Introduction

In 1983, British social anthropologist Ernest Gellner published *Nation and Nationalism*, a book that quickly became a classic of nationalism studies. Two ethnographic maps of Europe described in the summary contributed to this feat, impressively illustrating Gellner's earlier reflections on the "history of the national principle" (Gellner 1983, 139). According to Gellner, the first map resembled a painting by the expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka, who was born in Pöchlarn, Austria, in 1886. Although its many gradations of size, shape and color do not delineate a clearly defined structure, taken as a whole, they reveal a pattern: a great diversity, plurality and complexity of what is depicted. The second map differs significantly from the first. Gellner associated it with the work of the painter Amadeo Modigliani, born in Livorno, Italy, in 1884. Modigliani's paintings have few color gradations, with large, homogeneous areas that are clearly separated from one another.

Ernest Gellner uses the apparent differences between the two ethnographic maps to illustrate a fundamental development in Europe that began at the end of the eighteenth century. While the first map illustrates the world before the age of nationalism, the second reveals the political map of a continent that was fundamentally changed by the triumph of nationalism. In addition to this chronological development, the two maps also catalog the geography of Europe, which was very familiar to Ernest Gellner, who came from a Jewish-German family in Bohemia: nation-states in the west and multinational empires in the center and east of Europe.

Since its publication, Gellner's book on nationalism, including its two ethnographic maps, has often been referenced in academic publications – although the debate has increasingly shifted to an analysis of the present. Swedish cultural anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, for example, has argued that contemporary cultural complexity seems to suggest "Kokoschka's return" (2010, 65–78). In light of the rise of cultural globalization and increased global migration, this view has met with both approval and critique. Norwegian cultural anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, for example, has emphasized that contemporary cultural diversity "is of a qualitatively different order to the diversity typical of the pre-modern world" (Eriksen 2015, 376).

As different as these specific points of view are, cultural anthropology as a whole continues to share some common ground: "Our business," as Ulf Hannerz put it, "is diversity in the past, present, and future" (2010, 547).

Diversity | Diverzitás | Diversitate | Raznolikost | Diversität

In 2008, the fourth edition of Joseph Rothschild and Nancy M. Wingfield's fundamental work on the political history of East Central Europe since World War II was published by Oxford University Press. Its content is arranged chronologically, beginning with the interwar period, continuing through the communist takeovers, the uprisings against the dictatorships, and the Cold War conflict, ending with the varied demises of the Communist regimes. The two prominent authors conclude that, after a long interruption, a "return to Europe" had become possible for the states of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. What Rothschild and Wingfield mean by this, as the book's title suggests, is above all a "return to diversity" (2008).

Many scholars have followed this line of argumentation. In his essay "European Fascism and its Aftermath" (2014), British historian Keith Lowe, for example, describes a divided Europe in the interwar period: In Western Europe, he writes, "things were relatively simple," because Great Britain and France in particular had "single dominant cultures, with long stable histories." The minorities that existed there were tolerated and thus never posed a threat to the centers of power in these countries. In Eastern Europe, conversely, the empires that collapsed after World War I had left behind "a strong tradition of tolerance," although the new nation-states had also inherited dangerous, unclear, borders and a "huge variety of ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic minorities" (Lowe 2014, 159).

The massive fascist and communist resettlements and expulsions during the war and postwar period in Eastern and Southeastern Europe created "monocultural nation-states" with "more or less ethnically homogeneous" populations. However, although Eastern Europe "cleansed itself on a massive scale," Lowe continues, the large migrations in the postwar period in particular created a new and disturbing contrast between the eastern and western halves of Europe. In Western Europe, "diversity flourished" in the wake of the forced migration from Eastern Europe and then the mass migration of workers from Southeast Europe. In contrast, in Eastern Europe, the "cosmopolitanism that had existed for centuries was partly – and in many areas entirely – destroyed":

> Without free movement between countries, this lack of diversity remained until the fall of Communism more than 40 years later. But even when diversity returned, it was a diversity of a different kind. The old diversity of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires had been lost forever (Lowe 2014, 164).

It is worthwhile – as many contributions in this book attest – to examine these far-reaching considerations empirically. At the same time, however, it is striking that diversity is not only regarded as a characteristic feature of Southeastern Europe in popular perceptions and self-perceptions, but also repeatedly cited in contemporary

academic publications. Holm Sundhaussen, for example, speaks in his *Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas* (Encyclopedia of the History of Southeast Europe) of a "mutual and interpenetrating diversity with ethnically and culturally 'fluid spaces'" that is typical of this region (2016, 911–917). And Marie-Janine Calic emphasizes in her *Weltgeschichte einer Region* (World History of a Region) Southeast Europe is not a uniform space with a common identity, but has instead developed a "unique diversity" over the course of history (2016, 9).

"Diversity," as sociologist Steven Vertovec argues, "is everywhere" (2012) – including and especially in Southeastern Europe. Yet, how the term and the reality it refers to are understood in academia and society in relation to the past and present in the Danube region varies (and remains controversial). Diversity is therefore a key concept in this book, to be understood in the context of the regions discussed: In Hungarian as *diverzitás*, in Romanian as *diversitate*, in Serbian and Croatian as *raznolikost* and in German as *Diversität*.

Diversity in the Danube region in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries

On June 24, 2011, the European Council adopted the "EU Danube strategy" (EU Parliament), supported by the Land Baden-Württemberg, Germany. The strategy emphasizes the importance for Europe of the Danube region, which encompasses fourteen states with roughly 115 million inhabitants. Furthermore, the Danube itself, which originates in Baden-Württemberg and extends all the way to the Black Sea, stands as the blue thread connecting this region. While the EU Danube strategy is focused on strategic policy fields such as the economy, technology, security, traffic and environment, with culture playing a less significant role, looking at the Danube region only from an economic point of view completely underestimates the role of culture and history for the requirements, development and sustained improvement of the strategy (Donauraum-Strategie / Danube Region Strategy).

The region is home to three world religions, ten different computer keyboard layouts, fourteen different countries (nine of them current EU members), at least twenty different recipes for goulash, and a large, not easily quantifiable number of languages and dialects. The most striking characteristic of this region is its wide linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity. This diversity is partially the result of countless flows of migration through the region during the course of history. In the modern period, the Danube region became a center of political and economic interests and also a point of tension between three empires: the increasing influence of the Russian Tsarist Empire, the efforts of the Habsburg (double) monarchy to ensure its influence in the region, and the stealthy collapse of the Ottoman Empire. After World War I, these empires were replaced by the Soviet Union and its new model of society, national socialist dictatorships and western liberal democracies. Later, World War II and Germany's war of

expansion and extermination led directly to the Cold War, with lasting consequences for the history and culture of the region. Then, with fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the EU ascension of several states, a new phase began in the region.

These developments – and the wars that often came along with them – set the stage for the establishment of new nation-states in the region, from the initial wave in the second half of the nineteenth century to the new borders drawn after World War I and II and the territorial reorganization that took place after the fall of the Iron Curtain at the end of the twentieth century. Against this backdrop, the relationship between majorities and minorities has played an important role in molding this multiethnic region. This relationship has been shaped by multifaceted cultural exchange, but also minority protection treaties imposed by various rulers and diverse migratory movements – including violent forced resettlement, deportations, displacement and genocide – as well as the granting of minority rights to certain groups.

Culture is thus not only a folkloristic embellishment, but a core element for understanding the political, social, lingual and religious diversity in the Danube region. The history and culture of the Danube region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a research field with clear interconnections and entanglements. Topics such as the interethnic coexistence within nation-states, the constant necessity of cultural translation, daily practices within the frame of interethnic existence and the associated intercultural competencies of individual actors are thus of particular interest. At the same time, it is also vital to determine the conditions under which these practiced cultural patterns were suspended and how coexistence suddenly shifted to ethnic violence – in short, to remember that diversity is both challenge and opportunity. That was the starting point for our joint international teaching and research project.

Summer academies in Tübingen, Budapest, and Cluj-Napoca

The nature of diversity and what it specifically means in social life depends largely on its temporal and political context: diversity was understood and experienced differently in the multinational empires of the nineteenth century than in the more or less homogeneous nation-states of the interwar period or in the supranational confederation of states that gradually emerged after World War II in the form of the European Union. Historians have also been pointing out for some time that, rather than seeing this period as marked by sharp divisions, it is possible to observe a variety of transitions. Ulrike von Hirschhausen (2015, 742), for example, described the relationships between empires and nation-states as "intertwined" and characterized by numerous "convergences." The long-held opposition between empire and nation-state, according to Tübingen historian Dieter Langewiesche, has largely overlooked a twofold development: the efforts of nation-states themselves to form empires, on the one hand, and

their existing but limited potential to organize themselves into a supranational state form such as the European Union, on the other (2000, 217–221).

The Danube region, like Southeastern Europe more broadly, is a highly interesting field of research for questions such as these, inviting academic cooperation and intensive exchange. Both have been accomplished for many years through institutional and personal cooperation between the universities of Budapest, Cluj-Napoca and Tübingen in the form of joint research and student exchanges. Both university and non-university institutes have benefited greatly from this. The focus of this cooperation is on history, literary studies, and cultural anthropology. Against this backdrop, the rectors of these three universities have made it possible to hold three intensive summer academies to strengthen this cooperation: In 2016, the first academy was held at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen on "Empire and Diversity. The Habsburg Monarchy in the Long Nineteenth Century," followed in 2017 by the second at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest on "Nation/State/Diversity in the Danube Region, 1918–1948" and, in 2018, the third at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca on "Diversity Beyond the Nation/State (1948–2013)." More than sixty students and numerous speakers participated in these meetings and joined the discussions.

As the intensive cooperation and exchange have continued, the editors and their colleagues in Budapest and Cluj-Napoca jointly decided to publish this volume with updated contributions and newly added essays. The aim is to continue a discussion on a challenging subject that continues to be of great importance.

Contributions

The authors of this volume come from Budapest, Cluj-Napoca and Tübingen. Only Robert J. W. Evans, who taught at Oxford, was invited by the editors to write an introductory contribution to this book as an expert on Habsburg history. A historical perspective clearly dominates the chronological and thematic focus of this volume, which begins in the eighteenth century, but extends to the present day through contemporary historical, anthropological and literary studies. Diversity – the central concept of this book – is understood very differently by many of the authors. In most of the chapters, the term is used to describe the ethnic and religious plurality of the Danube region and the countries and regions located there; however, in the introductory articles, diversity is also developed as a theoretical concept, supported by empirical research.

In his chapter, "The Concept of Diversity and the Study of the Habsburg Monarchy," *Reinhard Johler* takes current social science research on diversity as his starting point. This research focuses on a migration-based "diversification of diversity" that has been observable primarily in large cities in Western Europe since the turn of the millennium. In this context, the analytical concept of super-diversity formulated by sociologist Steven Vertovec has become particularly important, as it essentially argues

against reducing diversity to ethnicity. Conversely, there are also interesting analyses, particularly in historical and anthropological studies, that take this "new diversity" as a starting point for a better understanding of the "old diversity" of past societies. Such an approach also requires a certain reflexivity, as Reinhard Johler illustrates in his essay, using the example of the Austrian half of the Habsburg Monarchy.

The approach taken by *Robert J. W. Evans* in his chapter "The Linguistic and Cultural Diversity of Central Europe: Perception and Reality" is similar. He begins by considering how the term diversity is currently in "fashion" and describes the different concepts associated with it. He is particularly interested in examining how diversity was perceived in premodern societies, how it subsequently became established and thus became "reality." His approach is thus constructivist, and his field of research is the Kingdom of Hungary. Evans observes that diversity was not initially more important there than elsewhere, but gained increasing significance in the perception of the state-building processes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hungary was initially seen as "Europe in miniature," but with the establishment of the modern bourgeois understanding of the nation, it increasingly became a prime example of state assimilation efforts. Evans thus proposes a contrast between the "short history of diversity" and an equally "short history of uniformity."

Gábor Erdődy picks up this thread in his chapter "The Emergence of the Modern Hungarian Bourgeois Nation (1790–1849)." He argues that the Hungarian bourgeois nation was shaped not only by Hungary's status as part of the Habsburg Empire and its lack of statehood until the Compromise of 1867, but also the fact that the Hungarian population did not have a majority in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. As a result, ethnic minorities – primarily Romanians, Slovaks, Germans, Serbs, Croats and Ruthenians – exerted a significant influence on the deliberations surrounding the formation of the Hungarian nation. Erdődy describes its development chronologically: The period between 1790 and 1830 stands as the prelude to the subsequent breakthrough during the Hungarian reform era (1830–1848), which was determined as much by the struggle for civil liberties as by a growing fear among the political elites that the nationalities might seek their future within a developing separatist movement and thus in isolation from the Hungarian people. According to Erdődy, the greatest mistake of the April Laws of 1848 was that they did not mention the nationality question, which made the "tragic escalation" that followed inevitable.

Judith Pál focuses her research on the same period – the long nineteenth century – and the same social currents – liberalism and nationalism. However, her essay "From the Identity of the Estates to a National Identity" has a particular regional focus, namely "The Ethnic Groups of Transylvania in the Nineteenth Century." Transylvania was under Ottoman rule until the seventeenth century, then became a peripheral part of the Habsburg Monarchy and, from 1867, of the Kingdom of Hungary. Three elite groups shared political power and territory in Transylvania: the Saxons, the Szeklers and the Hungarian nobility. At the same time, the large Romanian population

remained without political influence. Pál therefore speaks of an "incomplete society" and traces in detail how modern nationalities emerged from these "estate-states" in the nineteenth century through diverse processes of ethnicization. Even when the "estate-nations" were finally abolished, she argues, the parallel societies of Saxons, Romanians and Hungarians continued to exist and remained significant in the postwar period when Transylvania became part of Romania.

The contribution by *Mathias Beer*, "New States – Old Questions. Diversity and Homogeneity in Southeastern Europe after World War I", follows George F. Kennan's assessment that the World War was "a great seminal catastrophe" (1989, 4). It ushered in a new phase of nationalization – also and especially with regard to the minority question. He shows that, despite the international calls for the protection of minorities, the newly formed states in Southeastern Europe did not succeed in organizing their national, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity – in short, that they did not succeed in establishing the protection of their minorities. On the contrary, neither the warring parties during World War II nor the states established after 1945 were guided by the principle of minority protection. As heirs of the World War I, they resettled, displaced and expelled millions of members of minority groups. By the middle of the twentieth century, Europe had become a shunting yard under the banner of the ethnically pure nation-state. The ground for this state of affairs was prepared during the original catastrophe of the twentieth century, a trend that continues into the present. To discuss this systematically is an essential contribution of the historical scholarship to helping ensure that homogenization does not become the guiding principle for social coexistence and politics in the twenty-first century, including in Southeastern Europe.

In his essay "Hungarian Nationality Politics between 1918 and 1948," *Ferenc Eiler* argues that the Hungarian nationality policy in the interwar period can only be understood by accounting for both changes to the concept of nation and the direct and indirect consequences of the peace agreements after World War I on the political elite and increasingly politicized public sphere. In his opinion, Magyar nationalism made no distinction whatsoever between the cultural and political understanding of the concept of nation. Its adherents were convinced that other nationalities present within the state fundamentally endangered the continued existence of both the Hungarian kingdom and the mutilated Hungarian State after 1919. The restrictive interwar state nationality policy thus strengthened growing tendencies toward acculturation and assimilation. As a consequence of these minority politics, most of the large German and Slovak minorities were expelled to the Czechoslovakian Republic and Germany at the end of World War II.

From the perspective of *Virgiliu Țârău* in his contribution "Back to Uniformity: Different Paths, but the Same Road," the states of Eastern Europe found themselves, during the course of the previous century, at the center of three fundamental political changes during the foundational moments of new political regimes: First, at the end of World War I as a period of democratization and the liberalization of the new

nation-states in the region began; second, after World War II when communist-style regimes were imposed by the Soviet Union, and finally, after 1989 and the fall of the Communist regimes, when a new wave of political democratization began. For the period after 1945, he diagnoses a tendency by the newly established Communist regimes in the countries of Southeastern Europe toward uniformity. One instrument of this policy was the use of elections to accomplish specific functions: legitimation, the legalization of Communist power and accommodation – in order to make promises more credible. With these common goals in mind, the countries of Southeastern Europe nonetheless took different paths. In fact, not only the chronology of the elections in Central and Eastern Europe, but also their form and substance help to explain the ways in which the Soviet Union dealt with each of the countries under their control after the war.

Daniela Simon's contribution "Property Orders and Cultural Diversity: Political and Social Negotiations in Vojvodina during the Twentieth Century" explores the central role of property regimes in shaping cultural diversity in a multiethnic region. Her study reveals that property was never a neutral economic or legal category, but rather a contested institutional and symbolic framework through which social belonging, visibility and exclusion were continuously redefined. From interwar land reforms and socialist collectivization to the period of Yugoslav self-management and the post-socialist restitution process, property served as a key instrument of social ordering and cultural negotiation. Simon highlights how different political systems – imperial, royal, socialist and post-socialist – used property policies to restructure ethnic relations and regulate access to resources and recognition. By analyzing Vojvodina as a case study, Simon's contribution offers a nuanced understanding of how property regimes both reflected and produced cultural diversity in the Danube region.

The question of land distribution is also central to *Zsuzsanna Varga's* essay "Rural Pluralities behind the Iron Curtain: The Hungarian Case." In Hungary, aristocratic families owned half the arable land, while small-hold farmers owned the other half. The land reforms after World War I and II changed little in this regard. It was not until 1948 that the implementation of the Soviet *kolkhoz* model and the collectivization of land ownership led to a clear break and, as a result, to a long-lasting conflict between Communist rulers and peasant society. In the long term, it proved to be highly significant that although the farmers were not able to use their land independently, they remained its legal owners. As Varga convincingly demonstrates, this peculiarity enabled significant pluralities to emerge in socialist Hungarian agriculture. With the departure from the Soviet model, a form of "hybrid agriculture" that was highly productive by Eastern European standards gradually established itself in Hungary from the 1960s onwards and was celebrated even during the socialist era as the "Hungarian agricultural miracle."

Olivia Spiridon's contribution "Negotiation and Translation. Strategies against Uniformity in the Literary Communication of the German Minority in Romania after 1945" examines the literary communication of the German minority in Romania,

which developed in regions – the Banat and Transylvania – with a deep-rooted experience of cultural diversity. This literature has witnessed stark historical turning points, including the transition to the Romanian nation-state after World War I, a socialist dictatorship after 1945, and the exodus to the West (especially from the 1970s onwards). In order to understand the production and reception of this literature, in which minority and migration overlap, the article examines certain central developments in literary history after 1945. Using the terms "negotiation" and "translation," the focus is on the particularities of literary communication in socialist Romania and the relationship between the state and the author in changing cultural and political contexts. The article examines strategies used by authors when confronted with the uniformizing effect of state control, the range of negotiations and cultural translations and the diversification of literary codes in narrow spaces of free communication.

Reinhard Johler, Mathias Beer

References

Calic, Marie-Janine. 2016. *Südosteuropa. Weltgeschichte einer Region*. Munich: C. H. Beck.

Donauraum-Strategie / Danube Region Strategy. Die EU-Donauraumstrategie (EUSDR): Wohlstand durch Vielfalt. https://donauraumstrategie.de (accessed October 4, 2025).

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2015. "Cultural Complexity." In *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, edited by Steven Vertovec. New York: Routledge.

EU Parliament. 2010. Europäische Strategie für den Donauraum. www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2010-0008_DE.html?redirect (accessed October 5, 2025).

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hannerz, Ulf. 2010. "Diversity is our Business." *American Anthropologist* 112: 539–551.

Hirschhausen, Ulrike von. 2015. "A New Imperial History? Programm, Potenzial, Perspektiven." *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41: 718–757.

Kennan, George F. 1989, 1979. *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875–1890*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Langewiesche, Dieter. 2000. *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa*. Munich: C. H. Beck.

Lowe, Keith. 2014. "European Fascism and its Aftermath." In *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, edited by Steven Vertovec. New York: Routledge.

Sundhaussen, Holm and Konrad Clewing, eds. 2016. *Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas*. Weimar: Böhlau.

Rothschild, Joseph and Nancy M. Wingfield. 2008. *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vertovec, Steven. 2012. "'Diversity' and the Social Imaginary." *European Journal of Sociology* 53 (3): 287–312.