Preparing for an ERC grant

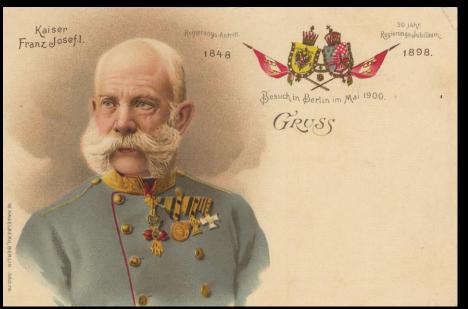Matthew Rampley
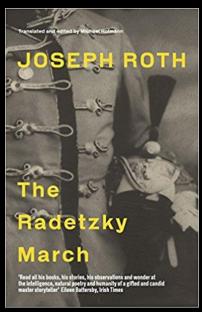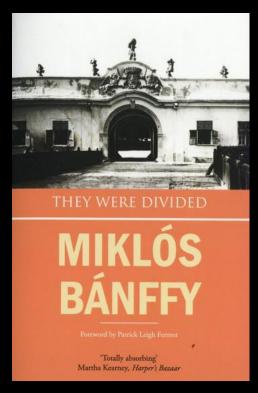
Department of Art History

- **ERC Advanced Grant**

- Five Year Project

- Comparative study of interwar Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (+ post-Ottoman Turkey, Europe and the Middle East, Baltic States)

  - One 0.6 Principal Investigator
  - Three 1.0 Post-doc Researchers (with appropriate language spread)
  - One administrator
  - Four monographs + one edited volume + five conferences / workshops

  - Budget: € 2.48 million

- What was the meaning of the year 1918 for art and architecture in Central Europe?

- Did 1918 mark a moment of rupture and discontinuity, or were there deeper *continuities* linking the art and culture of Austria-Hungary with that of the new world that arose from its ruins?

- When new political elites and social structures emerge out of historical rupture, how are art and architecture affected?

- In what ways can we challenge existing orthodoxies about interwar art?

Some thoughts:

Planning

- You may need long-term strategic planning – is your academic profile quite there yet?

- But …. there are different schemes for different levels – and reviewers take this into account when assessing applications.

Developing your profile?

- **Think longer term** – you may not be ready *now* but can you plan to have a compelling *curriculum vitae* in 2 or 3 years' time?

- **Develop a publication strategy.** This means:

  - making sure you publish in journals / with presses that will get you *noticed*
  - don't just go for the first journal that accepts your paper
  - being ambitious – aim for the best known / leading journals first (Panels will be better able to judge the quality of your publications)
  - decide who your audience is and cultivate them
  - cultivating international contacts as potential collaborators

Some thoughts:

- It takes a long time to develop a proposal through to the end. It may require a year or more of conceptual preparation before you even start writing

- It took **9 months** to write – the application is long and demanding, and it took about 20 versions before submitting the final one

- Take advantage of colleagues for feedback on drafts – and not just colleagues in your field (see below)

In your application, spell out:

- **Significance**: the significance of the research – its merits and benefits – should be spelled out
- **Aims**: is it clear what the research is aiming to achieve? What are the *questions* driving it?
- **Ambition**: it has to be an obvious measurable *departure* from your previous work, *not* just an incremental addition or more of the same.

Some thoughts:

- **Rationale**: why the ERC (rather than the GAČR)?
- **Audience**: do not just write it for specialists – writing for a non-academic reader will force you to spell out the aims and significance of the research without relying on jargon
- **Scale** (1): projects should be on a scale in keeping with the scheme – big enough to *require* 5 years.
- **Scale** (2): the project should be ambitious enough for the money to be *necessary*

Some thoughts (2):

- **Staffing**: my application included *named* staff, but there had to be a rationale as to why *they* were needed (vs. open competition for funded posts)
- **Salience**: this was a historical project, but it touched on a topic with particular political salience: central Europe and identities in a time of flux. I think this helped.
- **Gender**: also a central priority for the ERC
- **Flexibility**: as the project develops, changes are possible

Some thoughts (3):

- **Management**: it should be clear *who* is responsible for *what* in the team and why they are needed. What is *your* contribution as the lead investigator?

- **Risk management**: have you identified risks? What practical measures are there to minimise risk? How will you deal with potential disruptions, e.g. researchers / collaborators leaving?

- **Open Access**: a central priority for the ERC – build it into the design of the project (includes open data as well as open access publications)

A task for discussion in groups:

- If you already have an idea for a project – explain it to other members of your group (non-specialists). Can you indicate (1) its significance, (2) aims and (3) why the ERC?

- If you are not sure whether you are ready: (1) can you agree on useful steps to start developing a proposal?

- Are there aspects on your CV you need to develop? What concrete steps will you take to do so? What is the timescale?

- What do you think are the obstacles to applying for the ERC? What can you do to overcome them? What can the university / faculty do to support you?