

Epicentre of Territorial Revisionism: The Carpatho-Ukraine under Multiple Border and State Control Changes, 1914–1946

The project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), examines the history of Carpatho-Ukraine and its polyethnic population, whose lives were characterized by multiple border and state changes.

Project Duration: from September 2023 to August 2027

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Project Details

The history of East Central and Eastern Europe has been marked by border disputes and armed conflicts over the territorial affiliation of certain regions or the minorities that lived there. With around 17 occupations and a total of six regime changes, the westernmost part of today's Ukraine – Carpatho-Ukraine or Transcarpathia – was Europe's epicentre of territorial revisionism in the first half of the 20th century. In no other region of Europe did borders shift more frequently than in this polyethnic mountain region between 1914 and 1946.

The research project focuses on this interwoven history of Carpatho-Ukraine. It examines the everyday lives of groups and individuals whose biographies were significantly affected by the multiple border demarcations, new rulers and their respective nation-building projects. What effect did these multiple border changes have on the lives of the local people who, depending on where they lived, had to change their citizenship up to six times – without ever having left their hometown? What strategies did the local population develop to cope with these frequent and often drastic changes in the years from 1914 to 1946? How did the changes of power and border shifts influence matters of everyday life, communal solidarity, as well as questions of belonging?

The project is based on extensive archival sources, which shall provide new insights into inter-ethnic coexistence, belonging, disintegration and violence in this border region between East and West. This will contribute to a better understanding of micro dynamics as well as territorial conflicts in East Central and Eastern Europe. The ultimate goal of this project is to add a new concept to the field of Border and Borderland Studies: the Border Biographies, which tie together the history of the shifting borders and their effect on people's individual biographies in the region.

PI's Subproject by Prof. Dr. Julia Richers

Jewish Border Biographies – Jewish 'Life-Worlds' in the Carpathians under Multiple Border and State Control Changes, 1914–1944

Even though the Jewish population of the Eastern Carpathians never exceeded an average of five per cent of the total population, neither in the Kingdom of Hungary nor in later Czechoslovakia, it made up more than 40 per cent of the population in certain places such as the town of Munkács/Mukačevo. Hence, rather than being a marginal minority, the Jewish population in the Carpathians formed a substantial part of village communities and regional centres. Moreover, another exceptional aspect of this region was that the predominantly Orthodox and Hasidic Jews lived in closely-knit rural communities together with the Rusyn/Hutsul population. These communities were generally marked by peaceful coexistence and close interactions through crop, livestock and timber farming under precarious living conditions; a striking exception in East Central Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

At the same time, and after each change of state, the Jewish population was chronically accused of disloyalty towards its new sovereigns and their nation building projects. This project investigates the question of how the Jewish population experienced coexistence and communal life under constantly shifting borders and state sovereignty: How did new legislation impact their day-to-day lives and how did it affect their sense of belonging? Along which lines did identifications and markers of difference run?

With a clear focus on 'life-worlds' (*Lebenswelten*), individual biographies and their central points of reference, this project will contribute to the under-researched Jewish history of the Carpathians, to the concept of what I term Border Biographies, i.e. to biographies shaped by borderlands and multiple state changes, to questions of loyalties and (multiple) identifications as well as to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In so doing, the project will contribute to the field of border studies, both methodologically and theoretically.

Subproject: PhD Project by Michèle Häfliger

Rusyn Majority in Permanent Minority Position. Caught in Between Competing (Trans-)National Identity Concepts

Dissertation by Michèle Häfliger

The Carpathians have often been perceived as an isolated part of Europe, whose population supposedly lived much more 'backwardly' than anywhere else. A better understanding of the local Rusyn population, the most populous community by far but without any corresponding representation – neither under Hungarian nor under Czechoslovakian rule, is crucial for an in-depth study of the region. The Rusyn *intelligentsia* communicated their interests and self-image primarily through newspapers, associations and organizations which mostly represented one-sided Russophile, Ukrainophile or Rusynophile, pro-Hungarian or pro-Czech positions.

This project aims to question the one-sided national or even nationalist narratives in the previous historiography by simultaneously examining national and transnational movements and presenting alternative concepts and interpretations such as multiple

identifications and national indifference. In addition, the project will address gaps in research, such as women's history of the region.

Subproject: PhD Project by Philippe Thomet

Carpatho-Ukraine – a Playground for the Great Powers? The International Processes of (Re-)drawing Borders and their Protagonists, 1914–1939

As a multi-ethnic region, Carpatho-Ukraine was particularly affected by the geopolitical upheaval of the inter-war period. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Carpatho-Ukraine was awarded to the First Czechoslovak Republic. But as the talks in Paris were still going on, the Hungarian Soviet Republic under the leadership of Béla Kun tried to create a *fait accompli* by occupying the territory, which, however, failed. As a reaction to the war with the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Carpatho-Ukraine was put under military administration by the Czechoslovak government. The military administration was upheld until 9th January 1922 and commanded by the French General Edmond Hennocque. Nevertheless, Carpatho-Ukraine continued to be subject to revisionist intentions. This was particularly true in the late 1930s, when Hungary, in the wake of National Socialist expansionist policies, reasserted its territorial claims and, eventually, was able to assert them: with the First Vienna Award of 1938, Hungary claimed a large part of Carpatho-Ukraine, and after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939, it was seized by Hungary in its entirety.

Thus, during the whole inter-war period, Carpatho-Ukraine and its borders were a subject of international negotiations and demarcation processes. My PhD project aims to shed light onto these hitherto under-researched processes and the key actors behind them: who drew the borders at the Paris Peace Conference? Through which lense did they view and classify the local population into 'nationalities'? What role did France play in this process, both at the Paris Peace Conference and at the local level? With regard to the 1930s the question of how the conflicts over the new order of post-war East Central Europe were re-ignited and deliberately fuelled by individual actors arises: What links and continuities existed between the 'Paris System' and Hungary's territorial claims over Carpotho-Ukraine that culminated in the First Vienna award? These and similar questions are at the core of my research project.

Subproject: PhD Project by Berenika Zeller

Living with the Czechoslovak 'Modernisation' in Subcarpathian-Ruthenia/Carpatho-Ukraine, 1919–1939 (working title)

The Prague government launched a large-scale 'modernisation' aimed at integrating the previously little-known Transcarpathian region when it became part of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) after the end of the First World War. Thousands of

Czechoslovaks, such as bureaucrats, geographers, police officers and teachers, were sent to the Carpathian region from various parts of the Bohemian, Silesian, and Moravian lands during these two decades. Social and health organisations, such as the Czechoslovak Red Cross and the Organisation of Social Workers (Organizace sociálních pracovníků v ČSR), sent personnel and experts who had a significant impact on the daily lives of the population in the Carpathian region. The area at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains – now coined 'Podkarpatská Rus' (Subcarpathian-Ruthenia) – was being infrastructurally and administratively developed. Prague's modernisation plan brought disruptions into all areas of public life and affected the population who had previously belonged to Kingdom of Hungary. Power relations and loyalty were renegotiated, a process that was far from being strife-free. Between 1919 and 1938, Czechoslovak modernity entered the region, altering the everyday lives of the local population. In 1938–39, the arrival of Hungarian troops forced the last Czechoslovaks to leave Carpatho-Ukraine, which had already become a new home for many of them.

This PhD project analyses the economic and political effects of the border shifts on local life. It deals with the social and economic integration into the Czechoslovak state and examines the Czechoslovak's view of local life and the local population's perception of the Czechoslovak modernisation attempts.

The study's focus lies on investigating the 'life-worlds' (*Lebenswelten*) of Czechoslovakian teachers, particularly women, as well as (Red Cross) nurses and other Czechoslovakian professions in the region. It aims to examine the impact of experts, health organizations such as the Czechoslovak Red Cross and the Organisation of Social Workers on the lives of the local population, including children of Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Roma origins, among others. Furthermore, the study analyses questions of loyalty among the local population. In addition, the effects of border shifts on regional small-scale trade and local mobility need to be explored, as well as questions of individual belonging and biographical characteristics of selected actors.