



*Cultural Policy and Theatre in European Empires. The ‚Kulturstaat‘ Austria in International Comparison.* Wien: Europe and Beyond. Transfers, Networks and Markets for Musical Theatre in Modern Europe, European University Institute Florence; Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte, Wien, 19.11.2010-20.11.2010.

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## Cultural Policy and Theatre in European Empires. The ‚Kulturstaat‘ Austria in International Comparison

The term “cultural policy” gained currency only in the 1970s, but policy-making concerning art dates back much further. The conference “Cultural Policy and Theatre in European Empires”, taking place on the 19th and 20th November 2010 at the Institute for East European History in Vienna, addressed cultural policy-making of the European empires and, to a degree, their successor states. The Habsburg Empire was given particular attention, but case studies from Russia, Prussia and the Ottoman Empire provided for a comparative context. Theatres were the focal point of the conference, serving as a paradigmatic space of cultural policy-making, where the imperial political interests (representation of the state, education of citizens) converged with the popular demand for entertainment and the desire of imperial minority groups to stage their own cultural production. The conference, realised within the research project “Europe and Beyond. Transfers, Networks and Markets for Musical Theatre in Modern Europe”, was organised by Philipp Ther (University of Vienna), Peter Stachel (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna), and Ostap Sereda (National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Lviv).

The opening session of the conference was devoted to the court and court theatres as arenas of cultural policy. ELISABETH GROßEGGER (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) investigated the case of the Imperial and Royal Theatre (*k.k. Hofburgtheater*) in Vienna, which, originating from the court theatre tradition, came to play the role of a national theatre. Renamed into a National

Theatre in 1776, the stage was profiled as a “school of patriotism”. Staging works in German, it was to be a vehicle representing ideals of the German Enlightenment. It was also understood as a means to defuse social unrest and even reduce criminality. As the head of the court police unit put it in 1806: “The most dangerous hour is the evening hour. And it cannot be spent more harmlessly than in a theatre”. The nineteenth century, however, saw a gradual change in the understanding of what the theatre was to be. Rather than a tool of social instruction, it was increasingly employed as an ethnically exclusive instrument of nation-building.

HARTWIN SPENKUCH (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften), bringing in the Prussian case, turned to the *Begriffsgeschichte* of the very term *Kulturstaat*, which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, denoted, more broadly, the formation of a European culture based on Christianity rather than a state policy. And, in fact, an integrated and continuous state cultural policy as we understand it today was not practiced in nineteenth-century Prussia, where the financing of cultural projects heavily depended on the limited possibilities of the monarch. Although theatre and opera emerged as a politicized space, many, often conflicted, artistic visions of particular agents did not necessarily contribute to a clear overall direction of local cultural policies.

The crucial role of the monarch was also the focus of RICHARD WORTMAN (Columbia University, New York), who argued that Russian monarchs, starting with

Peter the Great, heavily relied on Western culture both to perform the grandeur of their absolutist power and to generate a Russian imperial myth. By borrowing and adapting Western forms of representation they were able not only to present Russia as a cultural heir of Byzantium and ancient Greece, but also as an empire at the forefront of Western civilisation. Theatre, among others, was one such powerful medium which proved instrumental to the royal artistic visions, at times in a very direct way, for example when staging plays penned by Catherine the Great herself. Apart from the dominating role of the monarchs in shaping the cultural production of the Russian empire, Wortman acknowledged however also poets, artists and architects who, finding themselves in the orbit of the court, were able to play the role of “cultural interlocutors” of the tzars and had their important share in staging the imperial myth via the contemporary cultural idiom.

FRANZ LEANDER FILLAFER (University of Konstanz) pondered how the public discourse of the Habsburg Monarchy reframed and recycled the very idea of culture and the civilising mission, adapting the legacy of enlightened absolutism in the age of the emerging nationalisms. Fillafer introduced the concept of “culturalisation” to denote the rising importance of culture not only as a panacea in the socio-political visions of the nineteenth century, but also as an explanatory device. At the same time, however, he pointed to the ambiguity inherent in the idea of culture as both a medium of universal appeal, transcending boundaries, and one increasingly instrumentalised for the particular nationalist projects. Interestingly, however, Fillafer observed that the idea of cultural refinement as a prerequisite for the monarchical subjects to be capable of forming a state underlay not only the civilising mission of multiethnic empires seeking to impose cohesion, but also the new ideologies of national emancipation.

The case of the Ottoman Empire, investigated by ADAM MESTYAN (Central European University, Budapest), provided an interesting contrast to the developments in the Habsburg Empire. Although the idea of investing in culture and education has had a long history in the Muslim states, with the tradition of *waqf*, a private donation supporting for example schools or libraries, a pronounced cultural policy became discernible in the Ottoman Empire only at the end of the nineteenth century. Before that, theatres, although encouraged by particular sultans, were not considered a domain of the state. European-style entertainments might not have been disapproved of, but unlike in Western Europe, they would not be considered as a medium of education.

What is interesting, however, is that integrated cultural policies were also missing in the peripheries of the Habsburg Empire. As ISABEL RÖSKAU-RYDEL (Pedagogical University, Kraków) convincingly demonstrated with the example of Galicia between 1772 and 1869, the Habsburg authorities, disinterested in investing in this marginally located province, exerted only minimal impact on the cultural life of cities like Krakau/Kraków or Lemberg/Lviv. Even though the Austrian Emperor would occasionally respond to single requests, most cultural institutions in the region emerged thanks to the engagement of local intellectuals. Also in Bohemia it was the local nobility who played a central role in shaping the cultural landscape well into the 1830s. But also after the 1848/9 revolution, as JIŘI STAIF (Charles University, Prague) argued, Vienna relinquished the option of designing their own cultural projects addressed at Bohemia. Rather, it expected the local nobility to take the initiative, thus facilitating the creation of an open and relatively autonomous cultural space which became increasingly important for the Czech national elite. After 1860, cultural policy of the Habsburg state lacked in creativity and financial means to significantly promote modernisation. Consequently, the Bohemian cultural realm was increasingly marked by an aggravating competition between Czechs and Germans.

The situation had a different dynamics in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, where the particular cultural policies of Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian aimed at winning the support of the local elites. Documenting the cultural initiatives of the Governor-General, JUTTA TOELLE (Humboldt University, Berlin) pictured his failure to break the opposition of the Lombardian nobility. Theatre, dancing events and outdoor festivities arranged by Ferdinand Maximilian as a means of “demonstrative celebration” did not win the expected acclaim. On the contrary, the opera houses in Milan and Venice remained strong centres of opposition, testifying to the powerlessness of the Austrian authorities in Northern Italy.

Also in Budapest, the stage, which after the 1848 revolution became the National Theatre, was a site of national ferment. Built in 1837 as a counter institution to the German-language theatre, the Hungarian stage remained an important venue of Hungarian-language cultural production at the time of neo-absolutism. Presenting a panorama of the theatrical life of Budapest, ANDRÁS GERGELY (Budapest) not only captured the dynamics of political decisions accompanying the erection and the maintenance of theatres in the Hungarian province, but also demonstrated how Hungarian-

language productions were generated in response, and as a counter-representation, to the German-language cultural offerings.

Similarly, the theatre life in Kyiv in the second half of the nineteenth century was marked by tensions between Russian and Polish-language productions. Analysing the developments on the local cultural scene between 1856 and 1866, OSTAP SEREDA (National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Lviv) presented a fascinating image of the heterogeneous theatrical landscape of the Russian south-western borderlands, which became not only a backdrop to rising nationalisms but also a site of negotiation where different ethnic communities tried to delineate their own languages of expression and patterns of theatrical consumption. The strong cultural presence of Poles in Kyiv, with their patriotic manifestations, and the budding Little Russian nationalism were both targets of the imperial agenda of Russification. The attempts at curbing the emancipatory tendencies, however, converged in Kyiv with a more pragmatic approach, accommodating the needs of the theatre-going public (also the Polish nobility). The homogenising impulses were therefore in interplay with a degree of tolerance for multicultural diversity.

BIRGIT KUCH's (University of Leipzig) case study of Tbilisi centred on roughly the same period of time. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of the local opera which, by the turn of the century, became an important site of the Georgian national movement. Despite its peripheral status in the Russian Empire, Tbilisi was a significant node of cultural transfer, where the appropriation of the European musical tendencies overlapped with attempts at constructing the Georgian national canon and the policies of the imperial civilising mission. The complex local power relations determined the patterns of cultural borrowing, defining the desirable and undesirable influences, and generating often conflicting visions of what should be understood as "Georgian" music.

The ascendance of national theatres within the nineteenth century European empires was marked, on the one hand, by a more universal tension between the centre and the periphery, but, on the other, it was also shaped by the particular local conditions. As ALINA HINC (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) demonstrated with the example of the Prussian and Polish national theatres in Posen/Poznań, the specific social structure of the province influenced in a considerable way the cultural policy of the Prussian state. The province

of Posen/Poznań was the only one where Germans were not a dominating majority but where the German population formed a colonial-like structure consisting mostly of civil servants, officers and landowners. In this context, the theatre not only generated but also fed on interethnic encounter. The German- and Polish-language theatres in Posen/Poznań provided, on the one hand, a meeting place for Poles, Germans and Jews of the region, but on the other, their very development was spurred and determined by the situation of constant competition between the rivalling national groups.

The dynamic between the imperial state and its provinces enfolded not only on stage, but also via different forms of representation. Museums, for example, as MARLIES RAFFLER (University of Graz) argued, provided an increasingly important vehicle of cultural policies both on the national and regional level. Proliferating from Hungary to Tirol, regional museums played a substantial role for the self image of the particular provinces of the Habsburg monarchy in the beginning of the nineteenth century. With time, they became not only markers of prestige, but also indicators of how successful the newly defined "*Kulturation*" was displaying and inventing its own past.

The policy of consolidating multiethnic legacies under the aegis of national or supranational heritage outlived the era of the great European empires. Their successor states often relied on the same idea of "imagined community", or even the same cultural genres to foster a feeling of national cohesion. TATJANA MARKOVIĆ (University of Arts in Belgrade) analysed such endeavours in Yugoslavia. Formed at the junction of different imperial traditions (Byzantine, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Venetian), Yugoslavia had a particular need for a myth legitimising the multinational state. Although the ideology of Pan-Slavism directly influenced the emergence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, cultural policy for decades remained on the margin of the political priorities of the new state. The policies drawn up by the Yugoslav Committee already during the First World War, envisaging either an adoption of the dominant, Serbian national culture, a creation of a synthesis of all the legacies of the region, or a construction of an entirely new, supranational Yugoslav heritage, influenced the consecutive periods. The precarious political situation, however, did not secure any continuity of these policies, resulting in a constant dissensus about the Yugoslav project.

The successor state of the Russian Empire, likewise, faced a challenging process of not only defining

a new supranational Soviet identity, but also generating a whole new proletarian culture. OKSANA SARKISOVA (OSA Archive Central European University, Budapest) analysed the incongruous and conflicting Soviet cultural policies, oscillating between the revolutionary ideas of *Proletkult* and the conservative camp, appropriating traditional bourgeois genres, and employing them as a medium of what was to become a classless culture. Documenting this clash of cultural policies in the post-revolutionary period, Sarkisova focused on the Bolshoi Theatre, which, as a powerful symbol of the old cultural order, became not only a bone of contention, but turned into an interesting, if ambiguous, trope in the Soviet cinema.

A similar tension accompanied the emergence of the Turkish Republic. SEREN AKYOLDAŞ (European University Institute, Florence) illustrated the dynamics between the Kemalist idea of Turkish culture as a synthesis of the Western genres and folk culture, and the new traditionalist ideology giving space to the religious and Arab-influenced elements. While the Kemalist Revolution aspired to educate the masses to enjoy “high culture”, based on the Western model, the 1960s faced the rise of the “Arabesque” culture, originating from the working class, ghetto-like, migrants’ neighbourhoods of the Turkish cities. Thus the “white Turk” elitist cultural model came to be contested by a popular genre which also implied resistance to the establishment.

Both Sarkisova and Akyoldaş dealt in their presentations with moments of social upheaval as catalysts of new cultural policies. It is in the conditions of revolution and dramatic change that arts become instrumentalised by the politics in a particularly intensive way and new policies emerge on the vestiges of the old socio-political order. But conflict not only provides a backdrop to, but is also inherent in, the very idea of cultural policy. Although some speakers of the Vienna conference acknowledged conflict as a creative force behind cultural developments (Jiří Staif, András Gergely, Alina Hinc, Ostap Sereda), neither the role of “conflict”, nor the very idea of “cultural policy” has actually been sufficiently defined and discussed.

Indeed, one of the central challenges of the conference was the fact that the term “cultural policy” is anachronistic to the time period that the conference covered. On the one hand, as Marlies Raffer pointed out, there was no other period in which politics and culture were so closely intertwined as in the early modern times, on the other, however, as some scholars had

to conclude (Hartwin Spenkuch, Adam Mestyan, Isabel Röskau-Rydel), many rulers adopted no discernible cultural policy or limited themselves merely to censorship or occasional sponsorship, rather than proposing any integrated policy plan.

The conference presented a very broad panorama of local case studies, covering the territory from Tbilisi to Milan and the time period from the late eighteenth century to the post Second World War period. This relatively wide scope, though at times hindering a focused comparative approach, offered a wealth of empirical material which sheds light on the convoluted relations between power and art in the empires which put their indelible mark on the modern Central Europe.

#### Conference overview:

Ostap Sereda / Peter Stachel / Philipp Ther:  
Kurze Einführung in die Kulturpolitik als historisches Handlungsfeld

*DIE HÖFE UND HOFTHEATER ALS ARENEN DER KULTURPOLITIK*

Moderation: Philipp Ther, Diskutant: Stanislav Tuk-sar

Elisabeth Großegger:  
Das k.k. Hofburg- und Nationaltheater in Wien. Ein Widerspruch?

Hartwin Spenkuch:  
Preußen als Kulturstaat

Richard Wortman:  
Cultural Metamorphoses of Imperial Myth Under Catherine the Great and Nicholas I.

*THEATER UND ÖFFENTLICHKEIT IN DEN IMPERIAL-ALLEN HAUPTSTÄTEN*

Moderation: Johannes Feichtinger, Diskutant: Michael Rössner

Franz Leander Fillafer:  
Reichsidee und Zivilisierungsmissionen

Adam Mestyan:  
Ottoman Control of Theaters in Istanbul (1883-1892)

*KULTURPOLITIK AN IMPERIALEN PERIPHERIEN I*  
Moderation: Andreas Kappeler, Diskutant:in: Vjera Katalinić

Isabel Röskau-Rydel:  
Bürgerliches Engagement und staatliche Kulturpolitik im österreichischen Galizien von 1772 bis 1869

- Jiří Staif:  
Die Kulturpolitik der böhmischen Stände
- KULTURPOLITIK AN IMPERIALEN PERIPHERIEN II*  
Moderation: Markian Prokopovych, Diskutant:  
Oliver Müller
- Jutta Toelle:  
Staatsrepräsentation und versuchte Elitenintegration:  
Die Kulturpolitik unter Erzherzog Maximilian in  
Italien
- Marlies Raffler:  
Interne und externe Konflikte der Landes- und Na-  
tionalmuseen in der Habsburgermonarchie
- András Gergely:  
Kulturpolitik und Nationsbildung in Ungarn unter  
besonderen Berücksichtigung der Theater
- KULTURPOLITIK AN IMPERIALEN PERIPHERIEN II*  
Moderation: Alexej Miller, Diskutant: Andreas Kap-  
peler
- Ostap Sereda:  
Imperial Cultural Policy and Provincial Cultural Pol-  
itics in the Russian South-Western Borderland: The Case  
of Musical Theater in the Second Half of the 19th Century
- Birgit Kuch:  
Die Aneignung imperialer Praktiken durch die geor-  
gische Nationalbewegung: Oper und Ethnographie in Ti-  
flis 1882-1923
- Alina Hinc:  
Das Preußische Theater und das Polnische Nation-  
altheater in Posen
- AUSBLICK: DAS IMPERIALE ERBE IN DER KULTUR-  
POLITIK I*  
Moderation: Heinz Gerhard Haupt, Diskutant:  
Michael Walter
- Peter Stachel:  
Musikland Österreich. Identitätspolitik von der  
Monarchie bis zur Zweiten Republik
- Tatjana Marković:  
Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia: Continuity of Discon-  
tinuity
- AUSBLICK: DAS IMPERIALE ERBE IN DER KULTUR-  
POLITIK II*  
Moderation: Ostap Sereda, Diskutant: Magdalena  
Waligorska
- Seren Akyoldaş:  
Music and Theatre Policy in the Early Turkish Repub-  
lic
- Oksana Sarkisova:  
The Musical in Soviet Cultural Policy

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