



CEU DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

The Doctoral Thesis in Comparative History

by

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on

**Experts in the Bureau: Private Clerks and Capitalism in the Late
Habsburg Monarchy**

will be held on

Friday, 20 December 2019, 16:00 pm

in

**Senate Room
Central European University (CEU)
Budapest—1051 Nádor u. 9.**

Examination Committee

Mária M. Kovács – Chair (Nationalism Studies, CEU)
Susan Zimmermann – Supervisor (Department of History, CEU)
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*The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection. Should you wish to access it, please contact
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ABSTRACT

The dissertation offers a social and intellectual history of private clerks employed in banking and insurance in the Habsburg Monarchy between the Gründerzeit of the 1850s and the aftermath of the Great War. It raises the question, how did the mindset, habitus, and ideology of private clerks become constitutive of the changes the modernizing society and economy of the Habsburg Monarchy went through in this period, and how can their understanding of modernity be contrasted to other answers offered to the “great transformation” of the nineteenth century. The dissertation relies on three clusters of theoretical and historiographical ideas to address Habsburg modernity from the perspective of private clerks: the conceptualization of capitalist modernity by Werner Sombart and Max Weber; the rise of numbers and the historical development of credibility in quantification; and the presupposition of a “Habsburg society” and a common Habsburg framework for the social and intellectual history of private clerks. Through the lens of this conceptual framework, the dissertation can bypass the shortcomings of modernization theories and the normativity of descriptions like “failed”, “uneven”, and “belated” modernization to produce a comprehensive account of the “great transformation” in Central Europe in its larger contexts.

The development of financial capitalism in the Habsburg Monarchy produced its own cadre of professionals in the form of bookkeepers, correspondents, cashiers, and so forth. The need for specialized workforce brought about the emergence of vocational schooling on the secondary level beginning in the late 1850s and the Handelsakademien represented a direct competition for classical secondary schools. Private clerks typically graduated from a trade school in the period under scrutiny and the systematic discrimination against women in the sector became the main component of discrimination against women in the bureau. Their labor movements sought to improve the legal and financial situation of private employees; this involved the creation of firm social frontiers between the working classes (both in trade and industry) and private clerks as well as the affirmation of their belonging to the Bildungsbürgertum. Efforts in the systematization of vocational education also targeted at establishing the group as part of the educated gentlemanly middle-classes with the help of prerogatives such as the Matura and the one-year voluntary service of graduates (Einjährige-Freiwilligkeit).

The activities of private clerk associations were closely entangled with the development of state interventionism that was often equally sought for and disapproved of by the social group. Efforts at class formation challenged the capacity of the state to enforce civil and political rights against the power of economic elites, for example in the form of the right to association, and private clerks also regarded state protectionism as the only way to ensure employees’ rights. The development of the welfare state represented the most significant difference between the two states of the Habsburg Monarchy: in Cisleithania, a parliamentary law was passed concerning the compulsory old age pensions of private employees in 1906 that both contributed to the class

formation of private clerks and established the legal grounds of their (irrevocable) rights to old-age pensions. In contrast, there was no similar legislation in Hungary and private clerks remained at the mercy of their employers in matters of pensions and other welfare provisions.

Social categories like nationality and gender intersected the development of the social group. Language differences were differently approached by dominant and minority ethnic groups in both halves of the Habsburg Monarchy. Dominant groups like the Magyars in Transleithania and German-Austrians in Cisleithania characterized ethnic differences as irrelevant from the perspective of private clerk interests and showed no interest in the affairs of non-Magyars in Hungary and chose an integrationist strategy in Cisleithania. The numerical growth of private clerks after the turn of the century coincided with their increasing discrimination on multiple levels. Women were systematically discriminated in the educational system, including professional education, and entered the job market with a considerable disadvantage compared to men. Discrimination against women was equally practiced by employers and employee associations. Employers willingly profited from the “capitalist exploitation” of female clerks and offered lower salaries, lesser career advancement, and curtailed old-age pension rights of women to maximize their profit. Male dominated employee associations and trade unions also discriminated against female clerks by first excluding them from interest group organizations and then by consciously neglecting the issues of female clerks, themselves profiting from the gender pay gap and speaking up against gender equality in education.

The experts and professionals that populate the universe of this thesis often turned to quantification and used “mechanical objectivity” to gain public credibility. In debates over old-age pensions, mathematicians were forced to share the “secret of actuarial calculations” with the public to gain credibility. Similar discussions arose concerning the validity of mortality rates. Both statisticians and actuaries participated in the growth of quantification but with particular motivations. They took different interests in the law of large numbers: the statistician was keen to identify the pathological in order to further social reform, while the actuary was interested in normalcy inasmuch as it guaranteed the future viability of the insurance company. Their role was to predict the future based on past events in contrast to the statistician who wanted to change it. Trust in numbers, though, was not the only way to create public credibility in capitalist endeavors. Credit cooperatives turned to the idea of community as a potential guarantee of financial solvency. Banks firmly resisted offering credit to small landowners and peasants but were willing to cope with the collective liability of a village community in which cooperative members knew each other and put constraints on each other. Business transactions were based on personal trust and knowledge of the member’s financial circumstances, but cooperatives also put efforts in social considerations. They functioned therefore in a much less quantified world that helped to counterbalancing the socially negative effects of capitalist transformations in agriculture.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Mátyás Erdélyi

EDUCATION

MA in Comparative History (CEU, 2012)

MA in Sociology (ELTE, 2010)

BA in Philosophy (ELTE, 2010)

CONFERENCES

1. “Speeding up modernity: railroad tariffs in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1860s-1880s” (IWM Junior Fellows’ Workshop, Vienna, 2018)
2. “You Are Not Even a Doctor: Medical Statistics in the Habsburg Monarchy (1880s-1910s)” (ESHS Biennial Conference, London, 2018)
3. “Quantifying Mortality in Austria-Hungary: Actuaries, Hygienists, and Statisticians” (Le chiffre et la carte, workshop organized by *Histoire et Mesure* and the Université du Québec, Montréal, 2017)
4. “Modernizing Facets of State Bureaucracy: Social Reforms in the Eyes of the Public Servant in Hungary, 1867-1918” (From Josef K to Lustration: Bureaucracy in Central Europe, Prague, 2017)
5. “Statistics and urban reform at the turn of the century in the Habsburg Monarchy, Prague and Budapest” (De la philanthropie à la protection sociale en Europe centrale et du sud-est – Expériences impériales au tournant du 20e siècle, workshop organized by the EHESS, Paris, 2017)
6. “Making life and death quantitative: social statistics and life insurance in the Dualist Monarchy” (Between Disciplines and Areas: Research Seminar organized by IMS-FSV-UK and CEFRES, Prague, 2016)
7. “Academies of trade and the sciences of trade: a national project in the Habsburg space (1867-1918)” (Central Europe at the Crossroads, Prague, 2016)
8. “Social mobility and schooling in Sátoraljaújhely (1898-1915)” (Annual Conference of the István Hajnal Circle, the Hungarian Social History Association, Sárospatak, 2015)

9. “Which events are to be counted? A case study of the long-term evolution of secondary education in Hungary between 1867 and 1948” (Annual Seminar of the BGHS, Bielefeld, 2015)
10. “When merchants confront the war: war-time practices in commerce and retailing during the Great War in Hungary” (GRACEH, Vienna, 2015)

GRANTS AND AWARDS

IWM Junior Visiting Fellowship (2018-2019), Global Teaching Fellowship (2018), Young Researcher Fellowship at CEFRES (2015-2017).

LANGUAGES

Hungarian (mother tongue)
 French (C2 – Proficient user)
 English (C2 – Proficient user)
 German (B2 – Independent user; only reading)
 Czech (B1 – Basic user; only reading)

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Articles

1. “Quantifying Mortality in Hungary: Actuaries and Statisticians (1860s-1910s)” *Histoire et Mesure* XXXIII, no. 2 (2018): 115–138. [Peer-reviewed]
2. “Társadalmi mobilitás és iskoláztatás a századelő Magyarországon: Sátoraljaújhely iskolai piaca (1898–1915)” [Social mobility and Education in Fin-de-siècle Hungary: The Market of Elementary and Secondary Schooling in Sátoraljaújhely (1898-1915)]. In *Iskola, művelődés, társadalom* [Schooling, culture, society], Csaba Sasfi and János Ugrai, eds, 232–49. Budapest: Hajnalkör, 2017. [Peer-reviewed]
3. “Crucial and local events in the long-term evolution of secondary schooling in Hungary (1867–1938),” *InterDisciplines* 7, no. 2, (2016): 95–124. [Peer-reviewed]
4. “Name Magyarization and Hungarianness: The Reception of Magyarized Names in the Dualist Period (1867-1919).” In *Shifting Discourses on Central European Histories*, Otčenášová Slávka and Csaba Zahorán, eds, 68–76. Budapest: Terra Recognita Foundation, 2015.
5. “Névmagyarosítás és magyarság: gondolatok a névmagyarosítás dualizmuskori megítéléséről” [Name Changes and the Social Recognition of Non-Magyars: Reflections on the Reception of the Magyarization of Foreign Names in Dualist Hungary]. In Slávka Otčenášová and Csaba Zahorán, eds, *Keressünk közös nyelvet a közös múlthoz. Szlovák és magyar történészek fiatal nemzedékének párbeszéde*, 42–46. Košice: Filozofická fakulta UPJŠ, 2012.

6. “In the Shadow of the *longue-duree*. Braudel and Veyne,” in *...de van benne rendszer Tanulmányok az Eötvös Collegium Filozófia műhelye fennállásának 15. évfordulójára*, 22–33. Budapest: Eötvös Collegium, 2012.
7. “A szabadság fogalma Sartre *A lét és a semmi* című munkájában” [The Concept of Liberty in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, *ELPIS* 10. (2012): 72–99. [Peer-reviewed]

Reviews

9. “A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe,” *Revue des études slaves* 88, no. 3 (2017): 619–621.
10. “The Habsburgs: Dynasty, Culture and Politics,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 23, no. 1–2 (2016): 229–30.
11. “A History of the Great Influenza Pandemics: Death, Panic and Hysteria, 1830 – 1920,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 22, no. 3 (2015): 508–509.
12. “*Cities in Modernity. Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840–1930*,” *Korall* 47 (2012): 192–196.
13. “Belépni a körbe—Balogh Brigitta Hegel olvasata—*A szellem és az idő: Identitás, cselekvés és temporalitás Hegelnél A szellem fenomenológiájában*” [Entering the Circle. Review of *The Spirit and Temporality* by Brigitta Balogh], *Különbség* 11, no. 1 (2011): 157–161.