty to the imperial dynasty. This chapter provides important impulses for further research, as Horel also discusses problems of internal colonization in the case of Czernowitz and Sarajevo as two “constructed Habsburg cities.” Horel notes that urban patriotism was ultimately based on the transnational connection to the dynasty, because it was equally necessary for all inhabitants. Horel particularly elaborates her perspective of “constructed Habsburg cities” in her conclusion, noting that the cities themselves were subject to internal colonization through migration because they challenged the social and ethnic fabric. At the same time, however, these migrants were colonized by urban policies. This finding, in particular, extends beyond the cases studied and may offer a useful perspective for cities outside of the Habsburg Monarchy, for example.

By analyzing and depicting everyday life, such as societies, schools, as well as the urban economy and local politics, she sought to distance herself from two simplistic discourses: the glorification of the Habsburg monarchy as a multiethnic paradise on the one hand, and the exaggeration of the nationality conflict on the other. By examining the micro level, everyday life, as well as the groups that migrated to the cities, Horel thus traces the development of mass politics in the cities to show how a separate, local identity was formed in the cities and how cities were imagined as a special environment. Herewith, her

analysis is based on the premise of a “double effect” of urban modernization, provoked by the competitive struggle between cities and their fragmentation into different groups.

Catherine Horel based her study on printed sources and literature in all the languages of the nationalities concerned, which is in itself an outstanding achievement. Only in this way can the perspectives of all national groups be taken into account. This diversity contains the potential for several errors, e.g. orthographic non-English terms have sometimes been overlooked in the text itself: e.g. the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) national representation in Lemberg should be spelt (Ukrainian) “narodnyj dim” and not “dom” (p. 368). As the author explains in her preface, the study was completed after about 20 years of research. As a consequence, only a very few of the studies on East Central European urban history published in the last 10 years, which have provided a fresh perspective through new approaches, have been taken into account. From the reviewer’s point of view, it would also have been desirable if the longer sections introducing the main chapters and further reflective passages had included more extensive footnotes, e.g. with regard to lacking reference to Jan Křen’s concept of the “conflict community” (p. 203) or the “race towards modernity” (p. 61, first introduced by Jan Behrends and Martin Kohlrausch in 2014); while the reference to Křen is only made in the conclusion (p. 494). These minor criticisms, which are not decisive for an overall assessment of this important work, are in the nature of such a multilayered and comprehensive work, which primarily aims to provide a comparative elaboration of structural developments and challenges as well as *differentia specifica* of the respective cities.

A particular merit of the study is that it broadens the perspective from the capital to minor provincial capitals particularly in Hungary. It even includes Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina with its large Muslim population, which has received little attention to date and provides a *tertium comparationes*. It should also be emphasized that women and Jews are particularly highlighted as actors in the cities, e.g. in associations or with regard to education. This inclusive approach is essentially missing in most urban history studies written from a national perspective. All in all, Catherine Horel’s study is an important comparative compendium of Habsburg urban history, which will serve as a central basis for anyone working on the Habsburg Monarchy and its national conflicts in the future.

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