

Solidarity as a driving force behind the formation of stipend funds in the Habsburg monarchy

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The funding of (higher) education is a topic that has been attracting a lot of attention recently. The for a long time predominant notion that the government alone is responsible for the financing of education has been challenged by politicians, scholars and society alike, terms like “third-party funds” entered the public discourse and modified our approach to the question how universities and similar institutions should be funded. Surprisingly though, the history of this issue is, at least regarding the German-speaking world, still fairly under-researched, even though there have been recent attempts to fill this gap.¹

Even less is known about the contributions of private persons and the civil society² to the costs caused by education. Private participation often manifested in the form of foundations, which played a crucial role in the financing of education throughout the history of the Habsburg monarchy; in fact most of the financial backing of the educational system prior to and during the time of Maria Theresia was provided for by them.³ But private donors did not only establish foundations for the benefit of institutions, they tried to support individual students as well. Both models, educational foundations as well as those who provided stipends, played an important role until World War 1: At the end of the 19th century, more than a 1000 foundations for educational purposes existed in Vienna alone, approximately 350 of them had the purpose of financing stipends.⁴ The impact of this phenomenon on the educational system and society in general might not be as remarkable as in other countries, such as the US or the UK, but it is far from negligible. Nevertheless, probably due to the fact that stipend foundations do not play a prominent role in modern Austria anymore, this topic has been neglected in historical research for a long time, and only recently have some publications started to deal with certain issues regarding foundations.⁵

If one wants to understand the background of this substantial system, it is essential to take a closer look at those who were responsible for it: the donors. After all, it was their initiative that brought the foundations into being, and one of the main questions thus has to be what motivated them to provide formidable financial means without seemingly receiving anything in return. To find out, it is helpful to investigate what kind of students were among the eligible

persons and awardees. On the one hand, qualifications/academic merits and financial neediness had always been an important factor in determining the eligibility of the applicants; on the other hand, solidarity had had a major impact on the erection and sustainment of stipend foundations from the very beginning of the institution. Donors wanted to enable adolescents that shared certain characteristics with them to be as successful as possible, and the easiest way to achieve that was providing them with an appropriate education. This paper is going to elaborate on the important role solidarity played as a motivational force for donors throughout the history of foundations in the Habsburg monarchy, focusing on the two peak phases in the 16th and 19th century respectively.⁶ Issues of religion, gender, nationality/origin, profession, social stratum and affiliation with the donor's family will be dealt with, while the question, to what extent certain forms of support for selected groups of students can be called "solidarity," has always to be taken into account.

- Religion and politics

In the Habsburg monarchy, the educational system had always been inseparably linked to the Catholic Church; Catholic institutions had founded most of the schools, and they continued to operate them. This Catholic predominance was challenged with the emergence of broad support for the Protestant denominations in Austria. With the exception of Tyrol, most of the nobility of inner Austria had converted during the 16th century, and thus the creation of a non-Catholic educational system became an imminent necessity for local rulers. Founding schools and stipends for Protestant students was not only a way to express solidarity with fellow believers and to enable the training of urgently needed Protestant clerics, it was also a chance to make the new denomination more attractive for potential converts.

With the onset of the counter-reformation, however, the Habsburg authorities gradually tried to inhibit and prohibit attempts to establish a non-Catholic educational system in order to support the traditional denomination. At first, their endeavors seemed to be in vain, but when they intensified their efforts towards the end of the 16th century, first results became apparent. In 1598, for example, Protestant schools in Styria had to be closed down, an Upper Austrian Protestant school was converted into a Catholic one some years later.⁷

As a reaction to these developments, new forms of solidarity were established. Protestants now tried to secure an appropriate education for their children and the offspring of their fellow believers by creating stipend foundations that were intended to fund studies abroad, in the Protestant areas of the Holy Roman Empire. This was probably the main reason why the

authorities not only concentrated their attention to all kinds of stipend foundations in the following period, but tried to bar their subjects from studying abroad as well. First attempts to curb these developments failed, for example when Rudolf II tried to avert the creation of a foundation for Protestants in a city near Wrocław in the late 16th century.⁸ His successors, however, were more successful, as is demonstrated by “Ferdinand’s foundation,” allegedly founded in 1630 by the ruling sovereign, Ferdinand II. This was only partially true: The capital it was based on had been donated by a Silesian woman, who wanted to finance studies abroad for Lutheran adolescents. However, Ferdinand had no intention to put her plans into practice, and thus he rededicated the foundation to fund Catholic students at a Viennese institution run by the Jesuits instead.⁹ Attempts to establish an institutionalized Protestant „confessional solidarity”¹⁰ were thus blocked by Austrian rulers, who managed to suppress a Protestant school system as well as pro-Protestant foundations.

In the course of the 19th century, a new form of religious solidarity started to manifest itself. Ever since the rule of Joseph II, the situation for Jews and non-Catholic Christians had improved, members of those denominations were now allowed to study at universities. At the end of the 19th century, foundations that aimed exclusively at Jews, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Catholics or Christians in general were a common phenomenon. Contemporaries were not surprised by this development: As there had always been foundations for Catholics only, the creation of foundations exclusively for the members of other denominations was interpreted as the logical reaction.¹¹ Many of these funds were managed by the official representatives of the respective denominations, to ensure that the financial means would benefit those that the donor had had in mind. The Catholic Church, meanwhile, had lost its grip on stipend foundations within Vienna; however, most of the older (and a lot of newer) foundations still preferred Catholic Christians. All the more important was it for religious minorities to create a system of stipend foundations on their own.

- Social stratum

Until the beginning of the 19th century, stipend foundations in the area of today’s Austria were most often established by members of the nobility. This started to change around 1800, with the emergence of new social strata such as middle classes and a “Second society.” In the course of the 19th century, founding stipend foundations became a phenomenon associated with the upper middle classes. The rise of the middle classes and the simultaneous boom of foundations tend to be treated as linked phenomena in modern literature, with scholars

terming foundations a “middle-class phenomenon”¹² or a “specific cultural feature of the wealthy and educated middle classes.”¹³ Indeed, stipend foundations played an important role in the process of class distinction – being able to afford being a donor raised individuals to the level of nobility in the public perception.¹⁴

Considering this aspect of foundations, it comes as no surprise, that supporting members of the own social stratum could occasionally play a role. Several foundations were accessible for members of the middle classes only, as only those were deemed worthy enough by the donors, who themselves of course belonged to the wealthy and educated strata. Foundations, thus, were not established to facilitate social upward mobility for underprivileged strata, the donors rather just wanted to secure the social position of their own social group by providing an appropriate education for peers in need. But not only the middle classes aspired to support members of their social group, noblemen and noblewomen did so as well. Several institutions, accessible exclusively for juvenile members of the nobility, were rooted in private initiatives of individuals. The same was true for foundations that sought to help out noblemen that had got into financial problems through no fault of their own.¹⁵

- Profession

Another factor that had an impact on the formation of foundations was the intention to support those who either shared an occupational field with the donor or who aspired to do so. Thus, it comes as no surprise that foundations for students of medicine had often been founded by physicians, or that those in favor of law students can be traced back to the initiative of lawyers and clerks. Teachers and priests often established foundations that sponsored students of philosophy and theology respectively; engineers were responsible for a lot of funds at the institute of technology.¹⁶ Former headmasters and academics in general were especially prone to support university students, often regardless of their specialization.

Not only the students’ fields of studies, but the occupation of their parents as well could have an impact on whether the applicant in question was deemed worthy to receive financial means or not. Donors sometimes wanted to relieve their peers from the burden of financing their offspring’s education. An example to illustrate this is the “court’s accountancy foundation” (1777), that preferably supported the children of clerks working there.¹⁷ Solidarity with peers, however, was rather to be found in the form of humanitarian foundations. In 1893, there existed about 180 funds that aimed especially at certain professional fields in Vienna, among

them foundations in favor of caretakers, railway workers, teachers, maids, servants, members of the military and many others.¹⁸

- Relatives and friends¹⁹

One of the most important factors behind the creation of stipend foundations was the backing of family members, especially the own children, or befriended families and their progenies. This most obvious form of solidarity was the most common one as well. A lot of foundations that addressed students in general preferred relatives and friends of the donors, often very explicitly; some of them even privileged those groups over other applicants irrespective of their qualifications, grades or other requirements. Providing financial means for the subsequent generations can thus be assumed to be one of the main motivating forces behind the creation of stipend foundations, it was a common way to ensure the best possible education for adolescents related to or acquainted with the donor.

- Local origin

Another requirement, that was almost as common as belonging to the donor's family, was the regional origin of the awardees. The preference of persons from particular areas is well-documented for the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy.²⁰ In most cases, it can be assumed that persons from the native region of the donor were favored.

Provenience as a determining factor can be traced back to the early 15th century. In 1420, for example, a clergyman from Wrocław founded a residential home for Silesian students in Vienna.²¹ As permanent residence in a hostel associated with the university was mandatory at that time, he thereby enabled 32 students from his home region to visit the university. Quite a lot of similar acts of solidarity can be found throughout the subsequent centuries. The majority of foundations that existed in Vienna around 1800 aimed exclusively at or preferred students from particular regions, from Bavaria, Austria, Westphalia, Carinthia, Styria, the Palatine or Carniola, to enumerate just a few. Students from almost every part of the monarchy were provided with foundations, and the same was true for many former possessions of the Habsburgs, such as the Netherlands or Spain.²² In 1900, approximately 100 foundations for students of the University of Vienna were scattered across the crown lands, most of them in Bohemia, Upper Austria and Galicia.²³ The fact that these were in the custody

of the local administrations suggests that local benefactors wanted to secure that these foundations would benefit juveniles from the respective regions.

The impression that regional solidarity was a main factor is proven by the many cases where the instructions regarding origin were much more detailed. Some foundations were available only for students from certain villages or towns, such as Eichsfeld, Weißkirchen, Weitra or Steyer; there seems to be no reason for regulations as detailed as that other than the donor having a kind of connection to these particular regions. Most of these foundations stated that in case no worthy candidate could be found in the very area, people from a broader region would be eligible to apply. A foundation that benefited adolescents from Alsace and Breisgau, for example, would also support people from Swabia or “younglings native of the areas close to the upper Rhine” in the absence of applicants from the aforementioned preferred region.²⁴ Solidarity thus was not based on nationality or citizenship, but on personal ties with the donor’s or his family’s home region. This changed towards the end of the 19th century, when nationalist tendencies arose.

- Gender

For most of the period under investigation, until the second half of the 19th century, higher education in today’s Austria was almost exclusively accessible to men, with only a few exceptions such as the conservatory. Nevertheless, this does not imply that women did not appear as donors. In fact, up to 15% of the foundations for students that existed in Vienna in 1893 had been instituted by female persons, most of them widows and members of the higher nobility or the Habsburg family.²⁵

However, it is fairly obvious from the sources that female donors preferred to contribute to institutions that taught or supported girls, thus expressing a sense of solidarity. More than half of the donors of foundations that provided dowries for unmarried girls were female. At the Viennese orphanage, women were responsible for more than 40% of the funds administered there.²⁶ In general, it is observable that women tended to support humanitarian foundations rather than educational ones; this might be due to the fact that most of these had always been accessible to girls and women. With the rise of all-female higher educational institutions towards the end of the 19th century, a new field for activities opened up. The public educational establishment for schoolmistresses, for example, owed the existence of its only foundation to the benefit of “poor girls” to the initiative of a woman.²⁷

- Solidarity or discrimination?

While most of the hitherto described processes can be interpreted as acts of solidarity, this notion becomes increasingly doubtful when taking foundations from the second half of the 19th century into consideration. While the traditional support for persons that shared a hometown with the donor can be considered as “solidarity,” this is not necessarily true for the new category of foundations that preferred students dependent on their nationality. Rising nationalist tendencies during the second half of the 19th century caused some donors to determine that certain nationalities were not to be among the recipients, such as a foundation from 1863: It aimed at “Hungarians, Austrians (in the narrower sense) and Tyroleans. Poles, Galicians, Bohemians and juveniles of Slavic descent in general are to be excluded unconditionally.”²⁸ Although exclusions as explicit as this were rare, a lot of foundations discriminated against certain population groups by simply not including them into the list of groups that were eligible. While a genuine solidarity with students from the donor’s home region seems to be a motivating force until 1800, this cannot be assumed for quite a lot of foundations created during the second half of the 19th century. With the rise of nationalism, solidarity with certain groups close to the donor was replaced by the exclusion of those alien to him.

Another aspect, that has to be considered, was the support of predominant groups opposite to minorities. It is hardly possible to distinguish between genuine solidarity and discrimination in this context: Men erecting foundations explicitly to the benefit of boys, although girls hardly had access to higher education anyway; Catholics providing for fellow Catholics, although schools for the members of other denominations did not even exist anymore; members of the upper classes supporting only those from a similar background. It remains highly questionable whether in these cases the donors wanted to show “solidarity” with people that they perceived to be more familiar with, or if they aspired to exclude groups they did not feel connected to. Foundations could thus become a means of securing existing social structures and maintaining the predominance of the own group.

- Conclusion: Solidarity as *the* driving force?

Sharing certain characteristics with the founder stayed one of the main prerequisites applicants had to fulfill in order to receive financial support throughout the history of the Habsburg monarchy. Donors often had very distinctive notions about the awardees to-be, and

they did not refrain from stating their preferences, sometimes even very explicitly. Supporting members of the own or befriended families had always played an important role and continued to do so until the end of the 19th century, in many cases it can be assumed to be the main cause for erecting foundations. Those who lacked family members often favored students from the founder's home region, or those engaging in similar fields of studies. Religion and gender could also play a role.

However, although one might be tempted to interpret many acts of foundation as mainly or even solely driven by solidarity, this is not the whole truth: Generosity and nobleness were often claimed to be the thriving forces, but upon closer observation, this notion has to be challenged. Donors were motivated by a broad variety of motives, such as educating future employees for their businesses, ensuring personal salvation by instructing the awardees to pray for them, gaining status within society by presenting themselves as generous givers and – last but not least – exerting influence on political, economic and social developments by determining which groups should have easier access to higher education. To get a coherent picture of the average donor, it is necessary to consider all of these incentives. In most cases it must be assumed that more than one motive alone was responsible for the decision to fund a foundation; a donor could want to support students from his hometown, thus expressing a sense of regional solidarity, while at the same time instructing the recipients to pray for his salvation, adding a religious aspect. In the end, it is most plausible that in most cases a mixture of selfish and altruistic ideas moved wealthy individuals to become donors.²⁹

After all, we can conclude that solidarity posed one of the many possible motivating forces for benefactors to-be. This was most obviously the case in the early modern times and in respect to local origin, but also during the time of reformation and counter-reformation, when foundations were used by Protestants as a tool to support each other in view of suppression, at least as long as it was possible. Later on, in the 19th century, solidarity among women and non-Catholic denominations played an important role in facilitating access to higher education for those that had been locked out of the institutions in question until then. In many other contexts, it is difficult to tell whether the donor had the well-being of those close to him in mind, or whether this was just a cover-up for more selfish intentions or for the exclusion of groups the donor did not favor.

- 1 The most notable contribution to this issue is Rainer Christoph Schwinges, ed., *Finanzierung von Universität und Wissenschaft in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag 2005). Schwinges repeatedly stresses that a history of the funding of education has yet to be written.
- 2 “Civil society” is defined as a society existing within a stable political framework, consisting of individuals who try to coexist without intervention by the state as far as possible.
- 3 Dr. Rudolf Herrmann von Herrnritt, *Das österreichische Stiftungsrecht. Mit Berücksichtigung der ausländischen Gesetzgebung und mit Benützung amtlicher Quellen dargestellt* (Wien: Manz, 1896), 95.
- 4 Ferdinand Schmid, *Statistik der in Nieder-Österreich verwalteten Stiftungen nach dem Stande vom 31. December 1893* (Wien: A. Hölder, 1897), 13-14.
- 5 Joachim Bahlcke and Thomas Winkelbauer, eds., *Schulstiftungen und Studienfinanzierung. Bildungsmäzenatentum in den böhmischen, österreichischen und ungarischen Ländern, 1500-1800* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag 2011),
- 6 Concerning the focus on the 16th and 19th century in German-speaking literature cf. Gerhard Kluchert, “Bildungsmäzenatentum und Schulstiftungen. Systematisch-historische Überlegungen zur Einführung,” in *Bildungsmäzenatentum. Privates Handeln – Bürgersinn – kulturelle Kompetenz seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Jonas Flöter et. al. (Sigmaringen: Thorbeck 1997) 31-34.
- 7 Walpurga Oppeker, “Joachim Enzmilner, Graf von Windhag (1600-1678). Fallbeispiele zum frühneuzeitlichen Bildungsmäzenatentum in Österreich ob und unter der Enns,” in *Schulstiftungen und Studienfinanzierung. Bildungsmäzenatentum in den böhmischen, österreichischen und ungarischen Ländern, 1500-1800*, ed. Joachim Bahlcke et. al. (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 204-211.
- 8 Joachim Bahlcke, “Bergesche Stipendien. Zielsetzung und Indienstnahme einer frühneuzeitlichen Studienstiftung im konfessionellen Zeitalter,” in *Schulstiftungen und Studienfinanzierung. Bildungsmäzenatentum in den böhmischen, österreichischen und ungarischen Ländern, 1500-1800*, ed. Joachim Bahlcke et. al. (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2011) 140-142.
- 9 Anton Reichsritter von Geusau, *Geschichte der Stiftungen, Erziehungs- und Unterrichtsanstalten in Wien, von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf gegenwärtiges Jahr. Aus echten Urkunden und Nachrichten* (Wien: 1803). Geusau, *Stiftungen*, 193.
- 10 Joachim Bahlcke and Thomas Winkelbauer, “Einleitung,” in *Schulstiftungen und Studienfinanzierung. Bildungsmäzenatentum in den böhmischen, österreichischen und ungarischen Ländern, 1500-1800*, ed. Joachim Bahlcke et. al. (Wien: Böhlau Verlag 2011), 10.
- 11 Carl Ferdinand Mautner Ritter von Markhof and Eugen Guglia, *Die Wiener Stiftungen. Ein Handbuch* (Wien: Mautner 1895), xxxiiif.
- 12 Dieter Hein, “Das Stiftungswesen als Instrument bürgerlichen Handelns im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Stadt und Mäzenatentum*, ed. Bernhard Kirchgässner et. al. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke 1997), 76.
- 13 Jonas Flöter, „Einleitung,” in *Bildungsmäzenatentum. Privates Handeln – Bürgersinn – kulturelle Kompetenz seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Jonas Flöter et. al. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag 2007), 14.
Unfortunately, this is not the place to discuss the problems occurring from the translation of the German term “Bürgertum.” In this article, I shall prefer “middle classes,” avoiding the more problematic word “bourgeoisie.”
- 14 Various examples for the appreciation of donors among contemporaries can be found in the literature published in the course of the 19th century. See Geusau, *Geschichte*; Mautner, *Stiftungen*; Schmid, *Statistik*.
- 15 Geusau, *Geschichte*, 437.
- 16 Mautner, *Stiftungen*, 625-665 and 674-686 respectively.
- 17 The “Hofbuchhaltereiy-Todtenkasse-Stiftung“. See Geusau, *Geschichte*, 310.
- 18 K. k. statistische Central-Commission, *Kataster der in Niederösterreich verwalteten weltlichen Stiftungen nach dem Stande des Jahres 1893. Auf Grund der von der k. k. n.-ö. Statthaltereiy gelieferten Nachweisungen bearbeitet von der k. k. statistischen Central-Commission* (Wien: 1898).

- 19 The content of this paragraph is the result of extensive research, which is based on Geusau, *Geschichte* and Mautner, *Stiftungen*.
- 20 Bahlcke, „Einleitung,“ 12.
- 21 Kurt Mühlberger, “Wiener Studentenbursen und Kodreien im Wandel vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert“ in *Aspekte der Bildungs- und Universitätsgeschichte. 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Kurt Mühlberger et. al. (Wien: WUV 1993), 176-177.
- 22 Joh. Nep. Edler von Savageri, *Chronologisch-geschichtliche Sammlung aller bestehenden Stiftungen, Institute, - öffentlichen Erziehungs- und Unterrichts-Anstalten der k. k. österreichischen Monarchie mit Ausnahme von Italien, in der faßlichen Kürze und nach ihrem wesentlichen Inhalte, von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf gegenwärtiges Jahr* (Brünn: R. Rohrer, 1832), x.
- 23 Mautner, *Stiftungen*, 666-673.
- 24 Geusau, *Geschichte*, 144.
- 25 Central-Commission, *Kataster*.
- 26 Geusau, *Geschichte*, 332-339 and 461-489 respectively.
- 27 Central-Commission, *Kataster*, 432-433.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 394-395.
- 29 Elisabeth Kraus, “Aus Tradition modern. Zur Geschichte von Stiftungswesen und Mäzenatentum in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,“ *Historisches Jahrbuch* 121 (2001): 402.