
Modelling the Austro-Hungarian Administration as a Resource

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Abstract

If you want to know who was in office as a Minister of Finances in the Cisleithanian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at a particular date, you have to look it up. Multiple resources contain this information: most of them are available in form of printed books. Digital reference resources such as the much-used *Gemeinsame Normdatei* (GND) do also contain parts, but in a fashion that is centered mostly on the person's description stemming from a bibliographical data point, which results in different forms and depths both of description and linking.

For historical research undertakings that want to make use of these data with the goals of **identifying** and **disambiguating** persons, roles and institutions, the current situation raises at least two issues:

- Firstly, a challenge of **data translation**
 - between medial forms of data **representation** (book to database)
 - which requires a step of data **modelling** that formalises preexisting thought models in "analogue" sources
- Secondly, a challenge of **provenance and attribution**
 - that binds the given assertion back to a source
 - which allows for dealing with conflicting data from various sources, and for making the choice between them an explicit one.

The poster describes the 'Cisleithanische Ministerratsprotokolle 1867-1918' editorial team's (for general information on the digital edition project, cf. Kurz/Fischer-Nebmaier/Kampkaspar/Lein/Schmied-Kowarzik 2019) efforts to model the information within our instance of the Austrian Prosopographical Information System (APIS, cf. Schlögl/Lejtovicz 2018) at <https://mpr.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/> (abbreviated **mpr**).

The APIS data model (Schlögl 2019), in short, consists of the following base entity types:

- person
- place
- event
- work
- institution

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and arbitrarily designable relations among them (e.g. a typical person-person relation would be ‘spouseOf’, person-institution e.g. ‘worksFor >> headOf’, institution-place e.g. ‘locatedIn’ etc.).

Workflow

The outset was to find a source that has a comprehensive record of the data of interest. Even though it has known shortcomings in some areas, we decided to start with the data from Spuler 1966, as it is widely accepted and covers all Cisleithanian ministers for the time period of 1867-1918 in equal granularity.

Data translation

An Excel sheet was used as a structured intermediate format, where plain text information was divided into chunks designating identifying information for persons as well as their roles within their respective institutions, and a time span.

Using an import script written in Python, the data was imported into the `**mpr**` instance, where it is ready to be used, not only by the Ministerratsprotokolle editorial team, but by the general public by and large.

The results we are presenting are concerning

- more than 600 role relations of
- 214 `**persons**` (ministers) related to
- 60 `**institutions**` throughout defined time-spans
- institutions are also `**localised**` (in a relation to `**places**`) and grouped in various institution-institution relations (e.g. `*Railway Ministry*` is a sub-unit of the `*Badeni Government*`)

Data provenance

Currently, the data we are publishing has only one (printed) source; this is documented within one database field for the whole APIS collection. Fine-grained documentation of the information is foreseen in the form of a Zotero/Bibsonomy module to be installed in the `**mpr**` APIS instance (see Future work). This will provide the attribution of single information particles coming from different sources, e.g. one source has a more detailed or corrected value for the time span a minister is in office, with the rest of the information coming from another source (the thought model, as applied to prosopography, is best described in the overview articles by John Bradley at <https://factoid-dighum.kcl.ac.uk/>).

Future work

Preliminary data modelling* The vocabulary defining the relations between `**mpr**` entities is currently only well-defined within our own data set. For another iteration of the data, this will be mapped to existing ontologies.

Competing sources* Even though the *Regierungs-Ploetz*” is still the most cited reliable source on Austro-Hungarian Ministers, a little-known competing source (Jahn 2012) will have to be incorporated into our data set.

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