

Major Grant Proposal  
Faculty Development Council  
Colgate University

## **The Middle Danube: Belgrade to Budapest**

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The problems of my hometown are actually the problems of identity.  
Siniša Glavašević<sup>1</sup>

You cannot demilitarize a region without psychologically demilitarizing the people.  
Jacques Klein<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Glavašević was journalist from Vukovar who was killed there in 1991. He is cited in Martin Bell, "Return to Vukovar," BBC Radio Broadcast, 22 August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b013f0xr>, last accessed 11 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The United States general Klein served in the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia (Croatia). He is cited in Nick Thorpe, *The Danube: A Journey Upriver from the Black Sea to the Black Forest* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013), 165.

## **Project Description**

I herewith propose for the FDC's consideration a trip for this coming fall, during the second semester of my current sabbatical, to cities on the "middle Danube"—from Belgrade, Serbia to Budapest, Hungary—in order to enhance my Core Communities and Identities course on the river. CORE 184C: THE DANUBE is now a regular contribution to the Colgate curriculum. It emerged out of interdisciplinary work undertaken across the "small" Humanities in the context of the CNY Humanities Corridor, which co-funded the "Black and Blue Danube Symposium" held at Colgate in the spring of 2013. By its very nature, the diverse multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural region traversed by the river—"Danubia" encompasses 14 countries of central and southeastern Europe—demands interdisciplinary approaches. Accordingly, "Core Danube" was collaboratively designed by myself and a colleague in Slavic Studies, in consultation with an historian of the region.

## **Statement of Purpose**

I have offered Core Danube at Colgate twice with success. There is also room for development and improvement. One of the challenges in facilitating this course's academic journey concerns the need to expand my own interdisciplinary grasp of the river. Indeed, by way of my training as a Germanist, I come to the course with expertise in transcultural studies and communication as well as knowledge of the upper course of the river, which begins in the Black Forest near Freiburg and proceeds across Bavaria on through Austria and Vienna. The Danube, however, is culturally multiple. The geographic designation of its middle section encompasses the river's course between the Porta Hungarica (also known as Devín Gate, at the Austrian-Slovakian-Hungarian border, where it leaves Germanophone Europe) and the Iron Gates, one of the river's most dramatic passages, along the Serbian-Romanian border. The (non-Germanic) middle Danube thus cuts a path across the Hungarian plains and flows thereafter into the lands of the former Yugoslavia, where it now forms a border between the separate nations of Croatia and Serbia. Subsequent to Croatia's joining the European Union in 2013, that border has come to constitute one of the EU's Balkan peripheries. (The river's lower course proceeds along the Serbian and Romanian and then Bulgarian and Romanian borders, before reaching the Romanian and Ukrainian shores where it empties into the Black Sea.) While the middle Danube has historically figured as a contested object of the imperial ambitions of larger powers (Habsburgs and Ottomans, Germans and Soviets), its rich cultural tapestry can neither be reduced to any one national legacy nor can it be approached exclusively through the lenses of German Studies.

A second challenge, more crucially related to pedagogy, concerns the perceived remoteness and foreignness of Europe's second longest river: the Danube traverses countries and has played a role in conflicts of which many students have never heard. One of the course's first pedagogical steps is hence to familiarize students with Danubian spaces and topics pertaining to the region's longstanding cultural diversity. In facilitating such an academic journey, I seek to drive the value of Danubian Studies home to students: of particular interest here is the course's treatment of histories and negotiations of cultural difference and ethnic tensions in Danubia as a foil for understanding analogous challenges in U.S. contexts. In this, as in my work in the German department, I serve a mediator between languages, cultures, life-worlds, and philosophies to ensure that students conduct comparative cultural study with sensitivity and are enabled to "see themselves honestly and critically within a global and historical perspective," to cite one of Colgate's educational goals.

I propose my own trip to the middle Danube in order to address both of these interrelated challenges. Indeed, part of my goal is to establish and maintain a maximally present and concrete Danube in the Colgate classroom. While I can enhance my desk-based knowledge of the Danube from afar, students also look to me as a locally embedded expert. Even seemingly superficial questions that arise in class sessions—e.g. “have you been to Belgrade and is it as ugly as this author describes it?”—can be turned into important teachable moments on the mediation of cultural perceptions (e.g. of beauty, of a “backwards” or “barbarian East,” etc.). To make this happen most effectively, it is crucial that I be able to draw on my own lived knowledge of Danubian spaces studied in the course. In short, the proposed trip seeks to develop my site-specific local knowledge of the non-Germanic Danube, with visits to the cities of Belgrade and Novi Sad in Serbia, Vukovar in Croatia, and Budapest in Hungary. This will not only allow me to check and transcend my own Germanophone perspective on the river. It will also serve the enhancement of course units on Hungary and the former Yugoslavia as crucial instantiations of Danubian diversity and its negotiations. I anticipate that the travel will also provide concrete resources with regard to the further development of the course’s examination of Danubian multiculturalism. (I am happy to provide the current syllabus upon request, should it be of interest.)

### Project Execution

The trip is conceptually designed along three lines of inquiry: 1) the Multiple Danube, 2) Reading (In/visible) Cities, and 3) History and Reconciliation. These interrelated categories underlie my plans for the course’s revision. The multiplicity of the Danube and its cultures has already generated one of Core Danube’s leading queries into conditions for the peaceful co-existence of the river’s ethnically diverse peoples. To this end, Core Danube examines the character and sustainability of transnational states that have shaped political life in the region. While transnational politics may seem especially appropriate to the Danube’s ethnically diverse and intertwined regions, history has not granted transnational states much longevity in Danubia. To explore why this is so, the course devotes units to Austria-Hungary (1867-1918) and (the second) Yugoslavia (1945-1991) and addresses the European Union as the contemporary heir to transnational politics’ legacy on the continent. Units on both of the Danube’s failed transnational states have proven particularly germane to analyzing the political, ethnic, lingual, religious, and gendered inflections of identity that bear on people’s lives in the region. At the same time, my sense is that with regard to the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s especially, the unit on that country stands to gain much from the proposed site-specific study to be undertaken in Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Vukovar.

This part of the trip’s design speaks most directly to History and Reconciliation. Vukovar, for example, was the site of one of the bitterest battles of the Croatian-Serbian conflict (in 1991) and inaugurated the “ethnic cleansing” associated with the Yugoslav wars. Hence Glavašević’s claim, cited above, that his hometown is haunted by identity. In fact Vukovar was destroyed by the divisive, ethno-nationalist version thereof that emerged amidst the collapse of the more inclusive concept of a Yugoslav identity. (Indeed, Klein’s appeal, cited above, on the need for “psychological demilitarization” in the former Yugoslavia speaks to the value of probing fraught identity-formations in the context of Core Communities and Identities courses.) Over twenty years later, the still segregated city straddles traumas and healing as it continues to rebuild. I wish to explore Vukovar’s war monuments, memorial sites, and reconciliation efforts to examine how the city is coming to terms with its past. The

proposed visits to Novi Sad (in the historically diverse Vojvodina region—Novi Sad is featured in several course materials, also due to atrocities committed there by occupying Hungarian forces during World War II) and Belgrade serve a related interest in how Serbia is framing its national identity and coming to terms with its perceived complicity in the Yugoslav Wars amidst its current EU candidacy. Across former Yugoslav spaces, I will also be on the lookout for signs of the cultural reemergence of Yugoslav identity in the public sphere (“Yugosphere”) in theaters and elsewhere. (The itinerary below identifies relevant sites.)

With the task of Reading (In/visible) Cities, I approach Danubian multiplicity in a different way. Drawing on the Hungarian writer Péter Esterházy’s reception of Italo Calvino’s work in the former’s *Down the Danube* novel (1991), I wish to take this strategy to Belgrade and Budapest in order to read urban space as a palimpsest of multicultural history, especially with regard to traces of the Ottoman Empire. Of the many border functions the Danube has served, that between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires (from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) has been one of the most contested and formidable. Both empires have left traces, not least in light of the Ottoman Empire’s longstanding control of southeastern Europe, including much of Hungary. More recently, such legacies are being interrogated anew today amidst Europe’s grappling with contemporary Islam. Re-reading the Ottoman legacy on site—oscillating as it did between domination and religious pluralism—would enable me to add additional texture relevant to the course’s comparison of the old Ottoman Empire with the role of Islam in the Europe today. I will book guided tours in Belgrade and Budapest to facilitate this proposed reading of urban spaces as multicultural palimpsests. Because English and German cannot be assumed to be functional lingua franca in the region, I will establish relevant contacts through Hungarian, Croatian, and Serbian colleagues, who might help me overcome linguistic divides.

Yet another dimension of the multiple Danube concerns its ecology. While I touch on it in the Communities and Identities course, Core Danube has mostly embraced a cultural-historical approach to the river. Danubian ecology thus constitutes an area of the course awaiting further development. As protests regarding the abuse of the environment under socialism were integral, in Hungary and elsewhere, to political revolutions in Eastern Europe towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I will observe the historical and contemporary trajectories of concerns for the Danube’s environmental health during my travel to see how they might be better incorporated into the syllabus. In sum, my expectation is that the proposed study journey, should it find the FDC’s favor, would enable me to strengthen my own role as intermediary in Core Danube considerably from out of the river’s own middle course and the authentic materials to be gleaned from it—a middle that cannot be claimed exclusively by any one people, but rather figures as a kind of whirlpool of peoples in the river’s very midst.

### Travel Itinerary

Dates (12 days total)	Places	Sites / Topics
Oct. 5-8, 2015	Belgrade	Museum of Yugoslav History, Kalemegdan fortress and exhibits, Bajrakli Mosque
Oct. 8-11	Novi Sad	Multilanguage in Vojvodina; Bridges, their reconstruction, and bridge stories; <i>Shoes on the Danube Promenade</i> (monument); Petrovaradin Fortress (history, uses, exhibits); Stari Grad

Oct. 11-14	Vukovar	Water tower as war monument, Ovčara Farm Memorial Center, Hospital Museum, European House
Oct. 14-17	Budapest	Bem tér, Buda Castle (Budapest History Museum, Hungarian National Gallery), Tomb of Gül Baba, Császár Baths (Veli Bej), Belváros Parish Church, Mátyás-templom, House of Terror (on 20 <sup>th</sup> century totalitarianisms), Raoul Wallenberg Memorial Park, Gellért Hill (Liberty Statue), Danube Circle group (environmental history), 2 Belgrad Rakpart (G. Lukács archive)

Notes on Itinerary:

The October 4<sup>th</sup> flight to Belgrade would be undertaken from Washington D.C., where I will be attending the German Studies Association conference prior to departure. From Budapest, I would travel by train to Berlin, where I may be undertaking research in October and November, prior to my return from Berlin to Syracuse. [The Berlin portion of the trip is contingent on the outcome of an application for research funding I am currently submitting to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).] A small portion of the multi-city journey, Syracuse-DC-Belgrade-Berlin-Syracuse, will thus be covered by my yearly travel conference fund, as indicated on the accompanying budget sheet. I have estimated the total airfare for the multi-city trip at \$1400.

Secondly, the proposed itinerary allots for time devoted to logistical research pertaining to the development of an extended study group to be attached to a future iteration of Core Danube. (This is contingent on my promotion and departmental staffing timelines.) For this reason, I am seeking additional support, as highlighted on the budget sheet also, from Colgate’s Off-Campus Study Office.

**Funding History**

From Colgate University’s Research Council I have previously received discretionary grants in 2011, 2013, and 2014. The grants in 2011 and 2013 supported my participation in conferences at the Freie Universität in Berlin, the first of which led to my chapter contribution to the forthcoming anthology *Different Germans, Many Germanies – New Transatlantic Perspectives*, Berghahn Books, 2015, and the second of which I co-organized as the Berlin Program Workshop (also at the Freie Universität) on “Germany looks East” (an overview of this work is captured at <http://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/bprogram/roundtables/BPSW2013Report.pdf?1373291799> ). The grants also enabled me to conduct research pertaining to my manuscript *Mauer, Migration, Maps: The German Epic in the Cold War*, which is due to the publisher at the end of summer, 2015. The discretionary grant in 2014 supplemented my travel fund to enable me to attend and participate in the conference “Where is Frankfurt Now?” (at the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main), which led to the solicitation of an article in the *Alexander Kluge Jahrbuch* (in preparation). In 2014, I received additional support from the Research Council in the form of a publication subvention grant for *Watersheds: Poetics and Politics of the Danube River*, an anthology I co-edited, which is currently under review at Academic Studies Press.

**Itemized Budget**

Please see accompanying excel sheet.