

Towards a New—and Broader—History of Hungary’s Troubled Peacemaking

A Research Report on the Trianon 100 Research Group

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Abstract. This research report presents the endeavors and findings of the Trianon 100 Research Group, which was founded with the support of the *Lendület* [Momentum] program of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Based on a survey of over a dozen volumes published by the group and another ten collaborative volumes, as well as numerous essays and articles, the report argues for the possibility of using newer instruments in the historian’s toolbox to tackle controversial issues in modern history from new perspectives. The Trianon 100 Research Group focused in particular on the history of mentalities, the interactions among bodies and individuals at different levels of societal organisation (local/regional/national/imperial), and an array of under-researched areas, such as the history of population movements after 1918. The essential aim was to suggest that it might be possible to (re-)write the history of post-World War I peacemaking from a less Westphalian perspective, informed in particular by historical political sociology and social history.

Keywords: Trianon, Momentum grant, World War I aftermath, population movements, border change, history, and public remembrance

Introduction

What would constitute a methodologically and topically relevant historical investigation of a Central European problem that has been discussed all too often from various high politics perspectives inflected by national bias? Is it even possible to discuss a divisive moment in modern history through novel approaches and thereby move beyond some of the unproductive controversies that have often plagued the

non-dialogues between national historiographies in the region? Revisiting the question of the Trianon peace treaty certainly constitutes such a moment and offers a good case study with which to test some of the more recent additions to the historian's toolbox, holding out the promise of untangling the multiple stories around the impossibly complex referent object of 'Trianon'. From the perspective of Hungarian historiography, it is difficult not to approach these questions with the desire to reestablish a 'moral order of the past' by retelling the story or stories of the peace.¹ Conversely, non-Hungarian historical research in the East Central European region has often focused on establishing the justice of the peace and highlighting the dangers of seeking to portray it as fundamentally flawed or immoral.²

While discussions of the relationship between the past and the present (in this case, between the Versailles peace system and the current state of Europe or its post-Habsburg regions) are both useful and natural within the broader societal discussions about ethnicity, nationhood, and statehood in the twenty-first century, the research project introduced in the following pages proceeded on the assumption that an academic engagement with an important and controversial moment in history should focus on how novel methods and approaches can add new colors to the 'Trianon tapestry'. This exercise in rethinking and reappraisal would, hopefully, result in a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of this multi-layered 'node' of history and memory. This in turn could help fulfill the calling of historiography to act as a critical corrective to collective memory, which according to Jacques Le Goff is always already entangled in the operations of political power.³ To accomplish this, academic history that seeks to contextualize the past as past would first explore how a transformation came about and what this transformation caused to happen in its own time period, distancing itself from present-day attempts to instrumentalize history.

In keeping with the aforementioned goals, the Trianon 100 research program (which is part of the Momentum grant program launched by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), has sought to broaden the scope of investigations about the peace treaty and its contexts while also endeavoring to add to the existing corpus of printed sources through the publication of a multi-volume series of archival documents. With regard to 'broadening' the research agenda, the emphasis fell on the entanglements among socioeconomic histories of smaller units (families, enterprises, subregions, etc.) and 'high politics', yielding multiple volumes on hitherto under-researched areas of 'Trianon history'. These volumes—monographs and conference proceedings—are situated at the meeting point of what could be called historical political sociology and social history, with some contributions perhaps

1 Szarka, "Párhuzamos jelenségek," 470–72.

2 Holec, "Čo majú spoločné Maďari s Japoncami"; Pušcaš, and Sava, eds. *Trianon, Trianon!*

3 Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 84 and 213–15.

leaning more towards one pole, but nevertheless sustaining a dialogue between the branches of research in each case. As far as the goal of making new information available is concerned, the project has sought to facilitate the publication of a series of digests from national archives that offer focused, topical, but also extensive documentary reconstructions of thought processes in governmental elites about peacemaking in East Central Europe in the wake of World War I. Together with numerous public engagements to help disseminate research findings, the research has generated thirteen volumes (including five monographs), as well as ten co-sponsored additional books and over a hundred published papers. Project members gave well over a hundred public talks targeting a broader public and numerous interviews and quotes were published in the Hungarian and international press, signaling our collective commitment to promoting nuanced, up-to-date assessments of history in the public domain. The first phase of the research ran from 2016 to 2020, with a follow-up phase to facilitate the dissemination of findings continuing until June 2024, at which time the project will be definitively closed.

The outlines of the research project

The Trianon 100 Research Group is part of the Momentum (*Lendület*) initiative launched by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2009 at the behest of President of the Academy at the time, József Pálinkás. The stated aim of the program was to provide incentives to young and mid-career researchers to conduct research in the country by offering a stable source of funding for their work. The Trianon 100 Research Group's participation in the competition and its selection as one of the eleven winners out of almost one hundred applicants in 2016 represented an extraordinary responsibility, because it was the first funded project in the history the Momentum program focusing specifically on twentieth-century history. As such, it would be expected to pave the way for further contemporary historical research.

The Trianon 100 Research Group originally proposed a five-year research plan structured around four main pillars. These included

- reconstructing the international context through publications of archival documents and promoting novel analyses of these fairly well researched aspects;
- expanding on previous, often anecdotal knowledge about the post-World War collapse and its effects on Hungarian society;
- studying the gradual consolidation of the peace system in the Central European context, while moving beyond diplomatic and political history and shifting the focus of inquiry to regions, societal groups, and other under-researched subjects;
- and contributing to the study of the mnemonic practices surrounding 'Trianon' in (contemporary) Hungarian society.

The Momentum grant provided a sum of approximately 80,000 euros per year, subject to some fluctuations for the first five years, and it was halved for the follow-up period. About half of the expenses was related to employment, with the other half was available to fund research, conferences, and publications.

The original commitments of the project included establishing a firmer empirical basis for historical thinking about Trianon. In addition to the publication of archival sources, this included a multi-tier representative survey on attitudes to Trianon in contemporary Hungarian society, a database of Trianon memorials, as well as the reconstruction (inevitably incomplete) of population movements related to the peace treaty, which is a large but understudied field in which basic empirical data were often missing or dating from the 1920s.⁴

In addition to data collection, the historiographical turn towards the social contexts of the peace treaty was to be highlighted through extensive engagement with individuals, families, and enterprises, as well as cultural, ethnic, and other associations and groups impacted (and often catalysed) by the Trianon peace treaty. This focus implied the ‘thickening’ of numerous familiar concepts: borders were to be investigated as places of social exchange and political contestation rather than as geographical lines agreed on by diplomats.⁵ Cities and townships were removed from the binary logic of being ‘lost’ or ‘retained’ and appeared instead as fragile and often fractured zones of interactions where ethnicity, social and economic status, and livelihoods were being renegotiated amidst dilemmas of staying or leaving. Altogether, the promise of the Trianon 100 undertaking was to provide solid empirical underpinning for a somewhat post-Westphalian rethinking of the peace system, where competing sovereignties and their claims and concerns would not render lives and mentalities unrecognizable or even invisible to the historian’s inquisitive gaze.

Research outcomes

The first pillar contains an impressive series of publications on the history of diplomacy and international politics in general. The focus of this series fell on the roles played by the victorious powers (Italy, Japan, and the United States) that had not been studied. This, of course, involved making the various records concerning these powers as accessible as the French, British, and even German records.⁶ Additionally, neighboring countries (Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) played a crucial role in the peace preparations and at the peace

4 Szűts, “Flüchtlingsfrage und Staatsbürgerschaft,” 32–35 and 42–48.

5 Egry, “Unruly Borderlands,” 721–24.

6 Juhász, ed., *Trianon és az olasz diplomácia*; Glant, ed., *Az Egyesült Államok útja Trianonhoz*.

conference. They did so through their diplomats but also through their actions in the territories of the former Kingdom of Hungary. Sources concerning the interactions between local army officers and bureaucrats on the one hand and their central governments in Prague, Bucharest, or Belgrade on the other, as well as the diplomats dispatched to Paris and other European cities, in part had not been made accessible in published form and therefore have not become integrated into much of the ongoing research on Trianon, a lacuna at least partially filled with the publication of three collections of selected documents.⁷

To mend this empirical gap efficiently, the form of these publications was kept as classic as possible: indexed selections of documents with a rich apparatus and a voluminous introductory study help the reader come to terms with the multiple rationalities and interlocking aims that influenced the major and minor powers. The published sources also included memoirs and Peace Delegation diaries that had not yet been published on the functioning of the Hungarian Peace Delegation, and they introduce the mentalities and attitudes underpinning the geographical-historical argumentation presented at the peace conference.⁸ The documents relating to the often overlooked Japanese participation in Paris rounded out this series.⁹ It should be remembered that Tokyo was acknowledged as a major power at the peace conference, and Japanese representatives were present on all the border demarcation committees. The lack of published sources about their participation could finally be overcome at least in part due to the work of the editors of this volume. With these volumes, together with the selected French and British documents available in print for some time, we have an almost complete corpus for a reconstruction of the circumstances of the genesis of the Hungarian peace treaty.¹⁰

Within the second pillar, research continued along the lines of social history and the history of mentalities. The focus of the research fell on the domestic efforts of the Hungarian state in 1918–1921 to alleviate the socioeconomic collapse of the country, as well as the interactions between society and the authorities embedded in it. These investigations encompassed the postwar economic depression, the social consequences of the peace, and the refugee crisis in Hungary, as well as the role of the armed forces and of paramilitary violence and the place of the Soviet Republic in Hungary in the history of peacemaking.

What was perhaps the single most important contribution in this area concerned the mapping of the complex integration process of refugees from formerly

7 Simon, ed., *Csehszlovák iratok*; L. Balogh, ed., *Románia és az erdélyi kérdés*; Hornyák, ed., *Szerb iratok*.

8 Zeidler, ed., *A magyar békeküldöttség naplója*.

9 Umemura and Wintermantel, eds, *Trianon és a japán diplomácia*.

10 Ádám et al., eds, *Documents diplomatiques français*; Lojók, ed., *British Policy on Hungary*.

Hungarian lands. The goal here was simple enough. We sought to move beyond the existing (scarce) secondary literature and include a much broader scope of archival and statistical sources to discuss this neglected issue. People who chose to leave did so for different reasons, and while it has been well-known that the eventual arrival of such groups impacted almost all aspects of social life, information about the nature of this impact had also remained scarce. The project contributed not only to a recalculation of the numbers of people arriving to post-Trianon Hungary, but, almost as importantly, it investigated the circumstances of their relocation. This included rural populations and intellectuals alike, who followed shifting opportunity structures and sought to escape not so much direct persecution as the elimination of the socioeconomic conditions that had permitted them to earn their livelihoods before the end of the Great War.¹¹

Similarly, it had been common knowledge for decades that the roles and functions of (para)militaries, defense, and violence in the transitional period represent an important yet poorly understood aspect of post-World War Hungary. The monograph by Tamás Révész constitutes a significant achievement in this area. Révész discusses army organisation, defense policy, and disarmament and mobilisation drawing on a broad array of source materials. His work shifts the focus of traditional questions about the continuation of wars towards an understanding of the social processes underlying the efforts to resist. The book highlights the faulty logic behind the dated dualist perspective, which drew a distinction between a ‘proletarian and internationalist Red Army’ and a counterrevolutionary ‘national army with patriotic intentions’. Révész offers a multifaceted reconstruction of the efforts of the Károlyi government to organise a new army as early as the turn of 1918/1919. These attempts at army organisation by the government of the 1918 revolutionary progressives failed not only due to the government’s stubborn pacifism and rapid shifts in the prospective function of the armed forces to be raised, but also because the segments of the population not affected by the offensives led by the successor states refused to participate in the half-hearted mobilisation attempt. In contrast, the proletarian dictatorship was successful in this regard, because it relied initially on disciplined social democratic trade unions. Simultaneously, it was able to integrate the various popular and middle-class militias that had been pushed back by the successor state forces from the north and the east. By regrouping them into armies, it created a relatively large armed force that was also relatively cohesive, at least at the unit level, and motivated to regain territories. In sum, the failure of 1918/1919 and the relative successes in the late spring of 1919 in terms of mobilisation had little to do with government ideology more with locating cohesive and/

11 Ablonczy, ed., *Úton*. For an English language state of that art on the question cf. Ablonczy, “»It is an Unpatritoric Act to Flee«.”

or motivated segments of society and committing them unambiguously to the fight against the armies of the neighboring states.¹²

Underpinning the crisis management by weak governments and war-weary social groups were the economic collapse of the country, the fuel needs of large cities, food rationing, price regulation, and interrupted commodity flows. These crises often determined the balance of power in the national political arena. We understand today that the stabilisation of the counterrevolutionary regime after the autumn of 1919 was made possible by the fact that it found more effective solutions in this area than the Soviet Republic or the Károlyi government had done and thus gained considerable social support. This was also one of the conclusions of the volume *From War to Peace: Hungarian Society after 1918*, edited by Zsombor Bódy and containing contributions by eminent experts on the subject.¹³ Péter Nagy's pioneering study dealt for instance with the state organisation of coal supply: coal, despite being an overwhelmingly important issue, had received little attention in the secondary literature in Hungary, though historians have known for some time that the history of World War I and the subsequent peace treaties could be written as a chronicle of social and political struggles for coal.¹⁴ We are just beginning to understand how major regional events from the 1918 supply crisis in the hinterland, the surrender of the Mackensen army retreating from Romania, and the signing of the peace treaty, to the Upper Silesian referenda, are linked to the most important energy source of the era, yet research on the importance of this raw material to social and political processes in postwar Hungary is still in its infancy.

This pillar also included research on population movements. Published studies of the research group eventually mapped state mechanisms of refugee management and the ideologies of refugee groups.¹⁵ Fifteen thousand names of refugees were made available on our website (trianon100.hu). This list was the 'by-product' of a book by documentary filmmaker István Dékány entitled *Orphans of Trianon*.¹⁶ It was revised (eliminating multiple mentions, etc.) and the relevant geographical names were disambiguated, checked, and entered into the database. Following the publication of the website, 50,000 individual visits were recorded in three days, and a flood of letters also started to arrive containing further clarifications, family memories,

12 Révész, *Nem akartak katonát látni*.

13 Bódy, ed., *Háborúból a békébe*. For an English language review of major themes by the editor, cf. Bódy, "A World Lifted off its Hinges."

14 Nagy, "Harc a szénhány ellen."

15 Ablonczy, "»Maradtunk volna ott, ahonnan jöttünk«"; also: Szűts, "Flüchtlingsfrage und Staatsbürgerschaft."

16 Dékány, *Trianoni árvák*. The database is available at *Menekültek*: <http://trianon100.hu/menekultek>, accessed on 16 July 2023.

and even, in some cases, scanned family diaries. The culmination of this aspect of the research was the conference *On the Road – Refugees, Mobility and Integration in Central Europe and Hungary after World War I*, which was held in November 2018 at the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). The conference opened with a presentation by Peter Gatrell, Professor at the University of Manchester and a renowned authority on refugee history. The conference volume contains most of the papers that were held and represents a considerable advance over earlier accounts.¹⁷

The third pillar of the research was organised around a comparative study of the Central European region. The Hungarian peace treaty is impossible to understand without knowledge of the events in the wider region. Here, the research team's interests coalesced around three distinct issues. Between 1918 and 1924, more than a dozen short-lived states were created at least partly in the territory of what had been historical Hungary. Several more similar formations arose in the wider Central European space, mainly in the former Russian Empire. In the former territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, these 'transient polities' included the Székely, Banat, Eastern Slovakian, Spiš, Kalotaszeg, and Vendian republics. The existing secondary literature contained scant mentions of these polities at best, and it did not engage with any of the fundamental questions that arise, such as what were the common features of these experiments, what determined their respective fates, and what kinds of ideological profiles (ranging from Wilsonianism to proto-fascism) did they have? We also knew little about the motivations of the local elites who chose to throw in their lot with these quasi-states, even if only for a short period of time. The emerging image permits a better understanding of how local and regional identities shift and become linked with different national identities (themselves subject to change), and it also highlights the interplay of ideational and material factors that impact such shifts.¹⁸ Ultimately, simplistic explanations and generalisations are bound to turn out to be false in this setting, given the different options that people from different walks of life and different political commitments had available to them. In this field, the research group collaborated with the Central European Research Institute of the Eötvös József Research Centre at the National University of Public Service. In February 2020, a joint conference of the two research teams was held, with, once more, an edited volume making accessible the most important research findings and new insights.¹⁹

17 Ablonczy, ed., *Úton*.

18 In this regard, Balázs Ablonczy's twin study on Székely networks and their (re)definitions of group identities in "exile" provides both theoretical insights and empirical examples. Ablonczy, "Székely identitásépítés"; Ablonczy, "»Székely fiúk«."

19 Szeghy-Gayer and Zahorán, eds, *Kérészállamok*.

The local and regional dimensions of post-imperial transitions were also explored within the framework of the research project. Given the importance, in this context, of context-specific situations and collective or individual life choices, these aspects were best explored through case studies which at times bordered on microhistory. The takeover of public administration and the effects of this takeover on personnel, the transformation of space (political, cultural, and economic), and the overhaul of large public systems such as education were all taking place simultaneously in this setting. What were the dominant patterns and strategies adopted by the new powers, and what strategies were used by minority elites (and other social classes) to get by? Research on the transfer of power and sovereignty shifts in Kosice (Kassa, Kaschau), Bardejov (Bártfa, Bártfeld), and Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti) represented municipality-level studies permitting in-depth reconstructions.²⁰ These initial studies were complemented later by more focused analyses of various aspects related to the transfer of power.²¹ Last but not least, a historiographical ‘comparing of notes’ also took place on 29–31 October, 2020, as our research group organised a three-day international conference in Budapest with the ERC-funded Nepostrans project. The conference, which was held online and live simultaneously due to the ongoing pandemic, focused on these processes and the interrelationship between these processes and the much more frequently discussed ‘high politics’.

In the context of studying the processes and effects of the transfer of power it became evident that a larger project extending these investigations into rural areas and larger communities in small villages would not be feasible at this time. Important work in this regard was initiated in Cluj at Babes-Bolyai University by Judit Pál,²² but the research group has not had the resources, both human and material, to replicate such research across a sample of several areas lost to Hungary in 1918–1920. Important contributions to studies on borderlands, however, could provide a partial corrective to this absence of any mapping of the postwar situation beyond the world of cities and townships. The research group published two monographs on life in Western Hungary, including life on both sides of the new border between post-Trianon Hungary and Austria, a subject already discussed in the context of population movements and individual adaptation strategies. These studies, by Péter Bencsik and Viola Murber, explored the processes of adapting to border shifts. These processes tended to reveal both the resilience of populations and the pliancy of local life in developing strategies for survival and even prosperity. Importantly, in these studies, borders are shown to be much more than boundaries: the legal and illicit

20 Simon, “Kassa három megszállása”; Szeghy-Gayer, “Államfordulat és az újrastrukturálódó elit”; Sárándi, “Konzolidáció után konzolidáció.”

21 Simon, *Az átmenet bizonytalansága*; Hornyák, “Marko Protić szerb ortodox esperes emlékei.”

22 Pál, “Főispánok és prefektusok 1918–1919-ben.”

movement of persons and goods is a constant and contributed significantly to (re) shaping life in Western Hungary/Eastern Austria.²³

The last monograph in the third pillar was authored by Máté Rigó and provides welcome insight into strategies used by business elites after 1918. Rigó reveals that, despite the obvious difficulties, many enterprises in Transylvania adapted to the changes and preserved the societal status and affluence of at least part of the old capitalist segment of the society. The book also documents, however, how incremental changes prepared the way for a longer term, thorough reconfiguration of elite positions and the social structure. Rigó argues for a nuanced interpretation, which discredits both the stories about a complete and immediate ‘changing of the guard’ and the narratives concerning the alleged persistence of prewar networks of power.²⁴

The fourth and final pillar concerns the place of the Trianon mnemonic complex in Hungarian public memory. It represents perhaps the most methodologically diverse tranche of the four main research directions. Memory studies bring together literary scholars, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, art historians, and historians, and our research has been no exception. The fundamental aim has been to explore the roles of Trianon remembrance and revisionist ideology in the development of Hungarian foreign policy thinking, historiography, public art/space, and also fiction and memory politics, complemented by a limited, text-based survey of parallel and antagonistic mnemonic practices in the neighboring countries. A September 2018 workshop with Slovak, Romanian, and Serbian historians aimed to investigate how historiographical and public debates about the past impact each other and render analysis difficult. Insights from participants, including discussions about divergent perspectives and shared concerns about how history can be discussed in the public space, were published as an edited collection of papers in one of the leading Hungarian historical reviews.²⁵

In addition to trans-border conversations, this research pillar also included discussion of public representations of Trianon and the preparation of a registry of memorials.²⁶ The analysis was complemented by a 1000+ respondent public opinion survey and two specific qualitative focus group studies on the Hungarian population’s and history teachers’ perceptions of Trianon. The latter surveys were launched in partnership with the Research Institute for National Strategy, and they included an unprecedentedly large survey sample of Hungarian history teachers’ knowledges and attitudes towards knowledge transfer on the subject.²⁷

23 Murber, *Nyugat-Magyarországtól Burgenlandig*; Bencsik, *Demarkációs vonaltól államhatárig*.

24 Rigó, *Capitalism in Chaos*.

25 Romsics and Zahorán, “Útkereső történések.”

26 *Emlékművek*. <https://trianon100.hu/emlekmuvek>, accessed on 16 July 2023.

27 Ablonczy, Bali, and Röss, eds, “Az első világháborút lezáró békeszerződések.” Electronic

The opinion poll concerning attitudes towards Trianon predictably drew considerable attention on publication. Its lead researcher, Balázs Bazsalya, documented and analysed the curious, overlapping character of beliefs concerning Trianon in Hungarian society. Most of the respondents, rather than committing to a single, watertight memory-*Gestalt* about the peace treaty and its consequences, tended to shy away from unbridled revisionism just as much as from attributing the loss of former territories the inexorable laws of history and nationalism. Instead, they tended to have middle-of-the-road attitudes, considering Trianon a loss and a tragedy, but not one that would determine attitudes to neighbours and the world at large. Responsibility tended to be distributed in the public eye, rather than attributable to a single actor or group. Overall, the survey suggested that most people in Hungarian society are slowly progressing through a belated processing of the peace, working towards memorialisation but also towards compartmentalizing the trans-generational trauma.²⁸

Conclusion

The overall findings of the research conducted within the fourth pillar were rather more ambiguous and pointed towards the overarching problems facing the whole project. Given the social and commercial (over)production of history-related content, the instrumentalisation of the past, the resilience of ahistorical narratives, and a colorful boom of Trianon memorials and memorabilia in Hungary, academic surveys such as the ones attempted by the research group can only identify and gauge challenges in the quest to master history, rather than accomplish this difficult task. This remains the case despite the considerable publishing successes of the group, including Balázs Ablonczy's *Trianon Unknown*, a presentation of alternative perspectives informing the collective research process, which is geared towards a broader readership.²⁹ The work of our research group, dozens of interviews and quotes and over a hundred public lectures notwithstanding, was accordingly focused not on changing perceptions of the Trianon-complex in society, but on exploring where historical analysis is still lacking or can be enhanced by additional research.

version available at: http://trianon100.hu/attachment/0003/2321_az_elso_vilagaborut_lezaro_bekeszerzodesek_mai_megitelese_magyarorszagi_kozepiskolakban_kutatasi_jelentes_nski_2020.pdf, accessed on 16 July 2023.

28 Bazsalya, "Trianon a hazai közvélemény szemében." Electronic version available at http://trianon100.hu/attachment/0003/2255_trianon_lakossagi_survey_elemzes_final_honlapra.pdf, accessed on 16 July 2023.

29 Ablonczy, *Ismeretlen Trianon*.

While two major monographs associated with the project are still forthcoming (one on Hungarian foreign policy thinking and one on a comparative historiographical study including Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania) and are due before its termination next year, it is already very clear that the subject matter of Trianon—in the broad sense as used throughout this report—was ripe for reconsideration. This was accomplished in this research project in light of the historiographical shifts of emphasis and the methodological innovations which, over roughly the past two decades, have transformed how the modern history of East Central Europe is researched, viewed, and interpreted. In practice, this has meant a turn towards the study of mentalities and local/regional life worlds in the context of broader historical processes, as well as the unearthing under-researched socioeconomic dimensions of era-defining political processes. A multilingual, multicultural burgher of a township in Northern Hungary, a peasant or aristocratic matriarch whose life is changed forever by a new border, a distinctly ‘post-imperial’ diplomat reflecting on which arguments remain relevant in the normative upheaval of post-Great War politics, and even a historian looking back on events which took place a century ago from the vantage point of an academic establishment of a small successor state to the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy all represent potential protagonists of stories that can be told and were in fact told by the Trianon 100 Research Group. And when the perspective of newer cultural history and historical sociology was abandoned in favour of broader ‘macrohistorical’ perspectives, such as the importance of raw materials and their consumption, infrastructure and its users, population shifts, and even force and armed violence, the emphasis on avoiding the all too familiar ‘country narrative’, with an almost personified, unitary state-actor emerging as the protagonist of history, remained palpable throughout. Along with colleagues in the country and in the broader Central European region, we consistently felt that we were working towards a ‘sustainable’, non-reductionist, multilingual and multiperspectival idea of historical research that sheds new light on subject material many had thought to have been discussed to death.

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