

Dr. Felix Jeschke

Peripheral Imperialisms? Ruling the Soil in Hungarian and Czechoslovak Ruthenia (1867–1939)

My research project is a diachronic study of imperial governance in Hungarian and Czechoslovak Ruthenia, focusing on initiatives of agricultural modernization to identify continuities and discontinuities between empire and nation-state. It builds on the assertion that the history of East-Central Europe in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century must be approached from the perspective of imperial and colonial history. For East-Central European states such as Dualist Hungary and inter-war Czechoslovakia were part of a transnational imperial context and used imperial measures of governance. This becomes evident especially in regions considered peripheral to the state's power structure, which became laboratories of governance.

The project will examine this hypothesis by studying the agricultural modernization projects that Hungary and Czechoslovakia implemented in Carpathian Ruthenia between 1867 and 1939. It will focus on a diachronic, trans-imperial investigation of the Hungarian 'Highlands Programme' (hegyvidéki akció) and the Czechoslovak land reform (pozemková reforma). The research of these case studies will be organized along three interconnected topics: a) knowledge production, b) structures of governance and c) imperial actors.

With its majority Rusyn and large Jewish population, Ruthenia was ethnically and socially different from both Budapest and Prague. Hence, I approach Ruthenia as an imperial 'contact zone' (Mary Louise Pratt) in which social groups met in highly asymmetrical relations of power. The aim of the project is to examine the relationships between Budapest/Prague and Ruthenia as well as between the groups within Ruthenia and, on this basis, to evaluate the resonance of these modernization initiatives with contemporary imperial and colonial projects.

The project has been approved for a three-year DFG research grant at the Collegium Carolinum. The anticipated start date is the beginning of 2026.

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