



Panel report:

A Connecting and Dividing arc. The Carpathians as National Imaginary, Natural Space and Lifeworld in the 20th century

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Organizers: Julia Richers, Felix Frey

Participants: Patrice Dabrowski, Péter Balogh, Martin Zückert

Comments by Bianca Hoenig

Report by: Oleksandra Kunovska Mondoux

In the introduction to the panel, **JULIA RICHERS** (Bern) emphasized the Carpathians as a huge natural space integrated in the nation-building project of many countries after the collapse of Austria-Hungary. Three valuable studies with multidisciplinary approaches are presented to reflect on local populations sharing the same mountains in different national contexts.

PATRICE DABROWSKI (Harvard) examined the importance of the Carpathians of Habsburg Galicia in the newly formed Second Polish Republic, with "alienated borders" with Romania (Bukovina) and Czechoslovakia (parts of Hungary) after the First World War. The Carpathians were to become for the Poles "our border mountains"; however, to what extent was this justifiable, since a third of the population were nationally indifferent? The Hutsuls, the Greek-Catholic Eastern Slavs of the Eastern Carpathians, religiously and linguistically closer to the Ukrainians than to the Poles, had to align with Warsaw instead of Vienna. The panelist presents the Polish responses to the Hutsuls' precarity through tourism to increase their loyalty to the Republic, as well as the Ukrainian reaction to the Polish interest in the region, based on her recent book *The Carpathians: Discovering the Highlands of Poland and Ukraine*.

In the summer, the Hutsul highlanders engaged in animal husbandry and forestry, while in winter they crafted beautifully colourful clothes in this mountain region, which was part of the global economy. The Poles aimed to maintain control over the border, as interaction with the Subcarpathians in the Czechoslovakia, and the Ukrainians in the Soviet Union could cause a certain danger for Polish security and territorial integrity. The Great Depression impacted the Polish economy and led to unemployment in the lumber industry and the "Hutsul hunger" (1931/1932), worsened by natural disasters. Contrary to a number of Polish, Romanian, Czech and French articles, Kharkiv periodicals pretended that only communism could recover the situation in the Hutsul region. The claim was clearly absurd, since millions of Ukrainians starved during the Great Famine (*Holodomor*) in the Soviet Union. The Polish Consul in Kharkiv considered this as a new attack by



Soviets on the Polish Republic. In fact, tourism enabled significant economic development and modernization in this remote region. In 1934, a Ukrainian article, observing on the Hutsuls' loyalty to the Poles thanks to tourism, sought to awaken their consciousness to the Ukrainian cause.

For **PÉTER BALOGH** (Budapest), Hungary, like most neighbouring countries, competes for its geopolitical image. Among a number of geographical concepts, the most important is the Carpathian Basin, which is related to Hungary's self-positioning as a heterogenous country, with large rivers and mountain environments, in domestic and foreign sources. The idea of the Basin's unity (natural, economic, political) has been promoted since the 1910s, including via the Swiss-inspired model of Danube Confederation, due to Hungary's ethnic diversity (see Count Pal Teleki's "carte rouge"). After Hungary's loss of territorial integrity under the Treaty of Trianon (1920), geographers mobilized to reclaim former territories, using orographic and hydrographic maps, in order to legitimize the unity of the Basin, which was the official position of the country, whereas an alternative vision of multi-ethnicity was disregarded.

Foreign counter-narratives of the interwar period had similar but less deterministic arguments as in Hungary. The Romanian spatial imaginary and textual works sought solid connections between the various regions of Greater Romania (with a strong identity in Transylvania). In some poetic narratives, the Carpathians were depicted as the heart, the spine, or citadel of Romania. Czechoslovak spatial imagery, with mountains variously surrounding the Czech Republic and Slovakia, was more complex with lasting ethnic diversity playing a central role. In the spatial imaginary of Yugoslavia, the term of Pannonian Plain intertwined with that of the Dinaric Mountains. During the Second World War, when Hungary regained some of its pre-First World War lands, the Carpathian Basin's concept was essential, but after the instauration of the communist regime in 1947, it became a tabou (except for natural sciences or diaspora publications).

In view of the recent concept of Slovakia as the Switzerland of the East, **MARTIN ZÜCKERT** (Munich) analyzed how national ideas influenced natural space, structural planning, and agricultural policy during the last century. After 1918, Slovakia, with its large mountainous territory, became a part of the newly created Czechoslovakia, the common nation. Some historians looked at Slovakia as a nation-state (where the Slovaks live), others as a multiethnic country in the framework of Czechoslovakia, with the Carpathians as a geographic space. Bratislava was chosen as capital due to political and practical considerations, instead of Martin, a centrally located mountain's town, known for a national uprising.

Czechoslovakia also experienced structural differences during the interwar period. Although many regions were industrialized, Slovakia's small-scale industry was not competitive. Thus, the government relied on the progressive organization of agriculture with traditional forms of land management. Due to the Munich Agreement, Slovakia became independent, seeking a modern image along the Swiss lines, even though many reforms were limited to the German model. After the restoration of Czechoslovakia, with increasing competition between Czechs and Slovaks in the mountains,



Switzerland was a role model during the Cold War. Some criticized communist industrialization, incomplete collectivization (with a failure to involve private farmers in cooperatives), settlement structure (mass immigration and overpopulation), incorrect planning and environmental damage, which were indeed accepted by Slovak society under the influence of natural factors, territoriality, and national politics.

BIANCA HOENIG (Basel) commented with several questions on three distinct perspectives of the Carpathians' history with the common topics, such as national issues, conflicts and imaginations. What is the relationship between three aspects (national imaginary, natural space, and life-world) of the panel title variously represented in the papers: is the national imaginary a central aspect, or do other aspects play an equal role? Should we talk about the same Carpathians, or are they interlinked with national histories? What are the connections between the Carpathians and other mountain regions? How is space – the whole arc of the Carpathians – related to the national entity? What can be learned more about the time – political chronology and seasonality – in order to emphasize the multi-ethnicity in the mountains?

In conclusion, the panelists discuss that the image of the Carpathians differ in many ways across space and time. It is still necessary to investigate the extent to which people cooperated in the Carpathians, and which West-East ties were stronger in the Hungarian context. In spite of the Cold War, Slovakia tried to make some contacts with Switzerland and Austria for agricultural and other interests. The Carpathian Commission of Anthropologists was also created to portray the pre-socialist community (e.g., shepherds), a topic of interest for further research. In the Polish Carpathians, seasonality is felt at different levels (local, regional, national) and more environmental and historical research should be done about the mountains as a global entity. The audience's question about identity is also multifaceted: local and regional identities clashed in the interwar period, as the state wanted to create nationally loyal people. The Poles took advantage of the national indifference of the Hutsuls, who probably felt Ukrainians before the war. The Ukrainians perceived the Hutsuls as not real Ukrainians – or so hoped the Poles. The Hutsuls played both sides, mainly for economic interests, profiting from investments in the region. In fact, (according to Richers), there are several projects of this noteworthy region that reveal the national aspirations of local people trying to make sense pragmatically of different political affiliations, which puzzle the collective history of the Carpathians.

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Panel overview:

Patrice Dabrowski: Our border mountains. Life and Politics in the Polish Carpathians

Peter Balog: Environmental Determinism on Speed: The Hungarian Concept of the Carpathian Basin

Zuckert Martin: A Switzerland of the East? Debates on National Projections and Structural policies in the Slovak Carpathians in the 20th Century.

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