



## The Sociological Idea of the State: Legal Education, Austrian Multinationalism, and the Future of Continental Empire, 1880–1914

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### Abstract

If historians now recognize that the Habsburg Monarchy was developing into a strong, cohesive state in the decades before the First World War, they have yet to fully examine contemporaneous European debates about Austria's legitimacy and place in the future world order. As the intertwined fields of law and social science began during this period to elaborate a binary distinction between "modern" nation-states and "archaic" multinational "empires," Austria, like other composite monarchies, found itself searching for a legally and scientifically valid justification for its continued existence. This article argues that Austrian sociology provided such a justification and was used to articulate a defense of the Habsburg Monarchy and other supposedly "abnormal" multinational states. While the birth of the social sciences is typically associated with Germany and France, a turn to sociology also occurred in the late Habsburg Monarchy, spurred by legal scholars who feared that the increasingly hegemonic idea of nation-based sovereignty threatened the stability of the pluralistic Austrian state. Proponents of the "sociological idea of the state," notably the sociologist, politician, and later president of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Masaryk and the Polish-Jewish sociologist and jurist Ludwig Gumplowicz, challenged the concept of statehood advanced by mainstream Western European legal philosophy and called for a reform of Austria's law and political science curriculum. I reveal how, more than a century before the "imperial turn," Habsburg actors came to reject the emerging scholarly distinction between "nations" and "empires" and fought, with considerable success, to institutionalize an alternative to nationalist social scientific discourse.

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