

Categorizing, Registering and Reporting of Mobility and Stay (PAT 9328724)

Wider research context

Registers and census data are frequently used by historians and social scientists as source material to gain information on the structure of society. From a different angle, scholarship examines the historical evolution and logic of registration practices. Identification, categorization, and registration are understood as key operations of modern states, as a way to make individuals legible and produce the knowledge necessary for establishing and securing power over population and territory. Registration practices have been addressed mostly in research on governmentality, surveillance, and migration control. Yet scholars have also highlighted how entitlements and rights were tied to proper registration.

Hypothesis and objectives

The project builds upon a project on the co-production and usage of identity documents in Austria from ca. 1850 to 1938. It will investigate related registration practices of the *Meldewesen* that strove for ubiquitous and permanent monitoring of any movement and stay. Registration was based on and created differences and inequality between citizens and foreigners as well as *among* citizens, who were subjected to differently strict vigilance. The registration system shows how various forms of mobility were assessed, thereby revealing notions of deviance and struggles over privacy, moral standards, and the boundaries of police work. Documentation of abode became a matter of concern and dispute in the contexts of citizenship, *Heimatrecht*, welfare, and suffrage. However, although this registration system was described as the “soul“ of police work, it relied fundamentally on municipalities, homeowners, janitors, innkeepers, employers, hosts, or the heads of monasteries or hospitals. Those parties executed but also adapted tasks assigned to them for their own purposes. The project will investigate the involved parties’ interplay, particularly their incentives to register, be registered, and to avoid or withhold registration. It will highlight performative and symbolic aspects of registration.

Approach

The project will use a broad range of source material by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. It will investigate debates over and enforcement of regulations while also

analysing registers as products of (changing) policies and interactions. Variations in registration will be examined with respect to regions, hosts, and those subjected to registration.

Innovation

The project highlights how non-state actors participated in the bureaucratic infrastructure of the state. It demonstrates the impact of documenting abode, which is often taken for granted and – in contrast to citizenship – neglected. It also provides greater understanding of the statistical representation of social facts, such as mobility vis-à-vis tourism, and sheds further light on the practical usage of identity documents.

Primary researchers involved

Sigrid Wadauer (principal investigator); NN (doctoral student).