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ARBEITSVORHABEN

An Invisible Empire? The Austro-Hungarian Economic Space in Southeast Europe 1890–1940: Actors, Structures, Embeddedness, Factors of Resilience

This project connects the economic history of the late 19th and early 20th century with the recent trend of looking at Austria-Hungary as an imperial/colonial actor in relation to the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire. Unconventionally but productively using the dissolution of the monarchy as its conceptual starting point, which offers insights into the less visible practices and meanings of the empire before 1918, it aims at revealing 1) how Austro-Hungarian imperialism reached Southeast Europe and integrated it into its economic sphere, 2) the place of this economic space between the European and global ones, and 3) how its post-WWI transformation from more direct forms of asset ownership to indirect ones created a laboratory of financialization of capitalism. The continuity of Austro-Hungarian businesses in the face of economic nationalist policies after 1918 highlights the importance of their previous practices of local embedding for the persistence of this space after the political structure that supported business expansion disappeared. This reinterpretation of Austro-Hungarian presence contributes to the understanding of the embedding of economic activity through interactions, how these interactions created structural features for the economy, and how the legal and political changes after 1918 did not change the interactional embeddedness, while the reconfiguration of structures still changed the face of capitalism to a more financialized one.

Recommended Reading

Egry, Gábor. "Unholy Alliances? Language Exams, Loyalty, and Identification in Interwar Romania." *Slavic Review* 76, no. 4 (2017): 959–982.

–. *The Empire's New Clothes: How Austria-Hungary's Legacy Kept the Successor States Running*. Austrian Studies Lecture. Leiden: Foundation for Austrian Studies, 2022.

–. "The Rise of Titans? Economic Transition and Local Elites in Post-1918 Banat and Transylvania." *European Review of History/Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 31 (forthcoming).

with and without Empire

Did Austria-Hungary have colonies? Was it an empire similar to its peer great powers France, Germany, Britain, or Russia? Was its dismemberment an economic catastrophe that brought about fragmentation, economic nationalism, and autarky, and ultimately authoritarian political turns in Central and Eastern Europe? These are just a few of the questions that seemed settled even a decade ago, only to reemerge and vex historians around the hundred-year anniversary of World War I. Today it is more common to read in professional historical accounts about how Bosnia-Herzegovina was colonized (with the massive involvement of Czechs), how the Monarchy at least aspired to become a modern colonial empire, or – probably the most surprising of all after the previous very convincing argument about the links between the end of World War I, the Great Depression, and the emergence of authoritarianism – how its successor states continued to be each other's most important economic partners.

I'm a historian and therefore it should not be too surprising that I share with my colleagues this newfound fascination with the Monarchy. Not least because it can help tell a story that has the potential to challenge established national histories – in which the commonplace narrative of Austria-Hungary is the foundation for regarding one's nation as a victim and a means of shedding responsibility even today. Nevertheless, in this talk I will set a much more limited goal for myself. Starting from the surprising but very successful survival of Austrian and Hungarian businesses in the successor states, I will ask how and why they succeeded. This quest for an answer leads me to issues like: What is an economic space? How does it operate, and who are the actors crucial for its management? Is there a moral economy within? How is it related to imperialism – both formal and informal? While these are admittedly very abstract questions, I promise to focus on people and their interactions and the many surprising stories I have found in the archives while traveling between Prague, Trieste, Constantinople, Bucharest, Zagreb, and many small places rarely shown on the conventional large-scale maps of Europe.

PUBLIKATIONEN AUS DER FELLOWBIBLIOTHEK

Egry, Gábor (New York, NY,2026)

Central European elites in post-imperial transition : locality, agency, capital

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1967043108>

Egry, Gábor (West Lafayette, Ind.,2025)

Ethnicizing Europe : hate and violence after Versailles

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1936682354>

Central European Studies

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Egry, Gábor (London [u.a.],2024)

The rise of Titans? : economic transition and local elites in post-1918 Banat and Transylvania

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Egry, Gábor (München,2023)

The moral economy of high imperial capital? : the (non-)nationalization of foreign companies in post-WWI Romania and the idea of a Romanian national economy

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1919819215>

Egry, Gábor (Berlin,2023)

Unlikely Brothers? : entangled Székely and Moți Peripheries in a Contested Province ; Transylvania 1900–1944

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1919773622>

Egry, Gábor (Leiden,2020)

The empire's new clothes : how Austria-Hungary's legacy kept the successor states running

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Unruly borderlands : border-making, peripheralization and layered regionalism in post-First World War Maramureş and the Banat

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Egry, Gábor (Lanhan [u.a.],2020)

Beyond electioneering : minority Hungarians and the vision of national unification

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1919826483>

Egry, Gábor (Lublin,2020)

The greatest catastrophe of (post-)colonial Central Europe : the 100th years anniversary of Transilvania and official politics of memory in Hungary

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1919821171>