

**41st Working Conference of the South-West German Study Group on Urban History
Research „Small Towns in the Modern Era”, November 15 -17, 2002 in Muehlacker**

The conference opened with an introduction by Clemens Zimmermann (Saarbruecken) to the conference theme „Small Towns in the Modern Era”. To begin with, significant literary images of small towns were presented for debate, which were characterized by philistines and provincialism, conformism and bleakness, yet from a counter-position it is also possible to find positive, often poignant attributions as a place of manageable proportions, a humane place and „home“. Different criteria for definition and a critical outline of small town historiography led to queries about the course and cause of diverse small town developments and about the levels of perception, not only in terms of adequate source material, but also the social groups to be studied. The assessment of small town history as often being merely imitative and adaptive is especially in need of a revision. It was deemed important to look more closely at the relationships to rural surroundings, the political culture of the small town, and the impact of different surges of modernization.

In her public evening lecture, Marlis Lippik (Muehlacker) presented „Muehlacker in Modern Urban History”, which does not begin, strictly speaking, until 1930 when the town charter was formally granted. One central aspect of the town history was the connection to the railroad in 1853, which played an important role in industrial development in the early 20th century. At this time, the jewelry industrialist Alfred Emrich, who was originally from Pforzheim, distinguished himself by his dedicated involvement not only as a businessman, but also in social and cultural affairs to the same degree. Explanations of the characteristics of the city and its central institutions were followed by insights into the cultural life of the city; these included initiatives such as the Beautification Association (founded 1892), the Natural Sciences Society (founded 1913), and the construction of the festival hall „Uhlandbau“ (1921). In these, according to the speaker, components no less innovative and pioneering are to be found for strengthening the position of the city in the surrounding areas.

The first morning section was opened by Stefan Brakensiek (Bielefeld) with his lecture „Stagnation? Small Town Society in the Early 19th Century“, taking six examples from the Electorate of Hesse and Westphalia. Against the background of an omnipresent awareness of crises and a transformation of structures, which led to pauperism and migration, where it was not possible to locate new industry, and to processes of economic concentration in other places, the question arises as to gauges of urbanity. These are not to be defined solely through infrastructure and functions in a central location, according to the speaker, but should additionally comprise urban identity and political climates. The selected small towns Eschwege, Homburg, Grebenstein, Lemgo, Warendorf and Buende were portrayed along a series of structural criteria. The conclusion drawn from this was that they primarily represent different types from historical and economic perspectives. The exploitation of individual opportunities and the regional surroundings, determined for their part by state framework conditions and the intensity of the industrial climate, were identified as crucial factors for the dynamic, using the example of Buende. Starting from a basis like this, infrastructural factors could have either a favorable or a constraining effect.

Peter Franke (Berlin) posed the question: „Why was there no communal liberalism in Ostelbien?“ and discussed the „Content and Function of Communal Politics in Small Towns of the Province of Brandenburg in the 19th Century“ in this context. He began with an

exposition of the specific characteristics of Prussian communal self-administration, which was defined, unlike in Southern Germany, as „state administration in accordance with the laws“. Further explanations then focused on questions of participation on the basis of class notions of equality, public spirit and public welfare, exemplified on the one hand by instances of the individual calculations of advantages accepted within this framework and on the other by examples of quasi forced participation - such as the acceptance of public offices - and the counter-arguments that could be employed with more or less success. The dimension of political involvement in the sense of a communal liberalism is retracted here to a certain degree, and its dependency on place, situation and persons is highlighted.

The lecture by Hans Heiss (Bolzano), „Bourgeoisie and Social Modernization in Austria“, which focused on the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the Habsburg monarchy with Cisleithania in the 19th century, was read to the participants, as the speaker had to cancel due to illness. Starting from some basic remarks on the Austrian urban landscape, reference was first made to the implications of the legal foundations for the scope of action of bourgeois influence in pre- and early constitutionalism, which was found primarily in the area of urban engineering until 1860. The expanding network of railways and three-class suffrage, which fostered bourgeois dominance in the municipalities, constituted factors influencing space and society in the subsequent period in the direction of liberal ideas of progress. These resulted in the emergence of condensed social milieus, grouped around leading figures, with clientele structures and forms of rule, as well as an abundantly differentiated social association system. This „old liberal“ and principally exclusive oligarchy came increasingly under pressure after 1880, and the political mass market and new political styles gradually changed the configurations in small towns as well. Turn-of-the-century Vienna set an example, and the personalization of communal politics through a symbolic figure, powerful communalism, and dynamic welfare and identification policies also emanated into small towns.

In Section II, the program first included a comparison of Northern German examples with Southern Germany for the period from 1871 to 1914: Oliver Barghorn-Schmidt (Hamburg) outlined processes of professionalization and bureaucratization „On the Way to Modern Town Administration“, which, contrary to frequently expressed opinion, were not limited to large and mid-sized cities. The composition of communal representatives, which hardly changed during the period investigated, and their sometimes extremely long periods of service, as well as the quantitative equipment and bureaucratic infrastructure at the various administration levels determined the speaker's view of the inner world of the small town. The use of supervisory authorities - based on relatively extensive discretion - and lively communication among municipalities for the purpose of gathering information or in the form of delegations indicated external references.

Hartmut Zoche (Waldkirch) discussed three examples from Baden (Kenzingen, Ettenheim and Waldkirch) in the period between 1870 and 1936 in his lecture entitled „The Dispossessed Small Town. The Demolition of Administrative Competencies and the Reaction of the Inhabitants“. During this period, these three small towns lost their center functions as seats of administration. The speaker noted a lack of enterprising energy and willingness to take risks prior to these events. He found further explanations in an attitude of resignation and a lack of forcefulness in representing the towns' own interests in the concrete situation of loss.

Christian Groh (Pforzheim) also addressed a higher level of administration, that of the state, with „Cultural Policies in Small Towns of the Federal Republic of Germany. From the Beginnings to the Eighties“. In his lecture, he drew an arch along various cultural concepts based on a concept of culture marked by post-war conditions, oriented to flight and dispersal on the one hand and to preservation (local museums) and adult education (re-education) on the other, all the way to a successively broader concept of culture. This concept is characterized by an expanded target audience as well as the simultaneity of varied sections, including contemporary art and forms of culture. The role of culture as a so-called soft locational factor and issues of the professionalization, implementation and orientation of local cultural policies was linked in this lecture to circumstances specific to the small town and differing city profiles.

On the third and final day of the conference, the program was continued by Christian Haller (Saarbruecken), who substituted for Johann Jessen (Stuttgart) on short notice. He presented „The Small Town in the Process of Suburbanization“ on the basis of the category of the „in-between city“ for the period beginning in 1960. He specifically discussed the changes taking place here against the background of the preconditions of traffic and transportation and the price differences between the core city and the surrounding area in terms of conflicts over utilization and building policies. Suburban development is often associated with negative assessments and images - not least of all in the context of a classic focus on the city and urban development. The concept of the „in-between city“ - which was subsequently the topic of a controversial discussion - as a polycentric overall structure with its own specific significance is intended to counteract this and to document the changing concept of „center“ and „periphery“, to the extent that the periphery is also increasingly becoming a functionally differentiated area in the course of the process discussed. In terms of the suburbanization tendencies that may also be noted in small towns, a significant role in positive steering opportunities is attributed to the communal representatives.

Christine Hannemann (Berlin) presented the results of a methodically very elaborate research project in her lecture „Urbanist Problems and Cultural Perspectives in the Development of East German Small Towns (1960-2000)“. Four small towns (defined by population, ground plan, urban building and central location functions) of the category Type 4 „without perspectives“ were discussed in greater detail in the lecture. The compiled and evaluated information on (pre-)history, German Democratic Republic influence, economy and city profile on the way to marginalization was supplemented by surveys that were conducted. Despite migration, loss of functions and de-economization, from the perspective of those remaining there, these small towns are regarded as places of risk minimization in unsettled times and evince a high degree of social cohesion, which is supported by organized and informal networks, but also by identification.

In conclusion, the thematic fields and perspectives addressed during the conference were structured in a „Resume and Theses on the Theme From a Historical-Cultural Studies Perspective“ by Margareth Lanzinger (Vienna), whereby several possibilities for tying into approaches oriented to cultural studies were highlighted. The small town as „in-between place“ between the village, on the one hand, the city, big city, metropolis on the other, as „locus“ and „focus“ for research issues, their external history - defined by location factors and urbanity criteria - and their internal history - defined by self-understanding and political culture, perceptions and concrete experiences - as well as larger contexts of integration were the motifs for the points of summary and perspectives that formed the transition to the closing discussion. Commentaries and desiderata were formulated in this discussion, including: a view directed more strongly from the rural area to the small town and less

dominated by the big city, a turn to issues of political culture and of the potential for mobilization, to internal history and processes, even if linked with difficulties with source material, to the significance of the family and various cultural initiatives. Similar question complexes had already permeated the discussions on individual lectures, with some of the issues addressed being the periodization of different political models, the development of the public sphere, and coordination and competition among cities.

What was new in terms of the tradition of the study group was this conference's concentration on a relatively short period of time, on covering larger areas, and taking special studies as a starting point for the development of the theme. The lectures will be published in one volume. The next working conference of the South-West German Study Group on Urban History Research will take place in Zurich under the direction of Bernd Roeck, and will be devoted to the theme of the iconography of the city.

Dr. Margareth Lanzinger

(Translation: Aileen Derieg)