The cities, the Empress and the urban spaces: An introduction

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In the context of crisis of the humanities and because of the difficulties experienced by history and historians in the last decades, historians have sought and proposed many solutions for their discipline\(^1\). Public History is one of these solutions and it is a new discipline that, starting from the United States, has the goal of communicating history to the general public in non-academic ways and settings. In fact, Public History aims at encouraging the use of history and at allowing easier access to the discipline, elaborating a kind of ‘history for everyone’.

The project underlying this publication forced us to reflect on these issues. In the occasion of the tercentenary of the birth of Maria Theresa, it all started with the direct and constructive incentive of the Trieste city administration. Moreover, the tercentenary is, without any doubt, an event that could to involve the public and the citizens more than ever. The project, therefore, had the need to tell the city and its inhabitants something about themselves. It is our attempt to provide citizens with the tools to

\(^1\) See Andreozzi 2017.
read their own territory and understand how the city and local identities have been shaped by history and developed to what they are today.

Our path has arisen from such items. The first step was the workshop, which took place in Trieste in October 2016\(^2\). After that, through the subsequent phases of discussion and writing, we get to this book. So, the book presents itself as a self-standing work, different from the first results of the workshop. However, it is nonetheless a by-product of that first step. Unlike what it may seem, this product takes into account the debate

\(^2\) The international convention *The empress cities: urban centres, societies and economies in the age of Maria Theresia von Habsburg* took place in Trieste, in the Sartorio Museum, on the 20\(^{th}\)-21\(^{st}\) of October 2016. The event was organized by the Municipality of Trieste and by the Central European Initiative with the University of Trieste and the its Department of Political and Social Sciences and under the guidance of Daniele Andreozzi e Luca Mocarelli.
around the role of Public History. In our opinion, dissemination cannot be reduced to a simplified version of history nor to the dichotomy between popular and academic history. We deemed it necessary to underline that history needs not only to become more accessible, but also to be treated with more respect. As Marc Bloch wrote in last century, such respect is based on the conscious use of the tools of the historian. At the same time, we cannot deny that the globalized world we live in needs sophisticated tools to read its reality. Therefore, we tried to combine both levels offering a ‘research’ book for many to read. Quality and objectives are the links between the different levels.

Behind this project, lies the firm belief that a thorough analysis of the urban phenomenon in the complexity of the Imperial spaces during Ther-
esian times will offer a new understanding of the development of both the Habsburg Empire and its cities. The tercentenary of the Empress’s birth offered us the opportunity to investigate the dynamics at play in the wide spaces that were subjected to her government. However, it also gives a chance to stress that the urban phenomenon can only be understood if considering those wide spaces and the wider ecological and geographic contexts.

After all, this project was conceived in Trieste, a city whose 18th-century development can only be truly understood by taking into consideration the continental and Mediterranean networks of which the city was part and where it could play the role of centre and periphery. Resources, goods, knowledge, women and men circulated along those networks. In the past, Trieste has been known to be the hub of relationships between cities. Nowadays, the idea of editing a book capable of circulating in those same networks wants to pay homage to that time, even if only for the limited scope of our research.

From the Trieste point of view, the choice to focus on urban history to talk about the era of Maria Theresa might seem obvious. During the life of the Empress, the city underwent massive economic, social and demographic growth and its population soared from around 5,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the century to nearly 30,000 at the end. Trieste became one of the biggest ports on the Mediterranean Sea and a much more socially and economically structured city. For a long time, such growth has been interpreted as the direct result of Habsburg policies, which created Trieste ‘artificially’. However, if we go beyond the surface of such traditional view, the urban phenomenon becomes less obvious even focusing on Trieste. In fact, the traditional view needs to be overcome by using, also in the history of Trieste, the results of the recent studies on the relationship between centre and periphery and between state and society, on the role, goals and functions of the “enlightened sovereigns”, on the relationship between rulers and the other social and economic protagonists of the time, and on the cities’ history. Moreover, we need to leave aside the classical framework not only because we can count on sources on 18th-century Trieste, but also because the city deserves to be considered in the geographic, economic, institutional and political context of the time. Above all, the history of Trieste deserves to be considered in the
context of networks and spaces the city was part of. The book certainly is
the result of Trieste’s needs. However, it glances beyond the local scope
and has broader ambitions. As already mentioned before, urban phenom-
enon could indeed be the starting point for a deeper analysis of imperi-
al policies and dynamics in the eighteenth century. These are among the
reasons why we chose to adopt a comparative approach, which enabled
us to compare the different regions of the Empire, with their many differ-
ences, both on an institutional, political, linguistic, ethnic, historical, eco-
nomic and environmental level. Just by looking at the table of contents,
the reader will be able to start an ideal journey through the Habsburg
Empire, from the heart of the Continent to the Italian peninsula and the
Mediterranean. The history of each city and urban system becomes the
common thread of the history of those areas, of the transformations they
underwent and the relationship they had with the Empire. These cities
and urban systems were not the passive result of the policies of the Vienna Court, but active protagonists of their own history. In this way, in the context of continue negotiations with the State, they had a profound impact on the development and application of such policies. The quantitative and qualitative growth of cities and urban systems proves that they were a relevant element in determining the imperial policies in the 18th century. The differences in the ways of growth are a first and important element of comparison. In the Habsburg part of the Italian Peninsula, the already densely populated big cities experienced a mainly qualitative growth, whereas in the eastern and continental areas the imperial cities were characterised by a sudden quantitative growth, especially in terms of population, Trieste included. Perhaps, the growth of these cities and urban systems may be the cause of the contradictions characterizing the mythical spaces we commonly call ‘Mitteleuropa’, where past and present have always been in conflict4. If on one hand one may argue that in the Habsburg Empire only the Great War put an end to the Ancien Régime5, on the other Central Europe has always been the cradle of new ways of life and of cultural and social modernization. Finally, it is here that democratic and multicultural realities have faced the worst totalitarian, imperialistic and nationalistic regimes.

Because of the interweaving of levels of analysis and the complexity of these areas, we chose to opt for a ‘plural approach’. In the book, each scholar analyses the urban phenomenon from his or her particular point of view. Remus Câmpeanu focused on the urban development of Transylvania from a quantitative point of view. Using the statistical data at his disposal and paying particular attention to the fiscal conscriptions, he tried to explain urbanization as a complex process avoiding interpretations based on ethnic factors. For this reason, he privileges economic, political, social, anthropological and demographic factors. Peter Fedorčák concerns himself with the ‘rebirth’ of the city of Košice in Theresian times. He is particularly interested in unveiling the relationships between Maria

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4 On these spaces and the clash between past and modernity and city and countryside, see Pollack 2017.
5 Mayer 1981
Theresa’s government, the Vienna Court policies and the growth of the city, in order to explain how Košice became an Early Eodern metropolis. Eva Chodějovská manages to analyze the transformations of Prague’s urban landscape making use of cartographic and iconographic visual representations, e.g. maps (town plans) and vedute (town views). Ceremonies and processions reveal ways of using space. She was able to draw information on the urban spaces and its transformation from details captured in city maps, ceremonial scenes and vedute, as, for example, the facades of the palaces. Anton Tantner makes use of quantitative and qualitative data to portray a vivid and descriptive image of urban life in Vienna during a period of rapid demographic growth. Focusing on socio-economic, religious and cultural aspects, he manages to outline the main transformations the city underwent in the second half of the 18th century. Daniele Andreozzi deals with the demographic and infrastructural growth of Trieste in the years 1750-1764. This time span marks the most important period of growth for the city in the whole XVIII century. Last but not least, Luca Mocarelli analyses the qualitative and dimensional growth of Milan in Theresian times making use of digitalized city maps of the time. From this point of view, he explores the relationship between the Vienna Court and the social fabric of the city, paying special attention to the economic factors. The archduke Ferdinando, the Royal architect Piermarini and the local nobility were the main actors of this transformation.

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Bibliography


