

Call for Papers

Provisioning Crisis and Transformation of East-Central Europe, 1918-1923

Villa Lanna, Prague

15–16 September 2022

From various perspectives and using different methodologies, recent historiography has shown that food ‘decided’ the First World War. Above all, it was the failure of the food provisioning system towards the end of the war that accelerated the disintegration of societies and the internal breakdown of states such as Austria-Hungary. The growing imbalance between appeals to self-sacrifice and the state’s worsening inability to satisfy the basic needs of its citizens became a symptom of the collapse. While there were differences in this respect between the various regions and states of East-Central Europe, most of them were confronted with the basic problems of malnourished and frustrated populations, depleted agriculture and interrupted international trade routes.

For East-Central Europe, the end of war in the autumn of 1918 also heralded the end of the centuries-old empires of the Habsburgs, Romanovs, and Hohenzollerns. The redrawing of political boundaries brought about competing national projects and provoked border disputes and wars. Radical politics and new ideologies offered promises of a better social order and a way out of the chaos. The primary issue for the new governments was how to feed their exhausted populations as a means of demonstrating better governance than the monarchies, averting the threat of uncontrolled social revolution and securing civic loyalty in a situation of shattered state authority. The issue of food and other basic needs was thus connected to the ability of these new polities to overcome the post-war crisis by providing for the well-being of their citizens. Food, clothes, fuel and shelter were not only everyday necessities, but also a measure of the ability of the new states to provide their citizens with what the former states had failed to provide.

This workshop aims to scrutinize the character and impact of the wartime and post-war provisioning crisis on the transformation of states and their populations in the years that followed the armistice of the First World War. The following questions will be addressed:

How was food produced, distributed and consumed in the period immediately after the First World War? How did the state, provincial and local organs of power regulate food supply and how much continuity was there with the period before 1918? What role did food play as a political tool in securing and reinforcing the legitimacy of the new state and its organs of power at all levels? How was the provisioning crisis perceived and interpreted by various actors – from consumers and producers at the local level, through the media, to political elites and experts? What was the role of international actors and humanitarian aid in attempts to manage the crisis? What new popular reactions and public policies emerged and what kind of legacy for the future did this unprecedented crisis leave?

In addition to case studies from East-Central Europe, we would welcome comparative or transnational approaches to this topic.

The organizers of the workshop are Václav Šmidrkal (Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences) and Rok Stergar (University of Ljubljana). It will take place in Prague or will be a hybrid event, depending on the COVID-19 situation. The working language is English. Limited funds are available for travel costs and accommodation. Please indicate in your application if you require such support.

The keynote lecture will be given by **Mary Elisabeth Cox** (Central European University).

Please send proposals of a maximum of 300 words and a short biographical statement by **31 March 2022** to smidrkal@mua.cas.cz and rok.stergar@ff.uni-lj.si. Successful applicants will be notified shortly after the submission deadline.