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THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITY AND ITS IDENTITY

ABSTRACT The form and shape of the city are, in a way, the sum of the development of its civilisation, and this is why urbanisation is so often cited as a symbol of Europe's cultural advancement. A particular triumph of urbanisation is the concept known as "creative cities", that is, cities that contribute creatively to the universal values of our civilisation without losing any of their local flavour or compromising their unique identity. This paper claims that the best evidence of Central Europe's achievements as a civilisation, and the essence of its identity, are its cities. Indeed, an understanding of the phenomenon of these cities, in particular their changing meanings and stories, and a broader historical perspective on the changing nature of their functions in relation to Europe's settlement network, are crucial to comprehending the very essence of Central European identity.

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In Central Europe cultural identity has never been something endowed once and for all; it has always required constant, deliberate election. There can be no doubt that the best evidence of Central Europe's achievements as a civilisation, and the essence of its identity, are its cities, among them Prague, Budapest, Krakow, Lviv and Zagreb. Indeed, an understanding of the phenomenon of these cities, in particular their changing meanings and stories, and a broader historical perspective on the changing nature of their functions in relation to Europe's settlement network, are crucial to comprehending the very essence of Europe Minor. For the city is the fruit of protracted processes, the product of a convergence of many different phenomena. The form and shape of the city are, in a way, the sum of the development of its civilisation, and this is why urbanisation is so often cited as a symbol of Europe's cultural advancement.

The city as an economic entity fulfils two types of functions: exo- and endogenic. The former have to do with the ways in which the city "radiates" – the export of its output of goods and services to supralocal markets. The scale and reach of these exports are a measure of the city's economic growth. Its endogenic functions are connected with the way it meets local residents' needs, and as such do not generate growth directly, although they are a determinant of the community's living standard. It is the supralocal, exogenic functions that are the driving force and guarantee of growth. They also broaden the scope and quality of the endogenic functions. In other words, the growth mechanism is founded on the maximisation of the city's positive trade balance in contacts with its economic zone. Fundamental to the success and the very character of the city – as a reflection of its model of functioning – is the structure of products and services it offers.¹ What makes a place a metropolis, or a centre of any kind, is not only its size, strength and reach, but also the complexity of the functions it performs. Hence truly worthy of the title of metropolis are "diversified cities", i.e. cities with complex functions and more sophisticated functions with a higher complexity factor.² A particular triumph of urbanisation is the concept known as "creative cities", that is, cities that contribute creatively to the universal values of our civilisation without losing any of their local flavour or compromising their unique identity.

If Christianity and self government are to be seen as two of the foundations of the Latin civilisation, the millennial experience of Central European cities is another. If we look back over both aspects of Europe's civilisational development, the cultural, on the one hand, and the economic, on the other, we can see, in the 12th and 13th centuries, a markedly deepening integration of Bohemia, Poland and Hungary, the monarchies of Europe Minor, with Carolingian Europe. This was linked in part with the economic programme of the Cistercians and above all with the great eastward wave of settlement, which transplanted the Western European mode of settlement to the Czech, Polish and Hungarian lands.

¹ K. Dziewoński, M. Jerczyński, *Baza ekonomiczna i struktura funkcjonalna miast*, Warszawa 1971.

² J. Purchla, J. Sepiół, "Metropolie a rozwój regionalny Polski", in J. Purchla (ed.), *Metropolitalne funkcje Krakowa*, vol. 1, Kraków 1998, p. 16.

One of the pillars of European urbanisation in this period was municipal self-government, which was gradually gaining new rights and privileges. The autonomy enjoyed by medieval cities as a result of the revolution that was the formation of communes was the source of their power, and urban law was also instrumental in determining their spatial layout.³ Indeed, even in the Middle Ages self-government as a factor in the advancement of civilisation played a fundamental role in the creation of the cultural space of the European civitas, including many towns and cities of Europe Minor. For these latter, self-government was something of a pass to Europe, a phenomenon integrating the older and younger parts of the continent. In the 12th and 13th centuries some 5,000 towns were established across Europe! Europe Minor already had a significant part in this remarkable process of urbanisation, with the Polish lands alone contributing around 250 new towns. The scale of this development is illustrated well by the estimates of Stanisław Trawkowski. According to his research, while in the mid-12th century there were barely more than 40 proto-urban settlements in Poland, 200 years later there were nearly 400 towns in the same territory.⁴

The chartering of medieval towns provided not only a framework for their spatial development, but also a foundation for their legal and economic organisation. In this respect, German law became the paradigm to be emulated. Throughout Central Europe of the day, the culture of the German language played a special role in creating a new model for urbanisation. As early as during the period 1176–1178, the Bohemian duke Sobieslaus II bestowed a privilege on the Germans in Prague which is widely recognised as the first endowment of urban legal autonomy in Central Europe (*lex iustitia Theutonicorum*).⁵ The inflow of German colonists contributed to multi-ethnicity, and the newcomers were the organisers of the urban borough. These colonists – the medieval equivalent of developers – brought a standardised organisational and legal model as far east as Transylvania, then the *limes* of Latin Europe.

German law – written law (*ius scriptum*) – introduced an entirely new legal culture based on a shared foundation. It taught respect for the law. It is also important to stress the breadth of this *ius municipale*, which encompassed civil law, criminal law, administrative law, and legal procedure. At its heart was the concept of the legal identity of the burgher (*cives*) within the city limits; this was encapsulated in the phrase: *Die Stadtluft macht frei*, City air makes one free. At the same time, German law offered a framework for the development of the market economy (the exchange of commodities for money). This was of significance not only for the urban economy and trade in real property, but also for the launch of new technologies. Thus, it was also the vehicle for the introduction of merchant law (*ius mercatorum*) in Central Europe, which regulated the principles of trade exchange.

³ H. Samsonowicz, *Życie miasta średniowiecznego*, Poznań 2012, pp. 44-51.

⁴ S. Trawkowski, "W sprawie roli kolonizacji niemieckiej", in *Opuscula medievistica. Studia nad historią społeczną Polski wczesnopiastowskiej*, Warszawa 2005, p. 318.

⁵ R. Eysymont, *Kod genetyczny miasta. Średniowieczne miasta lokacyjne Dolnego Śląska na tle urbanistyki europejskiej*, Wrocław 2009, p. 43.

One charter model which enjoyed particular popularity was that based on the imperial system of Magdeburg. This was codified and disseminated in the form of the “Sachsenspiegel” (the “Saxon mirror”), which was in essence a licence for the new “technology” of urbanisation – a kind of “know how”. To this day many of the terms and concepts introduced from German during this period have remained in everyday use in the Polish language, e.g. *rynek* (*Ring* ‘market square’), *ratusz* (*Rathaus* ‘town hall’), *burmistrz* (*Bürgermeister* ‘mayor’), *waga* (*Waage* ‘weighing scales’), and *kram* (*Kram* ‘trader’s stand’). The charter itself was at once a reference to a specific set of norms and values, and a contract between the landowner and his landlords (chief administrators) defining the terms of the town’s economic development. It was a kind of “invitation to the club”, which opened up a new chapter in the integration of Europe Minor with the old European economic area.⁶

Among the first rulers to perceive a direct link between application of Magdeburg law and rapid economic growth were the Silesian Piasts, who used German law as the foundation for chartering towns including Złotoryja (1211), Lwówek Śląski (1217), Trzebnica (1223), Środa Śląska (1235), and ultimately, in 1242, Wrocław. Silesia rapidly evolved into not only the most highly urbanised province in the Polish lands, but also the most densely urbanised part of Central Europe. Estimates given by scholars of the number of Silesian towns at the beginning of the 14th century range from 116 to as many as 128. By 1350 more than a quarter of the population of Lower Silesia lived in towns, of which there were on average one per 360 km² area.⁷ Unlike the Bohemian rulers in the neighbouring realm, the Silesian Piasts virtually monopolised the urbanisation process of their provinces.

Krakow followed the example of the Silesian towns. The foundation for the reorganisation of the city was the charter privilege issued by the Duke of Krakow, Bolesław V the Chaste, on June 5th 1257 at a gathering in Kopernia near Pińczów. Here, Magdeburg law was employed as the basis for the new order in the city, and the system was first implemented by incomers from Silesia.

Three fundamental conceptions of Central Europe – those of the Hansa, the Jagiellons and the Habsburgs – correspond with the three periods of greatest civilisational and creative advancement in Krakow. Two of them had their roots in the Middle Ages, and all three converged in the shadow of Wawel Hill as early as the turn of the 14th century. Krakow is the only city that blends so creatively and harmoniously the influences from all three of these diametrically different Central European integration systems, and as such its experience offers a way to understanding the essence of the Central European urbanisation model.⁸

The example of Krakow also offers a superb illustration of the complex significance of chartering cities under German law for the formation of the identity of Central

⁶ J. Purchla, “Dziedzictwo lokacji Krakowa. Garść uwag na marginesie jubileuszu 750-lecia nadania miastu prawa magdeburskiego”, *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie*, nr 835. *Prace z zakresu historii gospodarczej i studiów nad miastem*, Kraków 2010, pp. 43-44.

⁷ R. Eysymont, *Kod genetyczny miasta...*, pp. 17-20.

⁸ J. Purchla, *Cracow in the European Core*, Kraków 2016, p. 35.

Europe's cultural landscape. Prior to this development, the urbanisation process had primarily been regulated by the spontaneous evolution of urban function and space. The grand charter bestowed a plan on the city that, in view of the unprecedented scale and symmetry of its urban layout, guaranteed Krakow a special place in the civilisation of the day. The Market Square itself, one of the largest squares in medieval Europe, is magnificent in its regularity and in the scale of the forward planning that harmoniously incorporated existing elements of its urban fabric. Liberated from the narrow alleyways characteristic of so many medieval towns, in 1257 Krakow was granted a plan that remains the basis for its expansion as a metropolis to this day. The new charter confirmed Krakow's power and growing significance.⁹

Thus, it was not in Paris or London, Cologne or Milan – the greatest metropolises of the period – but out on the fringes of civilisation, beyond the borders of the *Imperium Romanum* and the old, Carolingian Europe, that the dream of the ideal city was being realised, employing the principles of hierarchy, finiteness, rhythm, proportion and harmony. It is entirely legitimate to claim that this characteristic and still abundantly legible urban form was Krakow's first creative contribution to European civilisation. At the core of this spatial composition is its great symmetry, its modularity and additivity, based on a system of square blocks forming a checkerboard layout. And although this system was spreading throughout Central Europe at this time, and Krakow was undoubtedly based on the earlier model of Wrocław, nevertheless it is this example that is held up as the supreme attainment of medieval European urban planning.

The new opening of June 5th 1257 had far broader and more extensive consequences for Krakow. For a city is not only *urbs*, but above all *civitas*. June 5th 1257 is the birth date of the urban autonomy in Krakow. The first intermediaries between the duke and the municipality were the *wójt*s (vogts), the chief officials of the city, while justice was exercised by a jury of aldermen, documented from 1264. The same year sees the first mention of the City Council, which was to become a true representation of the townspeople, and slowly but inexorably deprived the *wójt*s and the aldermen of power. This council system, based on a body of six, and later eight councillors, who elected from among their number a mayor, once every six weeks, on a rotational basis, soon became the guarantee of urban autonomy. This was a principle taken directly from the Magdeburg model rather than absorbed through Wrocław, which at that time did not as yet have a council.¹⁰

In this sense, the date June 5th 1257 was of greater than simply local significance. This was not merely a contract with those who were to administer the city, but a political act initiating the implementation of the charter programme. This was one aspect of a more general pursuit of economic revival of Lesser Poland undertaken by the ruler to help reinforce Krakow's political position in the process of a future revival of the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

¹⁰ J. Wyrozumski, *Dzieje Krakowa*, vol. 1, *Kraków do schyłku wieków średnich*, Kraków 1992, pp. 160-199; idem, "Lokacja czy lokacje Krakowa", in idem (ed.), *Kraków. Nowe studia nad rozwojem miasta*, Kraków 2007, pp. 121-151.

Kingdom of Poland. In 1257 Krakow was not yet the capital of a united state. Nevertheless, the charter elevated its position within the system of the Central European settlement, bringing it closer to capital status. This was the basis on which Krakow was drawn into the circle of European economy. It also introduced the principle of multi-ethnicity and openness, generating a creative heterogeneity that rapidly became a great value, and the cornerstone of Krakow's prosperity in the Middle Ages.

In granting the town a good legal foundation, Bolesław V the Chaste provided it with outstanding conditions for creativity and expansion, which paved the way for a time of unsurpassed prosperity founded on the privileges it obtained at the turn of the 14th century and the progressive emancipation of its burgher class. In this way the local government pillar of European civilisation emerged across Central Europe, with a common denominator of autonomy of the free municipality as the foundation of western civilisation.

These "colonial cities" of Central Europe, founded on German law and planned with flair, grew into a particular symbol of the "standardised" dimension of urbanisation that the civilisation of Latin Europe had created at the time. The new model of settlement also reinforced the function of these cities as emporia of commerce. This is confirmed both by the spectacular growth of the medieval towns of the Spisz/Spiš/Zips region and Transylvania and by the largest metropolises: Prague, Krakow and Wrocław. Yet the durability of their layouts as ordained by their charters symbolises not only the might of the *urbs*, but also the power of the continuity of the *civitas*, in the sense not of physical fabric, but of something more – of the city as *ethnos*, as a mass of functions, as a process, and perhaps above all as an idea.

In the 14th century Krakow, with Prague, was already among the largest cities in Central Europe. In the Krakow of the closing years of that century the might of the Hanseatic League as a trading force came into contact with the new political vision of Younger Europe. The 15th century was a time when two integrating concepts merged as the city developed and expanded: the Hansa, and the Europe of the Jagiellons. And although Krakow was on the very furthest fringes of Hanseatic Europe, in terms of the Jagiellonian conception, Wawel Castle was the very cradle of this new chapter in Europe Minor.

The union between Poland and Lithuania actualized with the marriage of Jadwiga and Władysław marked the beginning of the integration of two diametrically different states. Wawel – the seat of the Jagiellons – was to be of special significance in this process. By extending Krakow's sphere of influence, the Union changed the position of the Polish capital within the settlement network of Europe Minor. By the turn of the 15th century there was a duality in Krakow's position – it was peripheral to the Jagiellonian Empire as the latter expanded northwards and eastwards, but central on the map of Central Europe. This peculiar asymmetry constituted a certain added value to the city in the 15th century. Krakow acted as a hub connecting Poland's settlement network with Europe, including Mediterranean culture. Of vital significance to the policy of opening up to the South were the close political ties that the Polish court nurtured with the Hungarian and Bohemian courts. As the city's political influence grew, so did

its economic power. It owed its strong economic position in large measure to its jealously guarded privileges, which included the right to force traders to keep to designated routes (*przymus drożny*), and the right of storage (staple right).¹¹

Krakow also rapidly became the main export hub for the Latin civilisation to Vilnius and the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The most recognisable “brand” of this civilisation exported from Wawel to the north and east of the Jagiellon empire and as far as Kyiv was the “Magdeburg system”. Towards the end of the Middle Ages there were some 700 chartered towns in Poland, six of which were qualified *civitates primi ordinis*. These were Gdańsk, Krakow, Toruń, Elbląg, Poznań and Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine), all of which fulfilled all the criteria for diversified cities as centres of economic, cultural, social and religious life.¹² The multiethnicity of metropolises meant that in cities such as Krakow there were large communities of Jews, Germans, Italians, Ruthenians, Hungarians and Scots. In the mid-16th century the Krakow metropolitan area had a population of some 30,000, similar in size to that of Central Europe’s biggest city, imperial Prague. Neither Prague nor Krakow could compete in size or economic significance with metropolises such as Rome, Venice, Naples, Constantinople, Lisbon, Paris, London, Antwerp or Gdańsk, but in the complexity and force of the functions they served, they outstripped other cities in Central Europe: Królewiec (Kaliningrad), Vilnius, Riga, Lwów, Buda, Pressburg (Bratislava) and Wrocław.¹³

By the latter years of the Middle Ages, Poland, like Bohemia and Hungary, was organically linked with the West and was closing the gap caused by its civilisational delay. The symbol of this success was the scale of urbanisation experienced by Central Europe and the blossoming of its largest metropolises. In this light, it is thus paradoxical that the turn of the 16th century was to bring divergence in the subsequent socio-economic development paths of Europe’s East and West, as the great geographic discoveries ushered in a fundamental economic divide in Europe along the Elbe. The lands east of the Elbe gradually assumed the role of granary of the continent. But the price they came to pay for their prosperity in the 16th and 17th centuries, fuelled by the “price revolution”, was that of refeudalisation and the entrenchment of an economy based on the manor farm and serf model. This delayed the development of modern capitalism in Central Europe and brought the gradual economic decline of many towns and cities. And thus the civilisational unity of Carolingian Europe and Europe Minor achieved at the end of the Middle Ages on the one hand fostered further cultural integration in the Renaissance and Baroque, but on the other gave way to the slow but inexorable disintegration of the socio-economic system. At the turn of the 19th century this came to act as a drag on transformation towards liberalism in Central Europe.

And so the “Magdeburg system”, for several centuries the cornerstone of Central European cities, and central to their expansion, fell into crisis. One of the reasons for this was the curbing by the nobility (*szlachta*) of city rights and burgher rights, although the

¹¹ J. Purchla, *Cracow in the European Core*, pp. 35-48.

¹² H. Samsonowicz, *Życie miasta średniowiecznego*, p. 28.

¹³ J. Purchla, *Cracow in the European Core*, p. 57.

final collapse came with the biggest economic slump in many cities of Europe Minor, at the close of the 18th century, and the seizure of their property and sovereignty by the absolutist Enlightenment state.

The medieval town as a municipality was a corporation with its own legislative, judicial and executive powers. The urban borough was an independent union that functioned in a sense in parallel to the state – even as a state within a state. These towns, which in the Middle Ages were administratively and economically autonomous, and as such remain something of an ideal and symbol of self-government, in the age of enlightened absolutism at the end of the 18th century lost their independence with the curbing of the municipality's sphere of activity and the abolition by the state of the autonomy and corporate character of the medieval town. Self-government was replaced with the strong arm of the state. In Central Europe in particular, this period saw the emergence of a direct relationship between state and citizen that bypassed the municipality. Thus the turn of the 19th century brought an irrevocable end to the concept of the town as an isolated island. Symbolic of this change was the demolition of the medieval fortifications of many Central European towns and their replacement with grandiose “rings” and green public spaces. Defortification also triggered the spread of many cities; in the biggest cities in Central Europe a clear distinction must now be made between the “core” of the chartered town and the sprawling, ethnically heterogeneous suburbs.

In the Habsburg Monarchy in particular, the Vormärz and neo-absolutism brought state dominance in the creation of the public space of the city. This was a time of bringing order, of defortification, of evolution from the idea of the enclosed city to the open city, of bold works of urban planning, of mechanical regrafting of Viennese models, and of direct intervention by Vienna in the substance of provincial metropolises, now stripped of their traditional sovereignty. The demolition of town walls in favour of open towns was nevertheless a sign of times common to all Europe, which was gripped by the modernising urge. And with this “urban revolution”, the need for local government resurfaced.

The birth of modern municipal self-government was to an extent linked with more general processes that came with the 19th century. This was the age of “steam and electricity”, of industrial and communication revolution, of great migrations, but perhaps above all of turbulent urbanisation processes. The issues related to urbanisation, which now surfaced on an unprecedented scale, forced a quest for increasingly complex urban organisms. At the same time, the 19th century was the age of liberalism, of the transfer of the gains and ideals of the French Revolution to local conditions, in a reaction against the bureaucratic methods of the enlightened absolutism of the 18th century.

As early as in 1808, in Prussia, a law was passed on municipal self-government authored by Baron Henryk von Stein, the father of the modern self-government idea, to whom memorials stand in many German towns to this day, symbolising the great civilisational reform that he initiated. For with the dawn of the 19th century, the decentralisation of the Prussian state had begun, as conceptions for liberal systems began to be formulated. In that same 1808, Baron von Stein wrote: “The act on municipal self-government was conferred in order to grant towns and cities a better, independent municipal system. To give their residents the wherewithal to influence the administration

of the municipality and thus awaken in the populace the spirit of commonality of interests."¹⁴ From that time onwards, all kinds of theories on self-government began to be disseminated, but the central notions were the principle of autonomy and the municipality as an organism truly independent of the state, a legal entity in its own right, with powers including the natural right to take decisions concerning itself, also in matters financial, and the eligibility to express opinions on the politics of the state.¹⁵

In the Central European context, self-government and civilisation in the 19th century is where Prussia and Austria were. Austria in particular, from the 1860s onwards, evolved into a paragon of the liberal state. Modern self-government at the borough level was enshrined in the constitution, and became the model adopted by all boroughs, municipalities and local authorities throughout the Habsburg Monarchy. These developments in Austria were not a product of historical evolution of traditional forms of municipal autonomy, but a rationalistic legislative construct created out of the political conflicts that shook the empire between 1848–1870. The battle for a modern form of self-government in Austria was by no means an easy one, and it was a protracted process. As recently as in the late 18th century, during the reigns of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, the autonomy of rural boroughs and municipalities had been pared down to a minimum, and in the days of Francis I, the brother of Joseph II, almost all forms of self-government and all municipal administration had been deposited in the hands of the bureaucratic apparatus of the state.

The idea of modern municipal self-government had only germinated in Austria on the eve of the Spring of Nations, in the 1840s, a period of extreme bureaucratisation and centralisation of power. In response to this control, the Austrian bourgeoisie became increasingly enamoured with the German idea of liberalism and self-government. This was the beginning of the end of an era upheld by the police state and an outmoded social and economic system, and in Central Europe attempts to supersede it with a liberal system and a free-market economy began their long march in the mid-19th century. The events of the Spring of Nations amplified the struggle of liberal movements for local self-government, but in 1849 the suppression of these revolutions and the victory of reactionism in Austria nevertheless allowed the *ancien regime* to regain control of the situation and dictate its own solutions. It is characteristic that the 1850s in Austria were a swan song for the reactionary centralist system, but with the battle for self-government very much in evidence alongside it.¹⁶

In 1849 the incumbent minister of the interior, Franz Stadion, previously governor of Galicia, implemented a pilot government scheme for local self-government, although

¹⁴ E. Strasburger, *Gospodarka naszych wielkich miast*, Warszawa–Łódź–Kraków–Lwów–Poznań 1913, p. 30.

¹⁵ J.J. Sheehan, "Liberalism and the City in the Nineteenth-Century Germany", *Past and Present*, vol. 51, no. 1 (1971), pp. 16-137.

¹⁶ P. Urbanitsch, "Functions and Tasks of the Municipal Government in the Monarchy", in J. Purchla (ed.), *Mayors and City Halls*, Kraków 1998, pp. 11-23; S. Grodziski, "The Organization and Role of Galician Municipal Government at the Turn of the Century", in J. Purchla (ed.), *Mayors and City Halls*, pp. 25-33.

only in Bohemia and the German-speaking lands of the Monarchy. Nevertheless, it had vast psychological significance. Stadion introduced elected authorities and universal acceptance of citizens as members of local councils as fundamental rights. He gave over to local councils the administration of their own affairs, and introduced transparency in their budgets. It was also Stadion who formulated the notion of the free commune as the foundation of the free state.

Although this came as early as in 1849, however, the 1850s saw a departure from the idea of self-government in Austria. This was the period of reactionism under Minister Alexander Bach, the last triumph of neo-absolutism, which reversed virtually all the legislative achievements of 1849. Bach's Communal Code, ten years later, imposed bureaucratic controls on municipal activities, and re-integrated local administration with state administration.¹⁷

The year 1859 saw the Austrian defeat in the Italian War and brought the beginnings of fundamental liberal reforms to the monarchy. Gołuchowski's 1860 October Diploma marked the dawn of the constitutional era in Austria, which a year later formally became a constitutional monarchy. In March 1862, in a development of the principles of the October Diploma, a Municipal Law was passed that was to become the cornerstone of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy's system of local self-government until its very end. It was a compromise, a product of the political game played by the conservative landed gentry on the one side and the liberal bourgeoisie on the other.

The Municipal Law provided that every citizen of the Austrian state had to belong to a borough or municipality. This affiliation was defined by the *Heimatsrecht* (homeland right), which was hereditary. The local authority's areas of responsibility were clearly divided into local affairs and matters mandated by the state. The act also imposed a hierarchisation, or categorisation, of municipalities and boroughs. It gave extensive executive powers to the mayor, who was the legally ordained chairman of the municipal and borough council. Matters delegated to the local authority as "local affairs" included administration of its property, the responsibility for the safety of the local populace, the upkeep of roads, health care and social welfare, development of urban infrastructure, maintenance of public schools, and the judicial system. The broad scope of local government operations imposed by the political administrative authorities encompassed a very long list of duties including even such matters as construction of barracks. This model of local government functioned excellently until 1918.¹⁸

Under the new law, the supreme seat of local authority was the mayor, his deputy, and three or four assessors, all elected by the municipal council. The mayor directed the work of the municipal authorities, monitored local officials, and had the power to suspend resolutions passed by the municipal council and appeal to the political authorities, i.e. the district council, if he considered them in violation of the Municipal Law. The mayor himself answered to the municipal council, and in terms of mandated affairs

¹⁷ J. Klabouch, *Die Gemeindeselbstverwaltung in Osterreich 1848–1918*, Wien 1968, pp. 36–53.

¹⁸ J. Purchla, *Krakau unter österreichischer Herrschaft 1846–1918. Faktoren seiner Entwicklung*, Wien–Köln–Weimar 1993, pp. 38–39.

also to the head of the district council. The work of the municipal self-government was overseen by the district council and its head, who had the power to suspend resolutions of the municipal council and ordinances issued by the mayor and his assessors.

In August 1866 the Provincial Diet in Lwów passed the Galician Municipal Self-Government Act. That year thus marked the beginning of a new system of self-government across a considerable swathe of the Polish lands, which evolved into one of the fundamental elements of Central European civilisation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was the reason why Galicia, the poorest province in the Polish lands, facing a dire systemic and economic crisis in the mid-19th century, within a few decades transformed its towns into well-organized municipalities boasting extensive modern infrastructure. The financial and investment policy of Galicia's municipal authorities in the second half of the 19th century was founded on a large degree of autonomy, freedom and activity. Many Galician towns, large and small alike, were able to develop their modern infrastructure thanks to a very active credit and loans policy. In this period Galicia had two "large cities", Lwów and Krakow, 30 larger towns, and several dozen small towns. Each of these three categories was subject to separate legal regulations. The mayors of the two cities (who were known as "presidents") were not only the heads of the local municipal authorities and chairmen of the city council, but also the first instance of government authority, i.e. they essentially performed the function of chief district councillor, which further strengthened the local authorities.¹⁹ It is no coincidence that so many mayors of larger towns and cities in the Habsburg Monarchy were such remarkable individuals. An overview of the mayors of Vienna, Budapest or Prague at the turn of the 20th century offers ample evidence in support of this statement. Once again, new, monumental town and city halls were erected, symbolising the civic pride and autonomy of the municipalities.

The 19th century brought vast changes to Europe's settlement network. In this period industrialisation was the main trigger of urbanisation. In spite of its economic backwardness, Central Europe at the turn of the 20th century was a hothouse of creativity. The complex vicissitudes of the region's towns and cities offer confirmation of the words of Sophie Lang: "Cities are not by accident, cities are a concept of a higher order". The names Franz Kafka, Robert Musil and Josef Roth not only symbolise Central Europe's contradiction-ridden contribution to universal civilisation, but also show that at a very early stage this region harboured a premonition of the crisis awaiting the continent. The creative tension that had one of its sources in the conflicts that racked the Habsburg Monarchy generated the new identity of Kakania's towns. This is why tradition and modernisation, national identity and urbanisation were crucial issues in the expansion of Central Europe's largest cities in this period.

The turn-of-the-century city was the idea and quintessence of modernity. After 1890, in particular, there was a marked acceleration of modernisation processes, which, in Central and Eastern Europe, as elsewhere, were driven by the metropolises. In the

¹⁹ S. Grodziski, "Samorząd gminny i powiatowy w Galicji epoki autonomicznej", *Krakowskie Studia Prawnicze*, vol. 25 (1992), pp. 77-90.

Habsburg Monarchy, just as in other areas, rising tensions and contradictions between the structural socio-economic backwardness, rapid economic growth, and the modernising changes enforced by the state apparatus were at their highest in the largest cities.

The question of the scale and nature of these modernising processes in the Habsburg Empire remains a subject of controversy. In 1929 Oskar Jászi passed an unequivocally negative judgement on the monarchy's economic development at the turn of the century. The outstanding Lwów-born economic historian Eduard März also believed that on the threshold of the First World War the monarchy was still a vast expanse of backwardness. Alexander Gerschenkron's criticism was pithy: "Austria never experienced a great spurt of modern industrialization in the nineteenth century."²⁰ And although socio-economic historians today stress above all the complexity of the problems surrounding Austria-Hungary's economic development and the fact that prior to 1914 the lands under Austria had attained a comparable level of economic advancement to Western Europe, the delay of the industrialisation processes in the monarchy does remain incontrovertible.²¹ This means that, unlike in the West, industrialisation was not the flywheel of the dynamic urbanisation and modernisation processes that many of the monarchy's cities did undergo at the turn of the 20th century. The same Gerschenkron was the first to note that a rapid acceleration of development is possible in conditions of relative backwardness. He believed that the more delayed industrialisation is, the greater the role of institutional players – the state, local government, investment banks and so on – in the modernising processes.²² Among the main unifying factors spanning the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were the notion of the modern state of law, territorial self-government, civic society, and high educational standards, which were represented by the classical *gymnasium*. Large-scale projects transformed peripheral centres of this multiethnic empire into the homogeneous civilisation that was Károkánia; its monuments were the grand railway station and railway directorate buildings, theatres, museums and universities characteristic of the whole monarchy.²³

A fundamental developmental benchmark in this vast undertaking to modernise and standardise Central Europe's cities was Vienna and the relation between the imperial capital as a model to be emulated and the provincial metropolises. On the eve of the First World War, Vienna, with a population of two million, was the sixth-largest city in the world. On the threshold of the 20th century the *Großstadt* on the Danube was not only a boundless modern city but also – as Otto Wagner wrote – a city machine, a symbol of 20th-century civilisation. Vienna – die Weltstadt – was for all Károkánia a proud

²⁰ A. Gerschenkron, *An Economic Spurt That Failed. Four Lectures in Austrian History*, Princeton 1977, p. 52.

²¹ D.F. Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750–1914*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1984, pp. 139, 241; See also I.T. Berend, G. Ránki, *The Hungarian Economy in the Twentieth Century*, Beckenham 1985, pp. 13–23.

²² A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962.

²³ E. Blau, "The City as Protagonist: Architecture and the Cultures of Central Europe", in E. Blau, M. Platzer (eds.), *Shaping the Great City. Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890–1937*, Munich–London–New York 1999, pp. 12–13.

symbol of the triumph of liberalism and one of the most creative metropolises in Europe, as Carl Schorske demonstrates convincingly in his book *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*.²⁴ The cultural models devised in Vienna, and the standardising bureaucratic machine of this state of law made their imprint on the face and character of the monarchy's other towns and cities. The cosmopolitan breath of this Danube civilisation transformed other, smaller cities into miniatures of Vienna.

The "Viennesity" character of Brno, Krakow or Graz consists in both the grandiose layout of the Ring that encircles the medieval core of each of these cities and – perhaps above all – the atmosphere of city life, and the ambience of these cities, which is akin to the ambience of many other Central European cities. This unique ambience was an integral element of Kakania and the civilisation it represented, which stretched from Trieste and Zagreb to Lwów and Czerniowce (Chernivtsi). Vienna influenced the architecture of these cities both directly and indirectly, to an extent that determined their characteristic aesthetic charm. Its indirect influences took many forms, due not only to its role as the capital of a vast monarchy, but also to its burgeoning significance as an artistic metropolis and a global centre of modernism.

Within Vienna's cosmopolitan kaleidoscope, one social group that played a major role was the educated Jewish bourgeoisie.²⁵ Schorske has claimed that the liberal Jewish bourgeoisie, having ceded the political field in Vienna to the Christian-Social Party of the anti-Semitic mayor Karl Lueger (1897–1910), "withdrew" into the world of modernism.²⁶ Although in the period around 1900 Jews constituted barely ten per cent of the city's total population, Vienna nevertheless owed its status as a modern metropolis and centre of science and art to the "fruitful symbiosis of that which was Viennese and that which was Jewish." It was no coincidence that the writer Hermann Bahr quipped that anyone "who is a little bit smart or has some kind of talent is immediately considered a Jew,"²⁷ or that the names which remain most memorable from the Viennese "creative class" of this period are Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schönberg, Arthur Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig, Josef Roth, Sigmund Freud, Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Bauer and Ludwig von Mises.²⁸

Another standardising influence on the space of the monarchy's cities that must be taken into consideration is that of the Habsburg administration. It affected not only the urban landscape and cultural policy, but even the urban sociotopography and anthropology. This is partly why the architecture and form of Kakania's cities took on a monarchy-wide character rather than the characteristics of its component nations. Their outward appearance and cultural landscape was shaped by the civilisational force of the Habsburg empire. It was for this reason that Krakow and Lwów in 1914 were more similar in their urban identities to Prague, Graz or Ljubljana than to Warsaw or Kyiv.

²⁴ C. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, New York 1980.

²⁵ S. Beller, *Vienna and the Jews 1867–1938. A cultural history*, Cambridge 1989, p. 238.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁷ B. Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna. A Portrait of the Tyrant as a Young Man*, London–New York 2010, p. 328.

²⁸ S. Beller, *Vienna and the Jews...*, pp. 14–32.

At the turn of the 20th century Lwów was the most modern city in the lands of the former Polish Commonwealth. Its success was the product of a combination of long-term developments and processes which not only affected Galicia. This in no way detracted from the fact that this was the most creative, formative period in Lwów's history to that point.

As the capital of the largest of the Cisleithanian crown lands, Lwów "served" a Galician population of nine million in the period before the First World War.²⁹ With the granting of autonomy to Galicia in the 1860s, many of the political, administrative, economic and culture-forming functions connected with running such a vast province were transferred from Vienna to Lwów. As a capital, Lwów attracted major state investment, and its municipal government, established in 1870, took as its priority the development of the urban infrastructure. The scale of the city's urban planning solutions and architecture thus grew closer to that of Prague than to that of Krakow. Unlike Prague, however, it had no integrative function and did not later become a national capital, "because there was no Galician nation."³⁰ Thus, although it developed a metropolitan infrastructure (including theatres and museums), it lacked the national dimension that characterised Budapest, Prague and Krakow. What the Poles were building in Lwów amounted to the programme of a modern metropolis within the Habsburg civilisation in Europe.

The civilisational force of the Habsburg Monarchy was the decisive factor in shaping the turn-of-the-century Lwów, the third city of Cisleithania after Vienna and Prague. In this sense, the public space of the city created at this time was Central European in character. Habsburg Lwów as a modernising project of the monarchy helped to neutralise the conflict between the rival nationalisms on the Poltava. The success of Lwów, like that of many of the monarchy's other towns and cities in this period, was founded on its multiculturalism. The city was the seat of three Catholic archbishops of three different rites, and the young Martin Buber was exposed to six different languages there. In spite of rising tensions between the Poles and the Ukrainians, this multiculturalism was one of the primary modernising forces there. Within the liberal Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Lwów, in the period before the First World War, was both a major centre of Polish national life and the "Ukrainian Piedmont", while also assuming the attributes of a cosmopolitan metropolis, eagerly assimilating innovations emanating from Vienna.

In the general census of 1910, 86 per cent of Lwów's residents gave Polish as their native tongue, 11 per cent Ukrainian, and 3 per cent German. The second-largest ethnic group in Lwów was its Jews, who on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War accounted for one-third of the city's population.³¹ As in Vienna, they played an

²⁹ S. Hoszowski, *Ekonomiczny rozwój Lwowa w latach 1772–1914*, Lwów 1935, p. 107.

³⁰ J. Purchla, "Kraków i Lwów: zmienność relacji w XIX i XX wieku", in J. Purchla (ed.), *Kraków i Lwów w cywilizacji europejskiej*, Kraków 2003, pp. 81-90.

³¹ U. Jakubowska, *Lwów na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Przegląd środowisk prasotwórczych*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 45-46.

important role in the modernising processes. While in Krakow the Jews tended to be outside the main stream of the Young Poland modernising revolution, in Lwów the Jewish bourgeoisie and technological intelligentsia were the flywheel of the creation of a modern image for the Galician capital. One symbol of its modernising ambitions was its first “skyscrapers”, commissioned by the financial tycoon Jonasz (Jojne) Sprecher and built by the architect Ferdynand Kassler. Th construction of the first “skyscraper”, which occupied a prime location, at 8 Mickiewicz Square, began on the eve of the First World War, using state-of-the-art technologies. The permanence and efficacy of the Sprecher–Kassler tandem was also indicative of the solidarity of the Jewish community.³²

An important modernising role in the creation of the new Lwów was played by the Polytechnic, from the early 1870s the only Polish technical institute of higher education. In the 1912/1913 academic year it had 1,742 students, one in three of whom were Poles from the Kingdom of Poland or Russia.³³ The Polytechnic building itself – Viennese in character, the work of Julian Zachariewicz – became one of the symbols of the city’s modernisation.³⁴ Its main hall was decorated with a series of paintings commissioned specially by Emperor Francis Joseph I, depicting an allegory of “the triumph of progress.” Among the 11 paintings showing products of human progress and science – made by pupils of Jan Matejko under the supervision of their master – there were “the invention of the railway” and “the invention of the telegraph.”³⁵ On the eve of the First World War, Lwów was a strong, well-formed centre of modernism.³⁶ A particularly fortuitous role in its development had been played by the symbiosis between the Polytechnic and the needs of the dynamically expanding metropolis, for which modernity had become an ideology. These needs were translated into the language of urban planning by the Polytechnic’s professors and alumni.

The city’s lack of developmental checks, its capital status and its multicultural structure were all conducive to the modernisation processes. Austrian bureaucracy and Lwów’s administrative functions in the period of autonomy, as well as its strong local government, were all among the most important modernising factors. Lwów’s local government authorities promoted modernity and had the tools to implement it.

One symbol of the modernising processes underway in the monarchy’s major cities at the turn of the century was the huge exhibitions. On June 5th 1894 one such exhibition was opened in triumph in Lwów. Organised with flair by Adam Sapieha, the

³² Ż. Komar, “W poszukiwaniu stylu żydowskiego. Archeologia lwowskiego modernizmu”, *Herito*, no. 2 (2011), pp. 99-101.

³³ Z. Popławski, *Dzieje Politechniki Lwowskiej 1844-1945*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1992, pp. 54-55, 143.

³⁴ J. Purchla, “Patterns of Influence: Lviv and Vienna in the Mirror of Architecture”, in J. Czaplicka (ed.), *Lviv. A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies, vol. 24, Cambridge, Mass. 2000, pp.135-136.

³⁵ E. Paczoska, “Stolica nowoczesności. W poszukiwaniu «tekstu lwowskiego»”, in E. Paczoska, D.M. Osiński (eds.), *Modernistyczny Lwów. Teksty życia, teksty sztuki*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 24-25.

³⁶ J. Lewicki, *Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Architektura Lwowa lat 1893–1918*, Warszawa 2005.

legendary “red duke”, the National Exhibition was hailed “a great manifestation of the unity and vibrancy of the Polish nation.” It was a showcase of the country’s economic achievements, but also had a strong contribution from the Polish lands of the other partitions. The early 1890s were a time of exceptional political and economic prosperity for Galicia. Lwów took advantage of these favourable conditions to organise what was for the city’s relatively modest economic means a huge project. The great exhibition, comprising 129 pavilions scattered across a 50-hectare site, was prepared in two years, at a cost considerably in excess of the municipality’s annual budget. Situated close to Stryjski Park, the exhibition enjoyed unprecedented popularity. In the four-and-a-half months that it lasted, it was visited by nearly 1 150 thousand people – ten times more than the population of the city itself at the time. Among the visitors, in addition to Poles from all the partitions, was Emperor Francis Joseph I. Numerous conventions and conferences were held in the course of the exhibition. The site was connected with the city centre by Lwów’s first electric tram line – one of the first in this part of Europe.³⁷

The significance of the Lwów Exhibition may be interpreted in many ways from our present-day perspective. It was certainly a major manifestation of patriotic sentiment that encompassed all the partitioned lands. It was also something of a symbol of the victory of the concept of organic work and the economic progress Galicia had made. In his introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Stanisław Tarnowski stressed that it was intended to demonstrate that “we really are in progress”, and that “in various areas of civilisation we are not regressing, but moving forward.”³⁸ Like the opening of the Krakow Municipal Theatre building in 1893, the Lwów Exhibition was an important moment in the city’s history – its pass to modernity.³⁹

Krakow, too, experienced a brief phase of creativity in the twilight years of the Habsburg Monarchy. Although its setting was also Habsburg Europe Minor, in Krakow this interlude took on the idiosyncratic form of the Young Poland movement, which developed in characteristic opposition to Vienna. For these two very different worlds – the world of the dynamic, cosmopolitan high life in Vienna and the provincial world of Krakow – were, in a way, mutually exclusive. At this time Krakow was not only devoid of industry as a development factor, but in fact constituted a peculiar kind of enclave, enclosed within the corset of the Austrian fortress and fighting off all signs of modernity. As an aristocratic *pensionopolis*, it was gradually becoming an antithesis of the urbanisation characteristic of the period. The dynamism, innovation and creativity of this thrust, the creativity, modernism and cosmopolitanism characteristic of it, and its attendant multiethnicity and openness – were all countered by the “Bastion of Poland” with stagnation, provincialism, parochialism, clericalism,

³⁷ J. Purchla, *Kraków i Lwów...*, pp. 86-87; J. Purchla, “W stulecie Powszechnej Wystawy Krajowej we Lwowie 1894 roku”, in *Lwowska Wystawa Krajowa 1894*, Kraków 1994.

³⁸ E. Paczoska, “Stolica nowoczesności...”, p. 25.

³⁹ J. Purchla, *Teatr i jego architekt. W stulecie gmachu Teatru Miejskiego w Krakowie. Das Theater und sein Architekt. Zum hundersten Jahrestag der Eröffnung des Juliusz-Słowacki-Theaters in Krakau*, Kraków 1993.

traditionalism, ethnocentrism and caste structure. And in this respect, Krakow was growing further and further apart from not only Vienna and Budapest, but also Prague, Timisoara and Lwów. The Austrian fortifications that formed a hermetic ring around the town further reinforced the model of Krakow as a proto-industrial enclave isolated from its context. This was the reason why the Krakow railway station was not a destination but merely a staging-post on the route of the mass wave of economic migration out of overpopulated Galicia. Krakow, in thrall to the conservative Stańczyk movement, decisively eluded the classic rules of urban development in the 19th century.⁴⁰

For many European cities at the turn of the 20th century, the spark that ignited the flame of modernisation and territorial expansion had been the removal of their fortifications. In Krakow, defortification was out of the question. Until the First World War, “Festung Krakau” had a strategic role as an Austrian bastion and military camp on the border with Russia. The fortified earthworks that held the town in their pincer grip meant that on the threshold of the 20th century a population of over 100,000 was suffocating in a tiny administrative area of less than six square kilometres. One square kilometre was home to 16,500 people, while in Vienna the equivalent figure was 9,500, in Graz 6,300, in Lwów 4,900, and in neighbouring Podgórze just 3,300. In 1900, Krakow was the most densely populated city in the realm.⁴¹

But having in the mid-19th century condemned the former Polish capital to stagnation in the role of a border outpost, fortress and district administrative centre, a half-century later the Habsburg Monarchy dispatched a strong pro-expansion signal from Vienna. This was the ambitious programme to integrate the Habsburg state undertaken by the new minister-president (prime minister) of the Viennese government, Ernest von Körber.⁴² It was an equally ambitious attempt to overcome the economic backwardness of the Habsburg lands and to introduce developed capitalist relations in Austria by implementing an active state investment policy. This was an original idea at the time, and a bold one. In 1900 Körber outlined his plans for major government investments, which included construction of a new transalpine railway line to Trieste and a network of navigable inland waterways, of which the most important in economic terms was to be the Danube–Oder–Vistula canal. This impulse, in synergy with the idea for a “Greater Krakow”, was at the core of Juliusz Leo’s programme as the new mayor of Krakow, elected in July 1904.⁴³ Leo’s plan to create a Greater Krakow, implemented over the period 1909–1915, came at a time of marked stability in capitalist relations across Austria and in Galicia. In the broader perspective, Juliusz Leo’s Greater Krakow may be seen not only as a modernising vision and project, not only as the end

⁴⁰ See: J. Purchla, *Krakau unter österreichischer Herrschaft 1846-1918. Faktoren seiner Entwicklung*, Wien–Köln–Weimar 1993, passim.

⁴¹ J. Purchla, *Jak powstał nowoczesny Kraków*, Kraków 1990, pp. 83-92.

⁴² A. Gerschenkron, *An Economic Spurt That Failed*, pp. 6, 146.

⁴³ C. Bąk-Koczarska, *Juliusz Leo. Twórca Wielkiego Krakowa*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1986, pp. 34-36.

of the age of an enclosed city and the beginning of the inevitable process of transformation towards an open city model, but also as a triumph of local government and a symbol of the civilising power of the monarchy.

In essence, Galicia's bipolarity translated into not only the two different functional models of Krakow and Lwów, but also different "speeds" of modernisation. Until the First World War, Krakow remained a peculiar quasi-feudal town, whereas Lwów by that time had embarked on a phase of dynamic growth founded on its rapidly maturing capitalist relations. The crude oil rush that erupted on the oilfields of Boryslav (Boryslav) and Drohobycz (Drohobych) accelerated Lwów's development as a financial and industrial centre at the turn of the 20th century. The processes of transforming Galicia's two metropolises into modern cities at the turn of the century offer confirmation of Gerschenkron's theory: a fundamental role was played in the modernisation of Krakow and Lwów, as of many other Central European cities, by institutional factors: the democratic state of law, territorial self-government, and modern financial institutions.

Thus, after the lesson in medieval colonisation, at the turn of the 20th century the polycentricism of Central Europe's settlement network once again became an asset. In this system, cities such as Krakow and Lwów served as means for the implementation of the Habsburg civilisational model, and had the function of hubs in this remarkable intellectual space. And with the granting of political autonomy and national emancipation, even small towns ranked as centres on a certain level in this period.

On the eve of the First World War the dualist Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had two great capitals, centres of the political and economic life of the realm: Vienna and Budapest. Created in 1872 out of the merger of Buda, Pest and Ó-Buda, the capital of the Hungarian part of the monarchy was one of the fastest growing cities in the world at the turn of the century, with a growth dynamic outstripping Vienna and a population nearing the magic one million mark ahead of the war (from "just" 270,000 in 1859). It underwent a transformation into not only a truly European metropolis and an administrative, financial, communications and cultural centre, but also a major centre of the food, machine and chemical industries. As an economic centre it attracted vast numbers of migrants from the provinces, bringing significant changes to its ethnic make-up. While in the mid-19th century as many as 50 per cent of the capital's residents had regarded German as their native language, by 1890 as many as 90 per cent, including many Jews, considered it to be Hungarian.⁴⁴

A separate group of centres were the capitals of the crown lands, including Prague, Brno, Lwów, Czerniowce, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Sibiu (Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben). Some of them, above all Prague and Zagreb, but also Trieste and Krakow, were also centres of national revival in this period. Industrialisation was creating large new industrial towns, foremost among which were places in Bohemia and Moravia: Liberec (Reichenberg), Ostrava, Brno and Plzen. In Transleithania there was a whole prominent group of "local metropolises", such as the 100,000-strong Seged, Debrecen,

⁴⁴ J. Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture*, New York 1988.

Subotica, Kecskemet, Timisoara (Temesvar), Bratislava (Pressburg), Arad, Oradea (Grosswardein), Cluj (Klausenburg), Brasov (Kronstadt) and Kosice.

It was this network of peripheral centres scattered across the multinational monarchy that laced Kakania together into a homogeneous civilisation. The structure standardising the cultural landscape of the whole of Central Europe was the battery of modernising and urbanising processes. The major public and communal investments made at the turn of the century – railway lines, stations, public facilities, local infrastructure and urban design and architecture – had a lasting and characteristic impact on the urban landscape of Habsburg Central Europe.

At the same time, the empire's largest cities were absorbing not only vast masses of incomers, but with them rising contradictions. These crystallised into flashpoints chiefly rooted in the escalating conflicts surrounding nationality. Around 1900 the conflicts generated by this ethnic heterogeneity were still creative in character, and this tension produced some wonderful forms of artistic expression, but very shortly it was to spell the fall of the monarchy.

The ambivalence and trauma accompanying the Kafkaesque atmosphere of the end of the belle époque were but a reflection of the dilemmas faced by the "man without attributes," the resident of Kakania, who, as Robert Musil put it aptly, was torn between the various different dimensions of his identity: profession, nation, state, class, geography and gender....⁴⁵ Austria-Hungary's largest cities were peculiar "global hubs," in which the imperial costume exported from Vienna clashed with the local character, and the ambience on the street determined their multiculturalism. This is the source of the paradox of the homogenising urbanisation processes underway in the latter decades of a monarchy whose residents were concurrently experiencing a visible identity crisis caused by the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of their state. In 1910 the Habsburg Monarchy was the second-largest territorial entity and the third power (after the Russian and German empires) in Europe. This vast territory, "unified in terms of its urban development," was home to more than 51 million citizens, who used over a dozen different languages between them, including German, Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Italian. It was this multiculturalism that was ultimately to be the downfall of the empire and the cause of its fragmentation.

The year 1918 ushered in a fundamental change to the layout of Central Europe's settlement map. It now had become a unique part of the Old Continent in which political borders changed far more rapidly than cultural ones. The First World War marked a sharp turning-point in the development of Central Europe's cities. The collapse of Austria-Hungary marked the end of the second formative phase in the urbanisation of Central Europe. Whereas the chartering of towns under German law that had lasted throughout the Middle Ages had unified Europe Minor with the older Carolingian Europe, the major modernising and urbanising processes underway in the Habsburg Monarchy at the turn of the 20th century created a distinct identity for the landscape

⁴⁵ R. Musil, *Człowiek bez właściwości*, vol. 1, transl. by K. Radziwiłł, K. Truchanowski, J. Zeltzer, Warszawa 2002, p. 44.

of Central Europe. Yet at the heart of both processes lay the same factors: local government and civic society.

The delayed beginning of the 20th century essentially brought not only the triumph of nationalisms, and later totalitarianisms, the Holocaust and the expulsions; it also spelled the end of the dream of a Central Europe. For in the bipolar post-Yalta Europe of 1945, comprising East and West, there was no place for a centre. As Karl Schlögel rightly pointed out: “The elimination of the centre shifted one-time metropolises out onto the peripheries.”⁴⁶ The Sovietisation of Budapest, Prague, Krakow, Lviv and many other cities of Kakania clashed sharply with the tradition of these cities as places with a special potential for freedom and a unique way of building communities. Communism nullified the tradition of Central Europe and its civilisational achievements. Nor did it have room for municipal self-government or civil society. It was thus a civilisational shock, and as such was in its turn rejected by the nations of Central Europe. This is why the events of Budapest 1956 and Prague 1968 were viewed as symbolic of the fight for identity. The myth of Central Europe was triumphant, albeit only in the 1970s and 1980s. In that period it represented the clear distinction between the Soviet reality and European values. Intellectuals on both sides of the iron curtain – György Konrád, Milan Kundera, Václav Havel, Czesław Miłosz, Erhard Busek – exploited the separate cultural identities of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland to manifest these fundamental differences.

It was then that Central Europe became a choice, a question of worldview and of a community of experience. And the key to understanding this unique identity was the fact that the former Habsburg metropolises on either side of the Iron Curtain were now separated from each other by so many borders: Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Trieste, Krakow, Graz... Karl Schlögel, quoted above, rightly noted this divided unity at the time, when he wrote: “But our borders are visible in entirely different ways: in the features common to railway station restaurant interiors from Trieste to Krakow, which are decorated in the same way, painted the same colour (light ochre, of course) virtually everywhere. We move from one town to another, but we are constantly in the same place; we cross borders, but the conductor is always the same.”⁴⁷

The semantic force of the urban space of Prague, Krakow and Budapest revealed at this time was a kind of *ex post* test of the power of the standardising potential of a monarchy that had not existed for over half a century. This remarkable experience of the metropolises of Central Europe confirms the accuracy of Italo Calvino’s words: “The city [...] does not tell its past but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.”⁴⁸

Central Europe’s watershed year, 1989, has enabled us to look again at the various different meanings of the city: as a process, as a function, as an idea, as a form, as

⁴⁶ K. Schlögel, *Die Mitte liegt ostwärts. Europa im Übergang*, Frankfurt 2008 [trans. JTK].

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ I. Calvino, *Invisible cities*, transl. by W. Weaver, London 1997, p. 9.

a mirror of our civilisation. As Emil Brix notes: “Once again, space is discovered in its dynamic social function. Cities are interpreted as texts, that, in Eastern Europe in the 20th century, for instance, might have belonged to as many as six different political regimes and territories. Streets and squares – if only in view of their frequent changes of name – are understood as dynamic spatial structures, as is the public space: museums, monuments, churches. Regional discussions on the subject of identity (wielding terms and concepts such as Central Europe, the Danube Basin, the Balkans, New Europe) are subject to the principle of the dynamic that renders change of function and meaning possible at any time.”⁴⁹ For in Central Europe, cultural identity has never been something endowed once and for all; it has always required constant, deliberate election. In spite of its economic backwardness, Central Europe at the turn of the 20th century was a hothouse of creativity. The names Franz Kafka, Robert Musil and Josef Roth not only symbolise Central Europe’s contradiction-ridden contribution to universal civilisation, but also show that at a very early stage this region harboured a premonition of the crisis awaiting the continent. The creative tension that had one of its sources in the conflicts that racked the Habsburg Monarchy generated the new identity of Kakania’s towns. This is why tradition and modernisation, national identity and urbanisation were crucial issues in the expansion of Central Europe’s largest cities in this period.

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