

Call for papers

The Local and the Regional Dimensions of 1918/19. A Comparison

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After the end of the Great War 1918 and the Paris peace conferences that followed, a new but unstable international political system was established in Europe. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe, historians have often analyzed this system in the context of the new nation-states that emerged. The transition from an imperial order to one based on nations has been at the center of attention as well. For the past few years, however, a new tendency can be found in historical research, which more strongly than before highlights the local and/or regional dimensions of these processes. This trend may be a counter-reaction to the rise of global studies and global history. This trend in European comparative history studies will be addressed at an upcoming conference now being prepared in Prague.

After the War, in many regions and among rather different social groups, the state lost its legitimacy as an institution. In other countries, governmental authority had ceased to exist altogether. All governments were confronted with the problem of reestablishing their authority or, if they had acquired new territories, of creating new loyalties. For the victorious powers, this process was obviously easier than for those that were defeated. Recent research has clearly shown that after 1918–19, regional and local identities, which were not always tied to a certain nation-state, continued to exist or were revitalized. It is still an open question how the new order was accepted in the European regions, taking into account national, governmental, political, social, religious, and economic factors. Local actors displayed a high degree of self-organization, especially in territories where the authority of the state was weak or had collapsed at the end of the War. Units of paramilitary volunteers were formed, which tried to guarantee “law and order” (whatever that may mean), but also distribution of food and the general organization of daily life. A local and regional perspective will allow a new view of the processes through which the new nation-states were created “from below”. An additional question might deal with the problem of whether conflicts were really rooted in national divergences, or whether the term “national” only served to cover up other, deeper problems and conflicts.

Some historians have argued that after 1918, a new era of “total” nation states (cf. Lutz Raffael) began. However, the establishment of exclusive national identities sometimes faced resistance among the majority of people who spoke the same language and shared the same religion. Against this background, it makes sense to study not only the larger “national” frame, but to analyze single regions, territories and towns as well in order to find out how the radical changes of 1918–19 were accepted and internalized. Such studies need not be limited to the successor states of the great empires. It also can be useful to add perspective on other powers, whether victorious, defeated, or neutral, in order to draw useful comparisons.

Recent research has clearly shown that local identities survived the Great War. After 1918–19 these identities collided directly with official attempts to create homogenous nation states. In Upper Silesia in 1921, a great number of “ethnic” Poles voted for union with Germany—but hardly anything is known about their motives. In the Southern parts of East Prussia, the so-called “Staropruski,” a Polish-speaking Protestant minority, also voted for Germany because they did not want to live in a Catholic country. In the Polish-speaking parts of Poland, different mentalities and identities could be found as well. In the national census of 1931, in some regions of Eastern Poland, a large part of the population refused to choose any national or ethnic category at all and identified with the term “*hiesige*” (“from here”). Many other examples of similar attitudes, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the Iberian peninsula and Italy are well known.

This new context also allows for new interpretations of the challenges and the effects of the Bolshevik revolution. Historians have hardly discussed this topic since 1989–90. Interest in early communism has been widely replaced by themes which are more oriented toward the nation-state. However, immediately after the War, many local and regional actors developed and followed up on a positive attitude toward the socialist vision, aiming at a radical change in their society. Others were horrified by the rise of communism. It is both an open and a challenging question whether and how much political, social, and economic decisions—at the local and regional level—were influenced or determined by those attitudes. That question will be discussed in each case.

We are especially interested in papers that touch upon some of the following topics:

- 1918 in daily life and daily experience, with a focus on the local and regional contexts. Attention could be paid to the experience of the end of the war and the specific interpretations of victory and defeat associated with various visions of the coming political and social order. What characterized the local and regional dimensions of the revolutionary and/or counter-revolutionary movements?
- Continuity and change in the loyalties, identities and treatment of old and new minorities.
- Research on regional violence: what motives and factors were responsible for the emergence of violence and in what situations was it possible to limit or prevent the outbreak of violent conflict? Who were the main actors in those contexts?
- Research on the specific situations of border regions and border societies, with attention to the problems of minorities, refugees and expellees.
- Questions of legitimacy and local interpretations of radical change in the early inter-war years. Historical arguments and historical discourses were often used to create common political identities. Did tensions exist between local or regional interpretations and the official national narratives?

Prof. Joern Leonhard (University of Freiburg) will give the key-note speech.

At the moment we are able to cover accommodation and parts of the travel costs, we are still looking for funds for travel costs.

Please send your abstracts of about 500 to 700 words by **31 January 2018** to:

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