

Inbetween Fear and Hope. Rural Perspectives in the Era of the Great War

(Abstract to the research project)

Rural populations have always been affected by war, as they are responsible for supplying goods and men for armies; occasionally their living environment also is the location of military operations.

Wartime is not only accompanied by fear, but also by hope that fighting may bring improvement for one's future existence.

Eventhough the First World War's 100th year anniversary brought numerous new research about, this particular issue featured within this project - despite its correlation - has never really been illuminated. Therefor this is an innovative approach, to turning the focus from statesmen, soldiers and urban societies to peasants and other rural social circles. As this subject is far too encompassing for one research project to handle, two regions have been chosen to feature as case studies. Both were multiethnic border areas affiliated to other states after the war.

One of these regions is today's eastern area of Slovenia, whose affilitaion changed from the Habsburg Monarchie (Styria) to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croates and Slovenians (Yugoslavia). The other region is Transilvania's borderland (Siebenbürgen), which passed from Hungary to Rumania between 1918 and 1920.

The goal of the project, led by the University of Graz, is to draw a conclusion from three comparisons, whose validity goes beyond just being case studies. The territorial comparison refers to both mentioned locations with, in each case, different rural structures. The chronological comparison intends to contrast the time before, during and after the war, taking into account the varied values of the different generations. The thematic comparison referes to the interplay between fear and hope, that the rural population had to undergo and which, in the light of the radical change prevailing during the great war, inevitably generated winners and losers.

The questions raised by the project's approach will be answered by the project team, consisting of one Slovenian specialist (Christian Promitzer), one Rumanian specialist (Ionela Zaharia) and the East Central/South-East Europe expert (Harald Heppner), on the basis of the study of privat and offical text/picture sources. The findings will not only be communicated to an international expert audience, but also will be revealed to interested circles, especially in Slowenia and Rumania.