

Workshop “Meeting children’s needs, worrying for the young, caring for the old: intersecting historical approaches of age-based welfare in post-war Europe”, 18-19 March 2022, COST ‘Who Cares in Europe’ – University of Athens.

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### **Beyond the welfare state: Some notes on child- and elderly care in rural Austria during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In scholarly literature the history of European welfare is associated less with rural and more with urban societies; initiatives and decisions on welfare activities and practices were taken primarily in urban administrative centers, whereas the most impressive welfare activities developed in cities and towns, where population was concentrated, and poverty became much more visible. Nevertheless, European rural societies, too, took care of the poor, the weak, the physically and/or mentally impaired, the vulnerable, or those considered vulnerable due to negative circumstances, as well as to the very young or those of old age. My paper, as its title indicates, deals with aspects of child and elderly care in *rural* Austria during the first decades of the twentieth century (up to the mid-1930s and the rise of the Austro-fascist regime to power).<sup>1</sup>

Over many years, while conducting research on child labour, on rural as well as urban working-class families, on peasant societies and women’s work in the eastern Austrian Alps, or on street children, I constantly came across social welfare/social care issues. My remarks and comments here draw on autobiographical records,<sup>2</sup> contemporary ethnographic research, evidence

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed overview of the history of social welfare in Austria see: Guenther Steiner, “Zur Geschichte der Österreichischen Sozialversicherung -1. Teil. Die Sozialversicherung in Österreich. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende der Monarchie”, in *Soziale Sicherheit*, 4/2019, 158-172; Guenther Steiner, “Zur Geschichte der Österreichischen Sozialversicherung -2. Teil. Entwicklung der Sozialversicherung zwischen 1918 und 1945“, in *Soziale Sicherheit*, 5/2019, 225-236.

<sup>2</sup> These bionarratives are collected and kept at the *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* (Collection of Biographical Records), Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte (Department of Economic and Social History), Universität Wien (University of Vienna): <https://wirtschaftsgeschichte.univie.ac.at/forschung/doku-lebensgeschichten/> (date of last access 9.5.2022).

The collection’s records have been regularly published in the volume series titled *Damit es nicht verlorengeht...* (So that it doesn’t get lost...) since 1983:

from local archives in the eastern Austrian Alps collected and published by local researchers, contemporary publications on child welfare policies (regarding the urban space, yet useful for contextualization and comparative purposes), as well as scattered evidence coming up in scholarly studies on specific rural communities, social groups, or the functioning of peasant households.

Due to the ongoing significance of agricultural economy and population well into the interwar era, late imperial as well as post-1918 Austria, the Austrian Alpine lands constitute particularly privileged fields of research for historians interested in the rather neglected history of age-based care in modern European *rural* societies. In 1900 and 1910, respectively 40 and 35 percent of the population in the Alpine lands worked in agriculture; as late as 1934 more than a quarter of the Austrian population was still employed in the primary sector.<sup>3</sup> Of course, in late imperial as well as interwar Austrian Alpine lands, like elsewhere in Europe, rural population decreased steadily. Yet, as a consequence of the First World War and the subsequent inflation, the interwar financial and economic instability restricted prospects of work in the urban centers and left people with few alternatives, slowing down the pace of rural exodus.<sup>4</sup>

From a legal perspective, age (though rather young than old) and the vulnerability that accompanied it - or was thought to accompany it - put individuals under public control and thus also care. As early as 1811, the Austrian General Civil Code (*Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch - ABGB*) - which, several updates notwithstanding, remained in force during the first decades of the twentieth century (and indeed up to now) - classified children, early youth, as well as minors, together with those suffering from "affliction of spirit", as individuals in need of help.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the temporal bounds of childhood, youth and old age depend on social conditions and cultural norms, and thus vary from one society, or

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<https://wirtschaftsgeschichte.univie.ac.at/forschung/doku-lebensgeschichten/editionsreihe-damit-es-nicht-verlorengeht/> (date of last access 9.5.2022).

<sup>3</sup> Jorn Möller, *Der Wandel der Berufsstruktur in Österreich zwischen 1869 und 1961: Versuch einer Darstellung wirtschaftssektoraler Entwicklungstendenzen anhand berufsstatistischer Aufzeichnungen*, (Vienna: PhD thesis, University of Vienna, 1972), 114, 212.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Papanthassiou, "Aspekte der bergbäuerlichen Lebenswelt in Österreich - vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis in die Zwischenkriegszeit", in Maria Schuster, *Arbeit gab's das ganze Jahr. Vom Leben auf einem Lungauer Bauernhof*, [Damit es nicht verlorengeht..., 49], (Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2001, 187-243, here 210.

<sup>5</sup> In the text "affliction of spirit" appears associated with mental illness. Yet it brings senile dementia, and thus old age, into mind.

ABGB, p.279/& 21: ALEX. Historische Rechts- und Gesetzestexte online (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek): <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=jgs&datum=1012&page=469>

even micro-society, to another. In twentieth-century rural Austria, compulsory school attendance meant that childhood ended sometime between the ages of twelve and fourteen. Autobiographical and ethnographic information on the places people occupied in farms' labour hierarchies indicate that early youth lasted up to between sixteen and eighteen years of age, while similar evidence regarding retirement from agricultural work due to old age accompanied by physical weakness indicates that in contemporaries' minds old age usually began after the age of sixty or seventy.<sup>6</sup>

In the following, I first deal with children and early youth, boys as well as girls, focusing on foster children, most of whom were born out of wedlock, and I briefly juxtapose childcare in peasant societies with childcare in urban Austria, particularly Vienna, during the same period. I then deal with elderly care in peasant societies, focusing on the so-called *Einleger* (men) or *Einlegerinnen* (women), who were for the most part, former rural servants, who were no longer able to work due to physical weakness associated with old age, had become destitute, and were hosted by peasant households, that provided them with shelter and food.

#### **CHILDHOOD: FOSTER CHILDREN (ZIEHKINDER)<sup>7</sup>**

As shown by contemporary statistics, the numbers of foster children in Austria were high, well into the interwar period (160.244 as late as 1934, in the last census before Austria's annexation to Germany and the outbreak of World War II).<sup>8</sup> Most of them (probably more than eighty percent) were children born out of wedlock, and a very considerable number lived in the eastern Austrian Alps (about one third again in 1934).<sup>9</sup> In certain regions their numerical presence and

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<sup>6</sup> See indicatively: Norbert Ortmayr, "Sozialhistorische Skizzen zur Geschichte des ländlichen Gesindes in Österreich", in Norbert Ortmayr (ed.), *Knechte. Autobiographische Dokumente und sozialhistorische Skizzen*, [Damit es nicht verlorengeht..., 19], (Vienna, Cologne Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 297-356, here 331, 332; Barbara Waß, "Für sie gab es immer nur die Alm..." *Aus dem Leben einer Sennerin*, (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1994), 134; "Gemeindeausschußprotokoll Maueterndorf 1925", cited in Peter Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen. Anstiftskinder, Dienstboten und Einleger im Gebirge*, (Damit es nicht verlorengeht..., 26), (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1992), 200.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, the term „Ziehkinder“ came into general use with the 1919 law on the protection of foster and illegitimate children. Other, semantically overlapping terms were also widely used by contemporaries: Children who were given care by the community were usually called "Kostkinder", children who were cared for by relatives were usually called "Pflegekinder", very young children given to someone else's care for a fee by their parents or guardians seem to have been usually called "Haltekinder": Dorothea Novak, *Die öffentliche Aufsicht und Fürsorge für die Ziehkinder in Österreich*, (PhD thesis, Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck, 1924), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Volkszählung 1934*, cited in N. Ortmayr, "Sozialhistorische Skizzen", 348.

<sup>9</sup> Eva Ziss, „Nachwort“, in Eva Ziss (ed.), *Ziehkinder*, (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1994), 307-327, here 312, 313.

the frequency with which they changed accommodation is particularly impressive: in Lungau (Salzburg) one in four children, and in Murau (Upper Styria) one in five, grew up in foster households.<sup>10</sup>

Children were placed in peasant families either by their (single) mothers, or by local authorities, usually the village or market town community council (which consisted exclusively of well-off male community members), or by an institution, usually a foundling house in a neighboring or distant city<sup>11</sup>.

Foster care in Austrian rural societies largely responded to needs created by a particular socio-economic and labour system. In the eastern Austrian Alps and in most of rural Austria peasant farms were transferred to a single heir, usually the eldest son, rather than being divided among peasant children. On mountain or semi-mountain farms animal husbandry occupied a central place and demanded a permanently available workforce. Within this socioeconomic context, labour was largely based on (live-in) servants (men and women who may have been the peasant's own brothers and sisters) and was organized along sex/gender, as well as age. Social custom did not allow servants to get married; in fact, agricultural service was ideally associated with (unmarried) youth. Since the age at marriage was generally high, female servants and peasant daughters often got pregnant from peasant sons or male servants and gave birth to "illegitimate" children. Single mothers usually had no right or chance to keep their newborn child by their side, because their labour was urgently and completely needed on the farm, where they belonged to the female servants' group. These women were not the protected mothers of the twentieth-century welfare state or of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century welfare associations and official plans or actions.<sup>12</sup>

As shown by rich autobiographical evidence, single mothers typically entrusted the infants to the care of foster families, often consisting of close or distant relatives (sometimes to their own parents, often to the father's parents or kin, which relieved fathers from child support expenses), or other peasants' households. While the children were too young to work, and thus contribute to the household economy, mothers would usually hand most of their earnings

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<sup>10</sup> N. Ortmayr, "Sozialhistorische Skizzen", 348.

<sup>11</sup> On the placement of foundlings in rural (peasant or working class) households by the Vienna foundling house in the late nineteenth century see: Verena Pawlowsky, *Mutter ledig – Vater Staat. Das Gebär- und Findelhaus in Wien 1784-1910*, (Vienna: Studien Verlag, 2001), 161, 165.

<sup>12</sup> On rural servants and generally the organization of alpine rural societies and economies see: Norbert Ortmayr, "Sozialhistorische Skizzen zur Geschichte des ländlichen Gesindes in Österreich", in Norbert Ortmayr (ed.), *Knechte. Autobiographische Dokumente und Sozialhistorische Skizzen*, [Damit es nicht verlorengeht..., 19], (Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1992), 297-356; M. Papatthanassiou, "Aspekte der bergbäuerlichen Lebenswelt", 200-206.

over to the foster parents and visit their children every once in a while. Hermine Mölzer born in Carinthia in 1920 notes:

Just a few weeks after I was born, mother had to go back to work as a maid for a farmer. He didn't want any useless eater on the farm, so she followed her brother's rough advice to take the "worm" to the wealthy parents of the child's father, who was unwilling to pay and who had married another woman in the meantime.[...] The only thing I can remember about my mother's rare visits was that she stood behind the barred window, said a few kind words, and sometimes left a sweet.<sup>13</sup>

Later, between roughly twelve and eighteen years of age, the children would pay off their "debts" to the foster parents, working on their behalf for nothing or very little, as low-ranking rural servants.

Local authorities had a say in these processes, in accordance with state laws, such as the 1862 Municipal Law, "which had set the duty of the community 'care for its poor and for communal charitable institutions'"<sup>14</sup> or the 1863 Home Law, which made care dependent on individuals' affiliation with their community of origin, and later the 1919 Foster Children Law.<sup>15</sup> Yet, autobiographical records barely mention community councils and the part they had in the process. Historical subjects (usually single mothers) and households appear as driving forces behind the practice. Local authorities were in any case legally responsible for appointing guardians, finding foster homes for abandoned children or orphans, and paying foster families if necessary. Local archival material indicates that local councils were aware of children's circulation within the community. Since local councils consisted exclusively of men (usually well-off peasants), single mothers lived under specific forms of male control, which merit and behoove further historical research.

This childcare system, the placement of minors in foster families, and their transfer from one household to another, largely responded to the peasant economy's labour needs since it provided peasant households with cheap labour force at that time or in the future. Peasant households were thus sites of

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<sup>13</sup> Hermine Mölzer, in Ziss (ed.), *Ziehkinder*, 155-157, here 156, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Olga Fejtová - Milan Hlavačka - Václava Horčáková - Veronika Kotková, *Poverty, Charity and Social Welfare in Central Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Bartsch, „Government Organization for Social Aid in Austria“, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, [Supplement: Present Day Social and Industrial Conditions in Austria], volume 98 (1921), 61-65; Heidemarie Graf, *Unser Kind!: 100 Jahre Kinder- und Jugendhilfe OÖ: Soziale Fürsorge und Kinderschutz im Wandel der Zeiten*, (Linz: Abteilung Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, Amt der Oberösterreichischen Landesregierung, Gutenberg-Werbering GmbH, 2019), 34, 35.

childcare as well as of labour, whereby these two functions were inextricably intertwined.

Foster children usually did not spend their childhood in one and the same household, but in two or more. Municipal records from Pinzgau (Salzburg) show that between 1913 and 1938, foster children moved to a new home every three to four years.<sup>16</sup> Life history records demonstrate that foster children often suffered under a system that made them move from one place to another, and did not provide for a stable, permanent family context.<sup>17</sup> Children born out of wedlock (and indeed their mothers), and thus most foster children, were tolerated by local societies as present or future workforce. Yet they were also despised as illegitimate and thus socially “inferior”, a construct which in its turn and in a sort of vicious cycle legitimized the contemptuous and discriminatory behaviour that we can trace in some autobiographical records. It should be noted, however, that not all foster children were born out of wedlock. Children may also have been given away to foster families when the family of origin faced sudden hardships. For instance, Barbara Passruggger, born in 1910 in Salzburg, was handed over to a well-off peasant family by her father soon after her birth because her mother had died in childbirth.<sup>18</sup>

Another way for a poor rural family to counter hardship and safeguard a child’s security was to place the child in rural service at an early age. It is not always easy to distinguish children entering foster households from children entering rural service. Most children in upland, rather isolated communities, entered rural service at twelve, thirteen, or fourteen, namely during their last compulsory school years. But in negative circumstances, e.g. in case of a parent’s or both parents’ sickness and/or death, boys as well as girls entered rural service at an earlier (working) age.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Maria Gremel, born in 1900 in Lower Austria, entered rural service at the age of nine. It was her father, a cottager, who sent her to a peasant household well known to him, again because his wife, the girl’s mother, had been seriously ill. The nine-year-old

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<sup>16</sup> Ortmayr, “Sozialhistorische Skizzen“, 348.

<sup>17</sup> See f. e. the autobiographical text by Richard J. Pucher, “Ich spürte, daß ich ein Fremder war, ein angenommener Bub“, in N. Ortmayr (ed.), *Knechte*, 23-176. Richard Pucher was born in Nikolsdorf (Tyrol) in 1920.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Passruggger, *Hartes Brot. Aus dem Leben einer Bergbäuerin*, [Damit es nicht verlorengelht..., 18], (Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1989), 7, 8.

<sup>19</sup> See Maria Papathanassiou, *Zwischen Arbeit, Spiel und Schule. Die ökonomische Funktion der Kinder ärmerer Schichten in Österreich 1880-1939*, [Sozial- und Wirtschaftshistorische Studien, 24], (Vienna, Munich: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik – R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), 201-203.

had to take care of the peasant couple's newborn child; she would later enter the farm's female rural servants' group.<sup>20</sup>

At the center of childcare in twentieth-century rural Austria, and indeed probably in much of rural Europe, lay the needs of collectivities, of local societies and economies, of households and families, rather than the individual or collective needs of children themselves. Thus, childcare in rural societies differs from childcare as expressed in child welfare debates, schemes, and acts in urban Austria during the same period.

### A SHORT COMPARISON: CHILD WELFARE IN URBAN SPACE

During the first decades of the twentieth century child welfare was on the rise in Austrian cities, and above all in Vienna.<sup>21</sup> After the turn of the century, in the years that preceded the First World War, child protection societies proliferated. Their members were deeply concerned by destitute children wandering in the streets of the city, viewing them as threats to the status quo and at the same time as suffering individuals who had to be saved from exploitation and relieved from utter poverty. By that time, the idea that these children should be saved to get used to a humble life, which had been dominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had started to recede.

On the eve of World War I there were about twenty societies engaged in child protection in Vienna. As in other (at least Northern and Western) European cities, women played a central part in them, as Elisabeth Malleier, who has conducted a wide and thorough research on them, has shown.<sup>22</sup> Caring for the weak and the vulnerable may have been important but, judging from legislation, official surveys, charities, and voluntary associations, caring for the youth was a priority in the minds of the ruling classes, philanthropists, social activists, and the authorities. Two congresses on the protection of children and childhood took place in Austria before the Great War, the first in Vienna in 1907, the second in Salzburg in 1913.<sup>23</sup> The former focused on child neglect, the latter on child labour. Furthermore, an impressive state survey on child labour, probably unique in Europe in terms of its geographical extent and

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<sup>20</sup> Maria Gremel, *Mit neun Jahren im Dienst. Mein Leben im Stübl und am Bauernhof 1900-1930*, [Damit es nicht verlorengelht..., 1], (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 21991), 156, 157

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of social care policies and actions regarding children and youth during the first decades of the twentieth century see Graf, *Unser Kind!*, 20-38.

<sup>22</sup> Elisabeth Malleier, "Kinderschutz" and "Kinderrettung". *Die Gründung von freiwilligen Vereinen zum Schutz misshandelter Kinder im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2014)

<sup>23</sup> *Schriften des ersten Österreichischen Kinderschutzkongresses in Wien*. Volumes 1 and 2, (Vienna: Manz, 1907); *Schriften des Zweiten Österreichischen Kinderschutzkongresses in Salzburg*. Volumes 1 and 2, (Vienna: Perles, 1913).

the richness of its questionnaires, was conducted through the school mechanisms in 1906-7.<sup>24</sup>

During the war, societies taking care of suffering and undernourished children proliferated in Austrian cities, notably in Vienna.<sup>25</sup> Public discourse on “pale” city children prevailed and efforts to send children to recuperate in the countryside were made. This was the same countryside working rural children lived in, but the latter experienced it in a much different way. In the War’s aftermath children were sent to foreign countries (specifically, Denmark or the Netherlands) to spend some time in the countryside,<sup>26</sup> and a new child labour law (the last in a series of laws first dated back in the 1840s), was approved in 1918, further restricting minors’ employment in terms of worktime and age limits, introducing individual work cards which certified that specific jobs did not harm the employed child, and strengthening the powers of labour inspectors as well as of school principals.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1920s and the 1930s Social Democrats in “Red Vienna” placed particular emphasis on improving poor children’s lives and their prospects; they took concrete steps in this direction, introducing eight hour workdays, the Tenant Protection Act, an apprenticeship agency, counseling centers for young mothers, counseling centers for the youth, and more.<sup>28</sup> A distinction between charity and welfare (identified with state welfare) was made in social democratic public debate and discourse, charity was opposed and welfare supported, while the primacy of child and youth welfare over

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<sup>24</sup> *Erhebung über die Kinderarbeit in Österreich im Jahre 1908*. 3 Teile in 2 Bänden, Volumes 1 and 2, Österreich, Arbeitsstatistisches Amt, (Vienna: Hölder, 1910-13).

<sup>25</sup> Christa Hämmerle, “Diese Schatten über unsere Kindheit gelegen...’ – Historische Anmerkungen zu einem unerforschten Thema”, in Christa Hämmerle (ed.), *Kindheit im Ersten Weltkrieg*, [Damit es nicht verlorengeht..., 24], (Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1993), 265-335, here 327-334.

On the primacy of childcare and youth welfare during the war but also in the prewar period, see: Dr. Eduard Prinz von und zu Liechetnstein (k.k. Hofrat und Leiter des Kriegshilfsbüros des k.k. Ministerium des Innern) – Dr. Rudolf Preez (k.k. Professor), *Die Sorge um das kommende Geschlecht. Entwicklungsgedanken über Jugendschutz und Kriegerwaisen-Fürsorge in Österreich*, (Vienna: Verlag des Kriegshilfsbüros des k.k. Ministerium des Innern, 1916); (Oberlandsgerichtsrat) Franz Janisch, *Das Jugendstrafrecht und Jugendrichteramt sowie die Fürsorgeerziehung in Kriegs- und Friedens-Schulheimstätten in Österreich*, (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer und Söhne, 1918).

<sup>26</sup> Isabella Matauscek, *Lokales Leid – Globale Herausforderung. Die Verschickung österreichischer Kinder nach Dänemark und die Niederlande im Anschluss an den Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2018)

<sup>27</sup> Gesetz über die Kinderarbeit, *Staatsgesetzblatt* 141/1918, 19 Dez. 1918, pp. 231-235, especially &16 and &17: <https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=sgb&datum=1918&iv=1&size=45> (date of last access: 18.5.2022)

<sup>28</sup> See Gerhard Melinz – Gerhard Ungar, *Wohlfahrt und Krise. Wiener Kommunalpolitik 1929-1938*, (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1996), 30-33, 82-128.



every other kind of welfare was proclaimed. According to the social democrat politician and university professor Dr. Julius Tandler, health care councillor of the City of Vienna in the 1920s, youth welfare (*Jugendfürsorge*) was "the foundation of every welfare", seeing as:

the more we look after the young, the less we will have to do it in old age, the healthier, the more fit for life, the more resilient this youth will be in the struggle for existence. What we use in youth centers we save in prisons. What we spend on pregnant women and baby care we save on insane asylums. Generous, full-fledged childcare is the most economical method of managing human capital...<sup>29</sup>

In public discourse children and youth constituted a society's future. In the cities, poor children and youth, children and youth who were neglected, abused, who lived in the streets, who were thought to be in physical and moral danger, were at the center of ruling social groups and authorities' interest. The welfare state in Austria, like elsewhere in Europe, made its first and most crucial steps in the cities and in the field of child and youth welfare.

#### **OLD AGE: AUSGEDINGE AND EINLEGER / EINLEGERINNEN**

What about the elderly? If for social activists, politicians (including the Social Democrats) and the ruling classes in general, children and youth had a clear priority over other social groups, then they also had a clear priority over their "opposite" age group, the elderly. In fact, until well into the 1930s, no comprehensive care system for older people or any systematic efforts towards it appeared in Austria. During the first three and a half decades of the last century, neither urban nor rural social care policies appear to address old age per se - at least not as far as workers are concerned.

In the 1920s insurance for employees and workers, as well as a comprehensive health insurance law for agricultural workers were introduced. Although within the context of the insurance law old-age-benefits were provided for workers over sixty years of age, such benefits by no means amounted to an old-age insurance system. On their part, Austrian peasants strongly resisted plans and introductions of insurance laws that broke interpersonal ties and burdened them financially.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Julius Tandler, *Wohltätigkeit oder Fürsorge?* (Vienna: Verlag der Organisation Wien der Sozialdemokratischen Partei, 1925), 5.

<sup>30</sup> G. Steiner, "Zur Geschichte der Österreichischen Sozialversicherung -2. Teil", 228-231.

In rural societies old age care policies appear to have remained inextricably connected with traditional poor relief policies well into the 1930s. The limits between poor relief and elderly care were blurred. In this respect, it seems interesting that terms such as *Ziehkinder* or *Pflegekinder*, used to denote foster children, potentially include an age reference, while the term *Einleger* (for men) or *Einlegerinnen* (for women) does not. At any rate, in rural Austria care for the elderly went hand in hand with care for the physically impaired, the sick or the disabled, those who could no longer earn their living, and as such was widely considered a family, household and/or rural community matter.

The practice or strategy of “Ausgedinge” has been extensively researched by social historians who have worked on early modern and nineteenth century rural Germany or Bohemia.<sup>31</sup> It was widespread in the Austrian alpine countries as well, especially in cases where the farm was transferred integrally to a single heir (usually the eldest son) according to customary law. It meant that the old peasant or the peasant couple handed the property over to the young peasant couple, by a written or oral old-age retirement agreement, according to which in most cases the older would continue living on the farm (usually in a cottage built for this purpose), and would be entitled to a portion of the farm products within the context of self-consumption household economy. “Ausgedinge” contracts were a sort of private “welfare” policies (though associated with property transfer that was regulated by law and the state); they regarded property holders and were, among other things, a way to care for the elderly through an intra-household agreement.<sup>32</sup> Of course living conditions for the retired peasants and/or their wives were not always satisfactory, while domestic disputes and tensions often followed peasants’ retirement. Barbara Waß, a peasant’s daughter from Salzburg notes:

Cases were reported to me where the old farmers [...] lived in very poor conditions in a room that was more of a hole than a chamber.

If they had to eat from one bowl at the table with everyone else, this could be very bad for them. Old people often tremble, and so it happened that they only ever brought half a spoonful to their mouths and never got full. Some old

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<sup>31</sup> See indicatively Alice Velková, “Inheritance Practice and the Elderly in Central Europe: The Example of Western Bohemia, 1700-1850”, in Silvia Sović – Pat Thane – Pier Paolo Viazzo (eds.), *The History of Families and Households. Comparative European Dimensions*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), 232-255, especially 232, 240.

<sup>32</sup> On Tirol in the 1920s see Hermann Wopfner, *Bergbauernbuch, Volume 1, Siedlungs und Bevölkerungsgeschichte*, edited by Nikolaus Grass, (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1995), 316, 317. Wopfner thinks that old-age insurance for peasants, might facilitate their decision to transfer their property to their heirs (Wopfner, *Bergbauernbuch, Volume 1*, 316)

farmers didn't even have enough money to buy a little tobacco for their pipe. I was told that they were tricking nut or hazelnut leaves on the house bench next to them so that they would have something to smoke.

I was told of a case where the old farmer was so ill that he could no longer get up. He was left completely neglected. There were masses of lice and fleas in his bed.<sup>33</sup>

Care practices applied to destitute elderly people were much different. In the period dealt with here, poor houses accommodated older people in rural areas, but their capacities were limited despite the 1873-1874 law that favoured the founding of poor houses at a district level<sup>34</sup>. Poor relief varied according to the wealth of the supporting community, and in the words of Dr. Robert Bartsch, a professor at the University of Vienna and a high official in the Vienna Ministry of Social Administration poor relief was "better in the larger towns and bad in the poorer districts of the countryside."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, well into the 1930s, in the eastern alpine societies, older rural servants who were no longer able to work usually became *Einleger* or *Einlegerinnen* under the supervision of village communities; community councils took specific decisions in consultation with individual peasant households. An *Einleger* or *Einlegerin*<sup>36</sup> was someone who spent the year moving from one household to another and staying in each for a larger or shorter time span. Each household had to take care of him or her, providing him/her with food and shelter - usually against a reduction of the taxes due to the community.<sup>37</sup>

Not all *Einleger* were older people; the institution was a way of poor relief in rural areas regardless of age, and all those who had become unemployed due to illness or accident were also eligible for the *Einlage*. Still, the great majority must have been older, say over sixty or seventy (it is aged former servants who usually appear as *Einleger* in autobiographies, and in village community records from Lungau<sup>38</sup>). Many aged servants had to apply

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<sup>33</sup> B. Waß, "Für sie gab es immer nur die Alm...", 17, 18.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/F%C3%BCrsorge> (date of last access: 16.5.2022)

<sup>35</sup> Bartsch, „Government Organization for Social Aid in Austria“, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Local researcher (and teacher) Peter Klammer mentions two other designations he found in the death register of the market town of Mauterndorf in Lungau (1868-1938): *Einleiber* and *Inleiber*: P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 187, 273. These German terms cannot be translated in English. The English term "inmates" refers to institutions rather than households.

<sup>37</sup> P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 194; Wopfner notes that in Tirol "The peasant employer was also responsible for caring for those who had become unable to work after a long period of service": Hermann Wopfner, *Bergbauernbuch, Volume 2, Bäuerliche Kultur und Gemeinwesen*, edited by Nikolaus Grass, (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag, 1995), 54.

<sup>38</sup> See P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 187-201.

to the community for poor relief, because they lacked property and/ or savings and were no longer able to work.

Contemporaries have generally considered rural service a phase in the life cycle associated with (unmarried) youth, and historians have often followed their assumptions. But in Austria life cycle servants coexisted with lifelong servants; N. Ortmayr estimates that the latter made up one-fifth to one-fourth of all agricultural servants in 1934.<sup>39</sup> In fact, in Carinthia, Styria, Salzburg, Northern and East Tirol we find significant percentages of lifelong servants, of people who spent their whole life in rural service, who never had the chance to become independent and create their own family. When they got older and could no longer work, they asked for poor relief to survive. Some of them were accepted by the few poorhouses available, but most of them must have survived through the institution of *Einlage*.

Of course, savings could ensure survival in old age and rural servants often had savings. Furthermore, peasant children who did not inherit the farm, since it was transferred to a single heir (usually the eldest, sometimes the youngest, son), received monetary compensations.<sup>40</sup> However, recurrent instability and inflation during the First World War as well as the interwar years, eliminated any savings. Therefore, it would be interesting to know if older *Einleger* proliferated in the 1920s and 1930s compared with previous decades.

In any case, the *Einleger / Einlegerin* experience was generally hard. Constant moving from one household to another was a permanent feature in those older people's lives, making them very unstable. *Einleger* could stay in the same household for a few days, a few weeks, and sometimes a few months, depending on the household's financial abilities and on its availabilities. Individual booklets (*Einlegerbüchel*) reveal the frequency of people's circulation: in 1912, in Lungau (Salzburg), Eva Sieder, an aged former rural servant, moved no less than forty-six times. She spent between one and two months in each of four households, a week in most, no more than a day in some of them.<sup>41</sup> Between 1911 and 1918, in the same region, Michael Gruber changed numerous lodging places, from twenty-two in 1915 to fifty-six in 1911 and again in 1914.<sup>42</sup>

Cases of misbehavior on the part of the elderly or abuse on the part of the farmers were often discussed by community councils, who tried to solve

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<sup>39</sup> N. Ortmayr, "Sozialhistorische Skizzen", 322.

<sup>40</sup> H. Wopfner, *Bergbauernbuch, Volume 1*, 160, 161.

<sup>41</sup> "Einlegerbüchel der Eva Sieder", Tamsweg, in: P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 192.

<sup>42</sup> "Einlegerbüchel des Michael Grubers", Tamsweg, in: P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 193.

conflicts and function as mediators; this becomes clear in the records' excerpts from local archives in Lungau quoted by Peter Klammer.<sup>43</sup>

In autobiographical records peasant children remember that their families of origin, or other households, hosted older men and women who had formerly worked as rural servants - women as *Mägde* and men as *Knechte*. Authors of such records mention these servants' nicknames, their health condition, and sometimes the small tasks they undertook on the farm. Barbara Waß notes with regards to the Pinzgau region (Salzburg):

Up to the 1930s there were still *Einleger* who had to move from one peasant to another and, depending on the size of the farm, were allowed to stay there for a few days. My mother still remembers these *Einleger* well. When she was a maid, they often had *Einleger* on the farm.

The last *Einleger* were a certain "Abathei" - probably "Agathe" - and a certain "Miaschte" - probably "Martin". The man carried all his belongings with him in a basket. He had tied an old coat on top. So, he moved from one peasant to another.<sup>44</sup>

And another peasant daughter, born in Lungau (Salzburg) in 1915 writes:

In the little house there was a large room upstairs that could be heated and in which the school children usually slept in winter - but the *Einlegerin* was always accommodated here as well. The servants were so poor back then: when they were old and unable to work, they were passed around from one farmer to another. Our *Einlegerin* stayed with the Wald farmers until her death. Everyone had to accommodate her for a month, only with us she stayed for two.<sup>45</sup>

Kaspar Bauer, born in Lungau in 1915, tells how in their household they hosted, at the instigation of the community council, poor women up to their death against a fee. These women were elderly or grew older while living in the author's household. For example, "the 'Paugger-Rosei' [...] a crooked little woman that the community has billeted with us [...] sewed and patched everything. When Rosei died, she was seventy-three years old [...]"<sup>46</sup>

Elsewhere in his narrative Bauer mentions other *Einlegerinnen* und *Einleger*, who lived and grew old in Althofen, an area close to the municipality Mariapfarr in Lungau, and were known by particular names – nicknames:

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<sup>43</sup> See P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 187-201.

<sup>44</sup> Waß, "Für sie gab es immer nur die Alm...", 119.

<sup>45</sup> Maria Schuster, *Auf der Schattseite*, [Damit es nicht verlorebeht..., 40], (Vienna – Cologne – Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1997), 121.

<sup>46</sup> Kaspar Bauer, „Nicht haben ist ein geringes Leben!“, in P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 202-209, here 202.

“I can still remember the Blind-Thres, the Restn-Mirl and the Hofer-Lotter [...] When (the Restn-Mirl) came, she always carried a pack under her armpit. Inside she had her things. Most *Einleger* had nothing. If one died, then his/her garment, if still usable, was distributed among the other *Einleger*.”<sup>47</sup>

*Einleger* and *Einlegerinnen* lived in harsh conditions; they were usually put to sleep in the barn or in the stable, which led to poor hygiene and jeopardized their health. Furthermore, it was a shame and experienced as a shame to be dependent upon the community, to live in a poor house, to be an *Einleger*. Indeed, *Einleger* had no individual rights. Even their trunks and personal items were sometimes kept and auctioned by the community, to cover their maintenance costs.<sup>48</sup> “The *Einleger* were often teased and mocked by the children, and they could not expect anything good from many peasants either.”<sup>49</sup>

Well into the 1930s, the institution of *Einlage* remained the most economical solution to poor relief and elderly care, while nursery homes were largely thought to burden community budgets and uproot older people from their familiar social environment.<sup>50</sup> But this does not mean that community inhabitants did not feel that *Einlage* was a liability to them. According to a contemporary, after 1938, as insurance laws changed<sup>51</sup> and the institution came to an end, in Lungau “everyone was glad that no more *Einleger* came.”<sup>52</sup>

One can only speculate regarding the feelings of indentation these destitute, older men and women may have experienced; work on farms, where labour force was separated in two distinct groups along gender lines, must have built strong and intertwined gender and labour identities. Destitution and *Einlage*, must have largely deconstructed such identifications and identities, and brought strong feelings of worthlessness and insecurity into the fore.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>48</sup> P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 188.

<sup>49</sup> B. Waß, “Für sie gab es immer nur die Alm...”, 119.

<sup>50</sup> The reaction of Lungau municipalities to the construction of a district nursing home in the early 1930s confirms such attitudes: P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 201.

<sup>51</sup> G. Steiner, “Zur Geschichte der Österreichischen Sozialversicherung -2. Teil, 235, 236.

<sup>52</sup> K. Bauer, “Nichts haben ist ein geringes Leben!“, 209.

The child- and elderly care systems commented upon here were of a traditional, pre-industrial nature. Care took place “beyond the welfare state” system, as this paper’s title reflected, but also parallel to its first manifestations and sometimes (at the legal level) in relation to it. Up to 1938, municipalities and thus local communities had a central role in that system.<sup>53</sup>

It was provided by households, largely ready to assume responsibilities so that the socioeconomic systems they leaned upon functioned smoothly - sometimes, I think, in an almost “homeostatic” way. In the eastern Austrian Alps, foster children, boys as well as girls, provided for the most part free farm labour; rural servants, members of the peasant household’s, the farm’s male or female labour group, often spent their entire lives working on behalf of peasants who, due to the dominant inheritance system, could have been their brothers and sisters. Relations between households, within households and between individuals appear to have shaped the functioning of such traditional social (or rather micro-social) care systems to a large extent – probably stronger than contemporary legislation. Concrete decisions were taken by local, community councils, mainly made up of well-off peasants.

But these forms of care appear to have been largely (though certainly not exclusively) associated with discrimination and feelings of shame. Foster children and older *Einleger* or *Einlegerinnen* were not considered equals to the rest of society – on the contrary, in the twentieth century post World War II mature welfare state, individuals and social groups are treated as entitled to social welfare, and indeed they themselves perceive social welfare as a fundamental right, dissociated from shame – at least in principle.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> They lost their importance in favour of regional and central authorities, when in 1938 numerous welfare regulations of the German Reich came into force in Austria (so-called *Rechtsangleichung*: approximation of laws): H. Graf, *Unser Kind!*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> The case of three older agricultural servants in Lungau, who due to post-war inflation lost all their savings in the mid-1920s, is eloquent and may indicate the beginnings of a transition to a new age of social welfare in rural Austria: All three had to enter the poor house in rural Salzburg; the village council decided that the poorhouse be renamed to “retirement home” so that these three men be recognized as “labour veterans”, in the mayor’s words, namely diligent and wise.: P. Klammer, *Auf fremden Höfen*, 200. It is obvious that they were not held at all responsible for their poverty.