

CEH-C Proposal

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“Trust and the Social Meaning of Money: New currency in interwar Poland”

This paper uses the perspectives of trust and the social meaning of money to understand the introduction of the Polish *złoty* in 1924. As the latest scholarship has shown, currency valuation is not a function of monetary factors (balance of trade, reserves, money supply), but rather is historically contingent based on the politics of the moment and visions of the future. Drawing inspiration from sociologists and behavioral economics, my paper will uncover the historical, legal, cultural and socio-psychological mechanisms contributing to trust in a new monetary system. Poland dealt with currency chaos in the years after the end of the First World War, when post-imperial and other foreign currencies competed with the official legal tender, the Polish mark. As part of a broader tax and financial overhaul, Władysław Grabski led the foundation of a new central bank and a new currency, backed by gold.

Trust, as understood in the social sciences, indicates what people expect of one another and institutions, including the state. Money is an embodiment of trust because it represents an expectation of carrying value into the future to pay off debts and taxes as well as to be exchanged for goods and services. The point of departure for understanding trust will be to uncover how people understand money contextually, referred to as the social meaning of money.

This examination aims to understand the creation of the new national currency primarily through state-owned and private banks. Trust in money (and government) must be engendered and maintained. Thus this paper focuses on attempts to reach various populations in multiple languages (Polish, Ukrainian, Yiddish) in order to convince them of the security of the new currency.

Central European History Convention (University of Vienna, 17-19 July 2025)

Projected paper title: The Central European Economic Congress: the political implications of Central European economic integration (1925-1930)

Following the collapse of Austria-Hungary, which also resulted in the disintegration of its economic area, the Successor states experienced a structural economic crisis, accentuated by their protectionist economic policies. To remedy this situation, free trade advocates, not only economists, but also businessmen and politicians, gathered annually in Vienna from September 1925 to discuss the possibilities of economic integration in Central Europe.

During the 1920s, the participants of the Central European Economic Congress (CEEC) were divided over the “Austrian question”: Austria with the Successor states or with Germany? While its initiators, the Viennese businessman Julius Meinl, the Hungarian economist Elemér Hantos and the former Czechoslovak Trade Ministers Rudolf Hotowetz and Václav Schuster, defended the idea of an economic rapprochement between the Successor states, the former German Minister of Treasury Georg Gothein promoted the economic attachment of Austria to Germany. Under the influence of the German Foreign Office, and with the support of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, the CEEC progressively became an organisation in favour of an Austro-German customs union.

The research project led by Professor Carola Sachse at the University of Vienna from 2006 to 2010 mainly focused on the CEEC as an instrument of Germany’s expansionism in Central and South-Eastern Europe in the 1930s. With my paper, in which I will examine the ideological disagreements and power struggles within the CEEC from its origins in 1925 to its German-led reorganisation in 1930, I will fill an historiographical gap by studying the CEEC from the perspective of the Successor states. My research will be based on new archival sources (foreign policy documents and private archives) collected in Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Germany.

I would be honored to present my paper at the first Central European History Convention in Vienna, just before the 100th anniversary of the CEEC.

(299 words)

Organizing for progress. Rudolf Broda and his transnational networks

In 1907, the Viennese sociologist and Social Democrat Rudolf Broda (1880-1932) launched an international(ist) project in Paris to document, study, and organize global progress. Within a few years, six periodicals appearing in Paris (French), London (English), Berlin (German), Saint Petersburg (Russian), Budapest (Hungarian) and Madrid (Esperanto) carried a large debate across linguistic and political borders. In Paris, the *Institut international pour la diffusion des expériences sociales* and the *Ligue pour l'organisation du progrès* were founded, organizing local chapters, conducting comparative studies on social policy, and lobbying politicians. A large network of social scientists, political leaders, activists and reformers representing a spectrum of leftist inclinations across Europe and beyond was involved in Broda's project and contributed to his periodicals.

The debate on progress shifted during the time of the project's existence (1907-1932). It addressed a wide and sometimes eclectic range of topics in its *fin-de-siècle* phase. During the First World War it focused on pacifism, (non-Bolshevik) socialist internationalism, international law and the creation of international institutions. Broda also drafted plans for a post-war legal and political world order. Arguably, particularly Austrian sensibilities shaped his worldview and his understanding that building progress meant 'building culture'. He intended to create a large left alliance between the labor movement, 'bourgeois socialism', and what he called the four 'bourgeois cultural movements': the women's movement, temperance, pacifism, and international law. His project was an attempt to bring different civilizations and empires into a conversation with one another, to conduct comparative research in order to understand human progress, and to foster a global exchange of best practices and cultural production. Broda's project was as ambitious as it was visionary.