



FACULTY OF SCIENCE  
Charles University

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**Call for papers**

## **Parliament as a ring for elites?**

Academic conference

Date: November, 9–12, 2020

Venue: Faculty of Science, Charles University Prague / Vila Lanna Prague

The study of both elites and parliamentarianism has had a long tradition and has been conducted across various social sciences and humanities. In our conception, the parliament represents a place where political powers, embodied by various types/kinds of elites, conduct the legislative process and decide about further development of a particular state and its society, or rather societies. However, parliament also represents an imaginary ring/tiltyard, where not only participation and cooperation exist, but where sharp political conflicts and clashes of interest arise. Moreover, decisions made in parliament are subject to pressure from the executive and their proper implementation depends, in practice, on the availability of the latter, especially of the administrative elite, whose agenda is not always similar to that of the parliament. These conflicts do not occur only on the political level (between opposing parties and interest groups), but they may be viewed as conflicts of elites of a different type and character, elites who are formed in various ways and retain power by adopting diverse tactics. Contacts and conflicts of elected representatives of the society and its elites with unelected members of the executive are particularly striking in the parliamentary environment. These two groups, varied in type, but with similar social background, play an important part in the decision-making process in the parliament and determine further development of the state and its society/ies.

Executive and representative elites are formed in different processes and ways and they also retain power using different methods, but they come from the same or very similar social strata and they are connected by countless diverse links, which might not be visible on the parliamentary or political scene at all. To complicate matters further, the representatives of the parliamentary elite and those of the executive and administrative elite often play interchangeable roles, depending on the specificities of the political system. Not infrequently the ministers were members of parliament, the senior administrative officials were former and future members of parliament, while some parliamentarians were former and / or future civil servants, for whom the representative mandate served both as a prestige marker and a springboard for an office which would otherwise have been considerably more difficult to reach. Thus, it is usual for an atmosphere of conflict to be often followed by an atmosphere of purposive cooperation. At times a phase of an external conflict coincides with a phase of backstage harmony and cooperation.

The aim of the conference is not only to connect the research of both these diverse and still socially similar elites, but mainly to consider new methodological approaches, which are now

offered by the dynamic development of digital humanities tools. At the forthcoming conference, which focuses on the period 1848–1938 and the geographical area of Central Europe, we would like to cover three basic topics:

### 1) Elites and their transformations

This session will include papers dealing with theoretical concepts of the research of political elites. We invite proposals or presentations of research results related to these questions:

- How did the understanding of the term “elite” change from the viewpoint of the society in the period studied? Who was considered a member of the elite?
- Is it possible to speak about a hierarchy of the elites (which position was more prestigious – a deputy or a state official)?
- What factors were important in order to consider somebody a member of the elite?
- Did the position of a deputy change in this context and in what way?
- To what extent was the actual composition of the parliament influenced by the fact that deputies were again chosen by the elites? How did the gradual change of the suffrage influence this point?

### 2) Historical databases and digital humanities tools used for the research of political and social elites in the modern history

At the conference we would like to discuss new approaches which can be applied to the research of the above mentioned topics thanks to the usage of databases containing data about members of historical populations. In this context we would like to concentrate on the following issues:

- Possibilities and limitations of using historical databases for the study of elites
- Possibilities of reconstructing basic demographic data for the period studied
- Ways of analysing collected data (statistical methods, text analysis, GIS-based methods, graphic visualisations)
- Work with incomplete data
- Possibilities of reconstructing relationship networks of individuals

### 3) Deputies’ clubs

Insufficient attention has been paid to deputies’ clubs in the research of the history of the Central European parliamentarianism. We know that they existed. We know who their members were, what parliamentary coalitions and formations they were integrated into and we know their programmatic profile. However, we do not know much about their inner world. Since this conference on political elites has a wide scope of interest, we want to give special attention to deputies’ clubs. At first sight it is a classic political topic, but it contains dimensions which are omitted in traditionally presented political history. Clubs primarily represent a space where deputies cooperate when promoting political or other interests together. At the same time, they are a living organism comprised of strong personalities. Based on an example of selected deputies’ clubs we would like to focus on these themes:

- Deputies' clubs and their position within the parliamentary culture of Central Europe
- Formulating unwritten and written rules of deputies' clubs, the problem of inclusion and exclusion among elected political elites
- The authority versus democracy in running of clubs, resolving political and personal conflicts in clubs
- The selection of club elites and structuring the club hierarchy (inherited vs. newly acquired prestige, prestige vs. capability), executive tools and methods of leading deputies' clubs, establishing club oligarchy

The conference will be conducted in English and German. Abstracts (up to 300 words) and a short biographical note should be sent to [klecacky@mua.cas.cz](mailto:klecacky@mua.cas.cz) by May 31, 2020. Applicants will be notified by June 30. Selected papers will be published.

Program committee:

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