

Universities in Imperial Austria 1848–1918: A Social History of a Multicultural Space. By Surman, Jan. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2019. 460 pp.

A revised and updated version of his doctoral dissertation *Habsburg Universities 1848–1918: Biography of a Space* (University of Vienna, 2012), Jan Surman's new book is an ambitious study of universities as spaces of knowledge, multilingualism in the Habsburg Empire, and changing landscapes and networks of academic mobility in Cisleithania in the long nineteenth century. The book follows a chronological structure while engaging with a multi-layered thematic framework which draws on historiographical traditions and debates in the history of science and knowledge, the spatial turn, and imperial history, making an important contribution to understandings of the history of the Habsburg Empire. Surman's work will surely be of interest to scholars in these fields, as well as to readers interested in the history of education, migration, and nationalism.

While the title indicates that the narrative will focus primarily on the period between 1848 and 1918, Surman takes a broader view, exploring the transformations of what he calls “imperial academic space” (p.3) from the late eighteenth century to the afterlife of the empire in the late 1930s. He starts with an introduction of the Habsburg academic landscape of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, when universities were seen as institutions which made civil servants rather than scholarship, and the production of “real” scientific knowledge in the empire took place in other spaces, such as museums, botanical and zoological gardens, clubs and associations, libraries and other (state) collections. 1848 is identified as a turning point for Habsburg universities in Chapter 2, when new agendas emerged and universities were reorganized under Minister of Education Leo Thun-Hohenstein. Surman argues that Thun saw science as a panacea for the various problems, national and social, of the Habsburg composite state: universities were part of an agenda of imperialism, and the new policies aimed to create universities which were positive towards the monarchy and furthered the idea of German linguistic and cultural superiority. At the same time, Surman calls for a more nuanced view of the 1850s and the changes it brought forth, pointing out that the matter of university autonomy remained a central point of debate. He also argues against the forced Germanisation discourse in earlier historiography. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 consider the transformation of the intellectual geography of Cisleithania from

the 1860s as a consequence of the implementation of university autonomy, with a particular focus on changes to the language of instruction at universities across the empire. These chapters focus on changes to imperial, regional, and local academic landscapes, academic hierarchies, academic mobility and migration, and scholarly identities across three main language spaces: Czech, German, and Polish. Surman maps a network of tensions around issues of language, education, scholarship, and identity, pointing to parallels and differences in, for instance, Bohemia and Galicia, and he shows that there were definite similarities, for example, in Czech and Ruthenian language activism from the perspective of political stability. At the same time, these spaces developed very differently, as shown through examples of disciplinary diversification, patterns of academic mobility and exchange, and the stabilization of the institutional hierarchy, with Vienna at the top. The question of identity is explored further in Chapter 6, which considers the experience of being an “Other” at Habsburg universities, with a focus on the role of religious denomination in academic advancement in a context of increasing anti-Semitism, Catholic anti-modernism, and nationalism. Finally, the last chapter moves beyond 1918 and explores the pervasiveness of the Habsburg system in the successor states, not only through the survival of personal connections and scholarly entanglements, but as a consequence of the fact that prominent universities (Cracow, Prague, Vienna) had already been acting according to national geographies before the war.

Surman defines the Habsburg Empire as a “linguistically divided but still culturally entangled scientific space” (p.279). The engagement with the concept of entanglement (or multiple entanglements, in fact) is one of the most interesting aspects of the book. Surman focuses on the productive nature of multiculturalism, which, he argues, outweighed monoculturalism and nationally oriented intellectual retreat. In this sense, when he argues that language change and linguistic plurality did not lead to the dissolution of the empire, he is very much in conversation with recent revisionist histories of the Habsburg imperial space and imperial Austria in particular. The originality of Surman’s book is in that it depicts the Habsburg Austrian university sphere as a moveable, dynamic environment, in which universities were part of an agenda of imperialism, even if, at the same time, they also pursued their own, autonomous agendas. This is illustrated, for instance, through the question of language equality: the book shows that these agendas could be very different in Bohemia and Galicia, two of the book’s most important case studies, but as Surman argues, one cannot understand processes in one without looking at the other.

Space and its limits/limitations is one of the central themes that runs through the narrative as Surman maps the parallel transformations of the academic and imperial landscape. There are multiple, overlapping spaces under the lens here, both vertically and horizontally: Surman quotes Theodor Mommsen as saying that “Habsburg scholars are sentenced to Chernivtsi, pardoned to Graz, promoted to Vienna” (p.154), showing that the institutional and academic hierarchy in the Habsburg Empire was inseparable from imperial symbolic geography. The limitations of the academic space are also demonstrated through the analysis of academic appointments and scholars’ careers outside universities, with Surman crafting a nuanced picture of career insecurity and the role of untenured and unpaid university instructors. *Privatdozenten* (unsalaried university lecturers) are identified as key victims and, at the same time, important pillars of the Habsburg imperial academic landscape. They constituted a precarious teaching force which, for the most part, worked for no pay and which, through the work the members of this teaching force did outside universities, made an important contribution to local and urban developments. Another instance where the significance of multidirectional spatiality is made clear is when in Chapter 6 Surman writes about the anti-Semitism of academic participation and appointments, delineating the “invisible ghetto walls” and glass ceilings that affected Jewish scholars horizontally and vertically.

Language is another key theme used by Surman to argue that Habsburg universities were both spatial and imperial projects. The book uses the question of language use in university education and research to address various tensions in the empire, not only in terms of how nationalism affected academia at a more universal level, but also down to the more particular questions of local sciences or disciplines, such as the development of regional historiographies. Surman identifies changes to the language of instruction as a particular turning point, and he shows that it affected not only demands for language equality, but also the intellectual geography of the empire, its regions, and cities. Chapter 5 examines these processes through comparative analysis of the appointment processes in Galicia and Bohemia, looking at linguistic and geopolitical aspects of how the universities in Cracow and L’viv sought Polish-speaking professors, while Prague looked to appoint Czechs from the 1860s in a different fashion. Ultimately, the book convincingly argues that while science was, and remained, an overall universal enterprise for Habsburg scholars, pursuing it in the national language was seen as essential for national development, as the use of the national language in the sciences was seen as serving and securing loyalty to the national cause.

A meticulously researched work based on extensive archival research in an impressive number of languages and countries, the book offers detailed and nuanced analysis of the source material. In addition to several tables offering statistical evidence about academic salaries, appointments, and other social patterns of university life (including the percentage of professors' offspring who entered the professoriat), the narrative is also interspersed with some well-placed anecdotes. As Surman states himself in the introduction, the book would have benefitted from more attention to women (or rather, the virtual absence of women) in the Habsburg academic system, and, as evident from the title, Hungary is largely missing from this history of a Habsburg multilingual university space. This criticism notwithstanding, the book shows remarkable range in its coverage and analysis, and it is a significant achievement for the history of science in Central Europe.

Katalin Stráner  
University of Manchester