

Forgotten refugee camps in Austria-Hungary in the years 1914–1918

The experiences of the civilians of World War I have been overshadowed by the atrocities of 1939–1945. This also translates into a lack of public awareness that more than a century ago, hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of Polish lands fled or were evacuated and deployed inside the former empires. The same happened to the inhabitants of Galicia, then a constituent part belonging to the Habsburg Empire, who being a multinational group (mainly Poles, Jews, Ukrainians) became war refugees, deployed in a specially prepared refugee placement system. For this purpose, the Austrian authorities organized a network of camps for war refugees, constituting the first such major infrastructural solution in modern Europe. This system was modified under the influence of the dynamics of military operations and the influx of subsequent waves of war refugees to the Hinterland (i.e. the central part of the Habsburg state, not covered by military actions). In this way, mass war refugees became a new experience for each of the parties: the Austrian state, the refugees, and the civilian population, native to the areas where the war refugees ended up.

The subject of refugee camps remains unknown, even forgotten, in Polish and European historiography of the former Austro-Hungary (i.e. present-day Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and partially Poland and Ukraine). Definitely, more is known about the *behzenstvo* /Russian for *exile*/, i.e. refugees in the Russian empire, than about refugees in Austria-Hungary. The proposed research project intends to fill this gap in the literature and in public awareness. The project aims to gather scattered archival sources in Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine in order to further confront the various narratives coming from the sources (the official narrative, i.e. the state's, the refugees' own grassroots narrative, journalistic narrative, etc.) As a result, the functioning of refugee camps over one hundred years ago in the former Habsburg Empire and the experiences of the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe during World War I in these facilities will be brought back into historical circulation. The analysis of archival materials will be based on several research assumptions.

Firstly, the project involves an analysis of how the camp system and the camp space with all its infrastructure were organized; what were the models for the Austrian government's policy of dislocating civilians in refugee camps; what were the opinions about the facilities during and after the war?

Secondly, the project will analyze refugee camps as tools of state policy, i.e. to what extent did the refugee camp serve the function of controlling society? How was the refugee camp used for the purposes of implementing the propaganda policy of imperial Austria? To what extent were the social policies implemented in the refugee camps intended as an expression of ensuring continuity of daily life for pre-war civilians, and to what extent were they a propaganda demonstration?

Thirdly, the problem of the refugee camp as a place of categorisation and social separation will be examined, confronting hypotheses about refugee camps as a place of deliberate separation of refugees from civilians (despite the fact that they were citizens of the same state). In addition, the consequences of the categorization policy of war refugees will be analyzed, leading to a deeper ethnization of the state, but also to the formation of civic attitudes.

Fourthly, the everyday reality of the camp experience will be examined by comparing the standard of living of refugees inside selected refugee camps during particular years of the war, including confronting refugees' accounts of their camp experiences, prompting the reflection to what extent the camps concentrating on the civilian population are a missed tool which was used for a completely different purpose in the years 1939–1945? This also poses another question: to what extent was the experience of the forgotten camps of the First World War present during the Second World War?

Fifthly, the project will confront the analysis of mass sources presenting the statistics of war refugees in Central and Eastern Europe, trying to compare the scale of the phenomenon with the migration processes of the European continent of 1914–1918.

The project thus aspires to fill an important research gap, not only in national but also in European historiography, not only in terms of presenting the forgotten experience of the multinational group of people and their placement in refugee camps, but above all to force reflection on contemporary migration processes by analysing the mechanisms of both the functioning of the state and the reaction of the population (both refugees and locals) to the problem from a historical perspective.