The Unwanted Compromise

The Free City of Danzig/Gdańsk

International Conference

Gdańsk, November 15th-17th 2020

Call for Papers

On 15 November 1920, the founding of the Free City of Danzig was officially announced. What the great powers at the peace conference in Paris had conceived one and a half years before as a compromise solution would turn out to be quite problematic. In the nearly 19 years of its existence, the Free City of Danzig was worn down by the competing claims of Germany and Poland. It fell into the clutches of the National Socialists despite the supervision of the League of Nations and eventually became the place where the Second World War broke out with the bombardment of the Westerplatte.

The 100th anniversary of the day of the Free City of Danzig's founding provides the opportunity to recapitulate its history, to discuss its continuing influence on the present, and to compare it in the context of other city-states.

Key questions of the conference will be: What conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the functioning of city-states in the age of modern state formation and dominating nation state for the category of statehood? To what extent are states that - like the Free City of Danzig -- were designed and that owed their existence to compromises between balance of power interests, actual places of freedom? Or are they condemned to unfreedom because of their many dependencies?

To what extent do they represent alternatives to the national state model? Moreover, do they rather become focal points of national claims and thereby exceptions that underline the dominance of the nation state "rule" in discursive and political ways?

To what extent were or are modern city states also spaces of economic freedom and what role do they play in regional and international economic fields? To what extent do "free cities" as non-nation states develop their own social, political or cultural identities? How do they fulfill the state functions intended for them, and who benefits from their existence? And what is their after-life: Do they, if they come to an end, serve as mythical spaces of remembrance for later generations, or are they rather negatively connoted?

How is their existence symbolically charged or politically exploited, and how are they re-appreciated in marketing, tourism or identity in the current experience-driven society?

Our conference consists of four parts. The first two parts will present the state of research on the Free City of Danzig and showcase new academic work on its history. The third part will present

other examples of urban micro-states, from the Free City of Krakow to Rijeka / Fiume or Trieste, from the Free City of Frankfurt to the urban petty states of today such as Monaco or Singapore. The fourth part focuses on their historical memory.

The conference languages are Polish, German and English (simultaneous translation will be provided). A publication of the conference proceedings is planned.

All interested parties are encouraged to submit their proposals to Peter Oliver Loew (loew@dpi-da.de) by 15 February 2020 (abstract 1 page, biogram, in Polish or English).

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