

ESSHC 2016: The Capital in a State of Flux. Vienna during the First World War and in the Early 1920s
Conference Panel at ESSHC 2016 in Valencia

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Sema Colpan, Marie-Noëlle Yazdanpanah: Prowling Round the City. Juvenile Delinquency in Vienna around 1920

Towards the end of World War I reports on marauding gangs of urban youth become ever more frequent in the Viennese press. Conservative dailies such as the “Reichspost” declare railway stations to be dangerous zones of juvenile delinquency and worry about the consequences such criminal developments might have for the future of the city. Police chronicles documenting the morale of the Viennese population report on youths mugging soldiers and attacking civilians as well as on coordinated lootings by adolescents. The paper will draw on such scenarios of threat and intimidation in order to understand the transitions in Viennese society. We will examine the socio-political changes brought about by the devastating effects of the WWI on the Empire’s capital by analysing the different layers of and discourses on juvenile delinquency. On the one hand, we will consider the decline of patriarchal authority and the decrease in control by municipal authorities that coincided with the emergence and visibility of “gangs of youths.” On the other hand, the paper will take into account the reactions and attempts with which the authorities tried to achieve the (re-)integration of the future generation into a regulated urban society. For this purpose we will look at the specific urban spaces into which young people extended their sphere of activity during these years, i.e. public transport, barracks, the Ringstraße (the prestigious boulevard encircling the city centre). The appropriation of the city by adolescents will be compared with the sites and urban spaces that the city authorities suggested for young people.

Deborah Holmes: Joseph Roth and Feuilleton Journalism as Social History

From April 1919 to April 1920, Joseph Roth worked full-time as a reporter for the newly founded Viennese daily Der Neue Tag. The aim of the newspaper was to encourage reconciliation between the lower and middle classes and to salvage Vienna’s international reputation as a locus of (high) culture and gracious living. The founding editor, Benno Karpeles, had left the Social Democrat Party a mere matter of months previously, in protest at what he saw as the contradictions between its post-war rhetoric of revolution and the quietism of its strategies once they gained power. Der Neue Tag featured innovative methods of presenting the deprivation and social upheaval in post-1918 Vienna. It relied more heavily than the established newspapers of the time on openly subjective methods of presentation and analysis. For example,

it did not feature a conventional feuilleton section under a thick black line on its front page, but printed feuilletons on every day of the week throughout the newspaper. Feuilletons in *Der Neue Tag* also constituted a further development in socially critical journalism in Vienna in their stylistic modernity. I will look in particular at Joseph Roth's "Wiener Symptome" (Viennese Symptoms) column that used elements of Expressionism and Surrealism in seeking to capture the changes in the Austrian capital in a series of everyday scenes and descriptions of public and semi-public spaces. I will consider the ways in which the subjective and literary aspects of the feuilleton as a genre can contribute to our understanding of the social history of this period of transition.

Michaela Scharf: "The Immanent Danger." Prostitution in Vienna during the First World War and its Aftermath

The First World War brought about an increased mobility of individuals. As the capital of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Vienna underwent drastic socio-demographic changes. Hundreds of thousands of men were sent to the front and therefore separated from their partners and families. As these men left, other soldiers, injured, displaced persons and prisoners of war entered the city. As a consequence of the augmented diversification of the urban population, new forms of sexual relationships – the majority extramarital (i.e. between women and foreign workers, refugees or prisoners of war) – were established. The increased sexual mobility also led to a rise of both registered and clandestine prostitution.

In particular "Gelegenheitsbuhlerinnen," women who occasionally worked as prostitutes due to economic hardship, were considered to be responsible for the quick spread of venereal diseases among soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army, thus threatening its military strength. Therefore civilian and military authorities demanded more intense control and regulation of prostitution. The registration and medical supervision of prostitutes as well as the identification of women suspected of being involved in prostitution were carried out by the municipal "Sittenpolizei" (vice squad). Especially employees at hotels and restaurants, such as barmaids, waitresses or chambermaids, as well as Jewish or Slavic women were suspected of practising clandestine prostitution.

Against this backdrop, the paper aims to throw light on the development of legal and illegal prostitution in Vienna during the First World War and its aftermath. It especially focuses on urban spaces, i.e. parks, railway stations or the surroundings of barracks, where registered and clandestine prostitution took place. By understanding urban areas as discursive constructions, the paper discusses the public perception of urban spaces like the Prater amusement park or the Stiftskaserne barracks and interrelates them with their associated social practices, particularly with prostitution. It also examines the measures taken by the city administration and the police to regulate registered and illegal prostitution and looks at their impact on the urban spaces mentioned above.

Katalin Teller: Viennese Railway Stations at War and afterwards

One of the sites that were deeply affected by the outbreak of WWI both in cities and in rural areas was the railway station. The transport of persons and goods had to be re-arranged in favour of the transportation of armies, military equipment, and the injured. In the course of further developments, a great number of refugees and returning prisoners of war also needed to be catered for. In addition, new forms of delinquency appeared besides the “traditional” ones (prostitution or theft), i.e. smugglers and hoarders utilized this transitory space for their purposes. At the same time, railway station officials, within their immensely hierarchical institutions, were urged to cope with these challenges and find a way between traditional order and the new disorder they had to face. For propaganda reasons, however, earlier forms of representation continued: the arrival or departure of high state officials and monarchs were staged for the public and documented in the press, including illustrated reports, so as to suggest the non-transient power and agency of the ruling classes even during crises. This was complemented by various charity actions, conducted at the stations, such as donations for the injured or holiday trips organized for children. In short, the stations were able to merge entirely different social, political, and cultural activities into a highly dynamic and controversial complexity.

Based on the example of the main railway stations in Vienna, the paper will discuss the impacts of the war on these public spaces, and will ask to what extent the above mentioned modifications influenced the ways of functioning and the public perception of these important junctions during and immediately after the end of the war. The paper will draw on administration documents, on police reports and on press accounts including feuilletons, but also on works of fiction that proved to be relevant for the cultural memory of the war. It will argue that a number of social and cultural policies and practices that emerged out of the war situation continued to be effective after the end of the war, despite the fact that Vienna’s dominant role was significantly weakened with the fall of the Habsburg Empire. In order to demonstrate this point, I will evaluate comparable phenomena in Budapest. In Hungary, the dissolution and re-building of the capital’s image, and of the nation in general, lasted longer than in the Austrian First Republic: the impact of revolutionary movements and the Versailles Treaties on Budapest postponed the reconciliation of urban spaces and their functions.