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Encampment in the Soviet Occupation Zone of Austria
Post-War History and Documentation

edited by
Dieter Bacher, Hannes Leidinger and Ina Markova

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Contents

Dieter Bacher / Katharina Bergmann-Pfleger / Hannes Leidinger / Barbara Stelzl-Marx / Anne Unterwurzacher

Editorial. Soviet Camps and Research

Why camps?

Camps were a widespread phenomenon in postwar Austria—an everyday reality and a practical response to acute shortages of shelter and basic necessities affecting hundreds of thousands of people. At the same time, they represented a direct consequence of the Second World War, frequently drawing on infrastructure that had already been created during the conflict. These camp structures lay at the center of the research project *Encampment*, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) from 2022 through the end of 2025.[1]

To properly contextualize the development and structures of postwar camps in Austria—not only in the Soviet zone—it is necessary to begin with the broader conditions that shaped them, above all the migration movements and forced displacements imposed by the Nazi regime during the war. As early as June 1944, the Allied powers recognized that, in the final phase of the war and especially in the aftermath of an armistice, they would be confronted with the task of providing for and accommodating large numbers of non-German-speaking "displaced persons" (DPs)[2] and refugees within the territory of their wartime ad-

1 The contributions to this special issue were produced in the context of the FWF-funded research project *Encampment: Camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone* (P 34085), led by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Barbara Stelzl-Marx and conducted at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, in cooperation with the Department of History at the University of Graz and the Ilse Arlt Institute for Social Inclusion Research at St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences. For further details, see Section II.

2 The term "displaced person," or "DP," was used during the final phase of the Second World War and the postwar period to denote individuals whose native language was not German and who had been forcibly brought to Austria and Germany by the National Socialist regime during the war. This group consisted primarily of former civilian forced laborers, former prisoners of war, former concentration camp inmates, and other individuals persecuted under the Nazi regime, as well as stateless persons. Allied authorities and relief organizations at times subdivided DPs into various categories, such as "Allied DPs," "Ex-Enemy DPs," or "United Nations DPs." In German-language documents, the term *versetzte Personen* was occasionally used to refer to this group. The Soviet Union generally employed the designation "DP" only in

versary, the National Socialist "Third Reich."[3] At the Yalta Conference, held from February 4 to 11, 1945, the Allies agreed on a plan that appeared both simple and efficient: non-German-speaking individuals located within the territory of the "Third Reich" were to be "repatriated" as quickly as possible after a brief period of care and local organization, with arrangements made for their return to their countries of origin.

Only a few months after the end of the Second World War, it became clear that, in addition to the groups originally anticipated for repatriation, there would also be German-speaking expellees—referred to at the time as *Volksdeutsche*,[4] for example from Czechoslovakia—as well as additional refugees from Eastern European territories and so-called "Reich Germans,"[5] together totaling approximately 500,000 to 600,000 German-speaking individuals.

Research today estimates that, including the aforementioned DPs, a total of between 1.4 and 1.6 million people were ultimately affected in Austria. The Potsdam Conference, held from July 17 to August 2, 1945, also addressed the fate of German-speaking refugees and expellees. The delegations of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union agreed that "the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, must be carried out."[6]

In the relevant Chapter 13 of the Potsdam Agreement, it was further stipulated that this transfer was to be carried out "in an orderly and humane manner"[7]—a directive that, in practice, was often not implemented. Yugoslavia and its German-speaking population were not mentioned in the agreement. However, this

reference to the Western Allied definition and did not apply the term—or the associated provisions for care and supply—within its own occupation zone.

3 Cf. Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer. Die Displaced Persons in Westdeutschland 1945–1951* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 23.

4 The term "ethnic Germans" (*Volksdeutsche*) was used to denote people of German mother tongue who had lived outside the territory of the German Reich as defined in 1937. This group included, for example, the "Sudeten Germans" (*Sudetendeutsche*) in what was then Czechoslovakia; the "Danube Swabians" (*Donauschwaben*) or "Romanian Germans" (*Rumäniendeutsche*) in what was then Romania; and the "Gottscheer" in the southwestern part of present-day Slovenia. Many of these individuals were expelled to Austria and Germany after 1945 on suspicion of collaboration with the Nazi regime. For this reason, they are today most commonly referred to in the scholarly literature as "German-speaking expellees" (*deutschsprachige Vertriebene*).

5 The term *Reichsdeutsche*, in the Austrian context, refers to individuals of German mother tongue who resided within the borders of the German Reich as defined in 1937 and who came to the territory of present-day Austria during the Second World War.

6 Agreement of Potsdam, 2nd August 1945, as cited in Charles L. Mee, *Die Teilung der Beute. Die Potsdamer Konferenz 1945,* 2nd ed. (Munich: C.A. Koch, 1975), 311.

7 Ibid.

omission did not protect them from becoming targets of expulsion after 1945.[8] For those among them who found themselves in Austria at the end of the war, this meant that, following initial accommodation and care, they were to be transferred to Germany in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement.[9]

The resolutions cited were intended to provide a straightforward solution, but they ultimately proved overly simplistic and insufficiently thought through. The Western Allies, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, failed to anticipate that among the DPs there would be groups for whom repatriation was not a viable option for a variety of reasons. This was especially true of individuals from the Soviet Union, many of whom feared political and social repression upon their return—a fear that was indeed justified in the case of Soviet prisoners of war and civilian forced laborers.[10]

This, however, did not change the fact that in the first months after the war all occupying powers in Austria continued to pursue this plan. A clear turning point was undoubtedly the handover of approximately 35,000 Cossacks by the British to the Soviet authorities at Pentecost 1945 on the Mur Bridge in Judenburg. Many of those affected attempted to evade the transfer, fearing punishment by the Soviet authorities as "collaborators" with Nazi Germany. In some cases, this despair led to suicide, causing dismay on both the Austrian and British sides.[11] This episode evidently prompted a reassessment among the Western Allies, particularly on the part of the British, who—by 1946 at the latest—began to move away from the concept of "repatriation without alternative" and instead committed themselves to voluntary return only. This shift greatly displeased the Soviet authorities, who continued to insist on the repatriation of their citizens—whether voluntary or forced—until 1955. As a result, the Western powers increasingly restricted the access of Soviet repatriation missions within their zones. In turn, this development rendered Soviet "DPs"—to whom the Soviet authorities denied the international DP status recognized by the Western Allies—an emerging factor in the intensifying Cold War.

8 Cf. Gabriela Stieber, *Nachkriegsflüchtlinge in Kärnten und der Steiermark* (Graz: Leykam, 1997), 25–28.

9 Cf. ibid; Mee, *Die Teilung der Beute*, 311.

10 Cf. Nikita Petrov, Peter Ruggenthaler and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, "Repatriierung oder Verbleib in Österreich? Entscheidung nach Kriegsende," in: *Zwangsarbeit in der Land- und Forstwirtschaft auf dem Gebiet Österreichs 1939 bis 1945*, edited by Stefan Karner and Peter Ruggenthaler (Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 455–478. (Veröffentlichungen der Österreichischen Historikerkommission 26/2).

11 Cf. Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI. Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion* (Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 20–24; Barbara Stelzl-Marx, *Stalins Soldaten in Österreich. Die Innensicht der sowjetischen Besatzung 1945–1955* (Vienna – Munich: Böhlau, 2012), 217–222.

The Soviet authorities, however, required camps in postwar occupied Austria not only for their "repatriates." Camps were also needed for captured members of the Wehrmacht. In the final weeks of the war and the immediate postwar period, the Red Army and the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) established so-called "front camps" as initial sites of captivity. From there, prisoners of war were transported by train to camps operated by the Main Administration for Affairs of Prisoners of War and Internees (GUPVI) in the Soviet Union. These front camps were mobile facilities designed for extremely short-term stays and are therefore difficult to trace outside Soviet documentation.[12] In addition, more long-term POW camps also existed on Austrian territory, for example at the former military training area of Döllersheim, now Allentsteig, where several such camps were located.

Beyond these groups, there was also an urgent need for accommodation and provision for segments of the Austrian population itself. On the one hand, a large number of former internees and prisoners required care—individuals whom the Nazi regime had deprived of their livelihoods for racial, ideological, or political reasons and confined to camps and prisons. On the other hand, many Austrian "homeless" persons had lost their homes as a result of the war and were dependent on assistance until housing could once again be made available through reconstruction efforts. A particular role was played by the so-called "labor" and "detention camps" established for former National Socialists, which existed not only in the Western zones—especially well-documented and researched are the Wolfsberg camp[13] and the Marcus W. Orr camp[14] in Salzburg—but also in the Soviet zone. These internment camps were used to house former members and functionaries of the NSDAP, who were forced to work.

All of these groups on Austrian territory shared the need for a significantly more permanent solution than the Allies had envisioned during the war. The camp provided a structure through which this prolonged accommodation, provision and administration could be managed. Here, a camp is understood as a spatially and socially segregated territory in which a defined, larger "group" is provisionally housed for a specific purpose. Camps are characterized by spatial

12 Cf. Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI*, 38–42.

13 Cf. Barbara Stelzl-Marx, "Das Oflag XVIII B/Stalag XVIII A Wolfsberg 1939–45", in *Wolfsberg,* edited by Robert Gratzer (Wolfsberg: Stadtgemeinde Wolfsberg, 2001), 182–206; Stadtgemeinde Wolfsberg (ed.), *Schicksalswende. Das Interniertenlager Camp 272 in Wolfsberg* (Wolfsberg: Museum im Lavanthaus, 2022); Florentine Kastner, "'Zu Gast bei Seiner britischen Majestät.' Besatzungslager in Österreich nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," *zeitgeschichte* 37 (2010) 5: 304–327.

14 Cf. Oskar Dohle and Peter Eigelsberger, *Camp Marcus W. Orr. "Glasenbach" als Internierungslager nach 1945* (Linz: Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, 2009).

confinement, a lack of comfort, and limited privacy.[15] Depending on the context, camps as spatial instruments of order embody a distinct combination of containment, control and care.[16] A camp is always intended for a temporary stay. The purpose of camp accommodation is never universally definable, which fundamentally distinguishes camps from prisons—whose purpose is always to punish individuals convicted of crimes—or from military hospitals, whose function is to care for injured or ill military personnel. Whereas prisons sanction individually committed legal offenses, accommodation in a camp targets real or ascribed affiliations to a collective (such as refugees or prisoners of war). The purpose and function of camps are always determined by their operators, resulting in a wide variety of types, ranging from refugee camps and forced labor camps to filtration camps.

The establishment and administration of such structures initially fell, as planned, to the Allied military administrations, which soon transferred these responsibilities to other entities: on the one hand, to the occupying powers themselves, and on the other, to international relief organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Austrian authorities became involved only at a later stage, as they first had to be constituted and equipped with the necessary resources. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are Department 12U within the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and the provincial resettlement offices under the governments of the individual federal states. Especially in the zones of the Western occupying powers, camps were established as sites of accommodation and provision for hundreds of thousands of people.

Encampment research: genesis and central questions

To date, historical research has focused primarily on camps in the Western zones of occupied postwar Austria, in part because of easier access to sources.[17] Findings on camps in the Soviet occupation zone of Austria[18]—their structures,

15 See, above all, the definition proposed by Ulrich Herbert in "Das 'Jahrhundert der Lager.' Ursachen, Erscheinungsformen, Auswirkungen," in *Speziallager in der SBZ. Gedenkstätten mit "doppelter Vergangenheit,"* 1st ed., edited by Peter Reif-Spirek and Bodo Ritscher (Berlin: Links, 1999), 11–27, as well as the definition of camps used by the research network "Camps and Totalitarian Institutions" of the Research Network for Interdisciplinary Regional Studies in Lower Austria (*first*). Research for the FWF project was prepared in cooperation with *first*.

16 Claudio Minca, "Geographies of the camp," *Political Geography* 46 (2015): 74–83, at 74–75.

17 Cf., e. g., Stieber, *Nachkriegsflüchtlinge*; Michael John, "Zwischenstation Oberösterreich. Die Auffanglager und Wohnsiedlungen für jüdische DPs und Infiltrees in Oberösterreich," in *Flucht nach Eretz Israel. Die Bricha und der jüdische Exodus durch Österreich nach 1945,* edited by Thomas Albrich (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 1998), 67–92; Bernadette Lietzow,

the people housed in the camps, and the practice of encampment itself—have, by contrast, remained sporadic in the scholarly literature.[19] This gap has often been justified by the claim that there were no, few, or only very short-term camp structures in the Soviet zone, as such facilities were deemed unnecessary under the DP and repatriation policies pursued by the Soviet authorities. Moreover, access to Soviet sources on this topic was not only relatively difficult, or even impossible, due to language barriers, but Austrian authorities themselves were apparently only minimally or very incompletely informed about camps in the Soviet zone. In addition, certain relevant sources—such as records from the resettlement office of the Lower Austrian state government—are unfortunately no longer available.

"'Nächstes Jahr in Jerusalem.' Die Lager für jüdische DPs und Flüchtlinge in Salzburg," in Albrich, *Flucht nach Eretz Israel*, 119–136; Alexandra Kreisberger, "'Provisorische Heimat.' Die DP-Siedlung 121 Haid zwischen 1946 und 1964" (master's thesis, University of Salzburg, 1995); Heimo Halbrainer, *Lager Wagna 1914–1963. Die zeitweise drittgrößte Stadt der Steiermark* (Graz: Universalmuseum Joanneum, 2014); Horst Schreiber, *Die Lager von Schwaz 1944–1988. NS-Zwangsarbeiterlager – Entnazifizierungslager Oradour – Flüchtlingslager St. Margarethen – Armenlager Märzensiedlung* (Innsbruck – Vienna: Studienverlag, 2023).

18 Regarding the term "Soviet occupation zone": After World War II, Austria was occupied by the Allied powers of the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and France. Under the zone agreement signed on July 9, 1945, each power was assigned an occupation zone as well as sectors in Vienna. The Soviet zone comprised, according to today's geographical and political divisions, Lower Austria, Burgenland and Upper Austria north of the Danube (i. e. the Mühlviertel region). Vienna had been occupied by the Red Army since April 1945, and it was not until September 1, 1945, that the Western Allies assumed control of their agreed-upon sectors. As a result, Districts 2, 4, 10, 20, 21, and 22 belonged to the Soviet sector. With the entry into force of the Austrian State Treaty, which stipulated the withdrawal of Allied troops within 90 days, the occupation period officially ended on July 27, 1955; the last Soviet occupation soldier left Austria on 19 September 1955.

19 Camps are occasionally mentioned only in passing, e. g. in Stefan Karner and Peter Ruggenthaler, "(Zwangs-)Repatriierungen sowjetischer Staatsbürger aus Österreich in die UdSSR," in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich. Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955,* edited by Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx and Alexander Tschubarjan (Graz – Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 243–273; and Walter M. Iber and Peter Ruggenthaler, "Sowjetische Repatriierungspolitik in Österreich," in *Hitlers Sklaven – Stalins "Verräter". Aspekte der Repression an Zwangsarbeitern und Kriegsgefangenen: eine Zwischenbilanz,* edited by Peter Ruggenthaler and Walter M. Iber (Innsbruck – Vienna – Bolzano: Studienverlag, 2010), 247–280. More detailed, though still sporadic, references to camps in the Soviet zone can be found in Cornelia Znoy, "Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen nach Österreich 1945/46. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bundesländer Wien und Niederösterreich" (master's thesis, University of Vienna, 1995). To date, the only more comprehensive study concerns the collection camp for resettlers in Melk: Niklas Perzi, "Aufnahme und Abschub. Die Sudetendeutschen in Niederösterreich 1945/46," *Jahrbuch für Landeskunde von Niederösterreich 2016,* (St. Pölten: Verein für Landeskunde von Niederösterreich, 2017), 135–234. (Neue Folge 82).

The aim of the research project *Encampment–Camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone in Austria: Postwar History and Memory*, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and the State of Lower Austria, was—and remains—to address this research gap concerning camps in the Soviet occupation zone. The project, carried out between early 2022 and late 2025, was conducted by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on the Consequences of War (Graz–Vienna–Raabs), in collaboration with the Ilse Arlt Institute for Social Inclusion Research at the University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten and the Department of History at the University of Graz, under the leadership of Univ.-Prof. Dr. Barbara Stelzl-Marx. The present volume should be understood as presenting the results of this project.

At the conception and outset of the research project, the central questions were as follows: Was the Soviet occupation zone of Austria an "exception to the rule," in which the long-term accommodation of DPs, refugees, and displaced persons in camp structures was merely a necessity in the zones of the Western Allies? Were there really only a few camps in the Soviet zone, and only for very short periods? There were sufficient indicators to critically question these previously unchallenged assumptions in the scholarship. First, case studies of several camps in the Soviet occupation zone suggested that camp structures were used over a longer period, in some cases until 1948 or even 1955, such as the resettler collection camp in the Melk Pioneer Barracks or the facilities of the former POW main camp (Stalag) XVII A Kaisersteinbruch. These findings also indicated that a phenomenon similar to that observed in the Western zones occurred in the Soviet occupation zone as well: camp structures from the Nazi era were partly reused in the postwar period.

Second, macro-level research on Soviet repatriation policy, such as the work of Pavel Polyan[20] or Ulrike Goeken-Haidl[21], has shown that camp structures were also necessary for managing the repatriation of former Soviet civilian forced laborers and prisoners of war. Camps served purposes such as gathering individuals, organizing transportation and conducting the already mentioned "filtration" process.

Third, surveys on the postwar fate of former civilian forced laborers in the territory of present-day Austria suggested that the initially intended rapid repatriation often did not proceed as quickly as the Allies had planned, resulting

20 Cf. Pavel Polyan, *Zhertvy dvuch diktatur. Ostarbaitery i voennoplennye v Tret'em Reikhe i ikh repatriaciya* (Moskow: Rosspen, 1996); Pavel Poljan, *Deportiert nach Hause. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im "Dritten Reich" und ihre Repatriierung* (Munich – Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2001).

21 Cf. Ulrike Goeken-Haidl, *Der Weg zurück. Die Repatriierung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener und Zwangsarbeiter während und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2006).

in longer stays in Austria.[22] In many cases, former civilian forced laborers remained in private accommodations, particularly when they had been employed on farms during the Nazi era. However, a significant number of them remained in camps for years after 1945.

Fourth, migration movements occurred after the end of the war in 1945 that had been difficult to foresee during the war itself, such as the expulsion of German-speaking populations from Eastern Europe or flight resulting from political developments in several Eastern European states.

Fifth, segments of the Austrian population also relied on camp accommodation, for example because of war damage or social hardship. Taken together, these factors provided sufficient grounds to assume that even the Soviet occupying power could not manage without resorting to camp structures, thereby justifying further research into this issue.

Research efforts therefore first sought to establish a foundation (Module I) by identifying, recording, and localizing as many camps as possible in order to focus on specific aspects in subsequent analysis. In the course of cataloguing camps on the basis of existing archival documentation, several questions arose: Where were camps established, by which authorities, and for which groups? How long did these camps exist during the Soviet occupation? To what extent was infrastructure from the Nazi era repurposed? Which locations appeared to have a "camp tradition," in the sense that they had housed camp structures even prior to the Nazi period? The aim was, for the first time, to compile a comprehensive "camp list" of identified sites and to document key information such as georeferenced location, documented duration, camp category (particularly with regard to the groups accommodated), and available sources.

After the camps had been recorded, the next question concerned which aspects should guide further analysis. Beyond examining camps as physical "sites," both the "agents," meaning those who operated the camp structures, and the inmates or residents constituted key areas of investigation. A camp can be studied both as a structure in its entirety and from the individual perspectives of its inhabitants or members of the camp administration. Moreover, although camps are often viewed as "isolated spaces" with their own rules and living conditions, they were also interconnected with other areas, whether with other camps or with their surrounding environments. As "spaces," camps were often

22 Cf. Dieter Bacher, "Eine neue Heimat. Eine Motivanalyse in Österreich verbliebener Zwangsarbeiter anhand des Aktenbestandes des 'Österreichischen Versöhnungsfonds'," in *Zwangsarbeiter in Österreich 1939–1945 und ihr Nachkriegsschicksal. Ergebnisse der Auswertung des Aktenbestandes des "Österreichischen Versöhnungsfonds." Ein Zwischenbericht*, edited by Dieter Bacher and Stefan Karner (Innsbruck – Vienna: Studienverlag, 2013), 271–323; Iber and Ruggenthaler, "Sowjetische Repatriierungspolitik in Österreich", 247–280.

less isolated than one might initially assume. It therefore seemed appropriate to approach these dimensions through both typological and relational analysis.

The typological analysis (Module II) primarily focused on the individual camp as a "space," addressing questions related to regulations, usage strategies, access, overt and hidden functions within the camp, and the theoretical classification of the camps in question. With regard to residents and inmates, the central interest lay in the extent to which living conditions in the camps can be understood as "bare life,"[23] in the sense defined by Giorgio Agamben.

The relational analysis (Module III) aimed to shed light on the interactions between individual camps, other camps, and their surrounding environments. Three aspects stood out in particular. First, questions arose concerning the path into the camp: Which individuals were placed in camps, by whom, and for what reasons? How were they transferred, and which camps, as in the case of Soviet repatriates, formed part of broader "chain of camps"? How did interactions among the involved "agents" influence the situation in Austria during the early Cold War? Second, the analysis focused on interactions between camps and their local and regional environments. What kinds of relationships did residents and inmates, as well as "agents," maintain with surrounding communities? For what purposes were these relationships used? And how did such connections affect other aspects, such as the strategies employed by residents and inmates after leaving the camps? Third, attention was given to the path out of the camp. What options were available to residents and inmates? To what extent did sequential stays in multiple camps occur? How did the strategies of the "agents" shape the options available, and to what degree did those affected exercise agency, and in what form? This third aspect, in particular, raised the question of "life after the camp," a topic that, with regard to camps in the Soviet zone, had previously been almost entirely neglected in the scholarship.

It became clear at a very early stage that camps in the Soviet zone of Austria could not be studied solely through the lens of "official" archival documentation. The perspectives of residents and inmates, as well as those of the local population, played an essential complementary role, particularly with regard to "smaller spaces of memory" and their cultivation by local individuals and initiatives. Accordingly, the fourth part of the project (Module IV) focused on "local memory" in order to open up these perspectives as sources for research and to document them. Key questions included the following: What knowledge about occupation-era camps still exists at the local level? How has it been recorded, preserved, and cultivated? What role does remembrance of these camps play in today's culture of memory, especially in relation to the commemoration of

23 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

camps from the Nazi era? And what value do these memories hold for research into the camps themselves? Over the course of the project, numerous local-level insights emerged around specific camps, significantly contributing to the supplementation and expansion of the "official" documentation produced by the "agents."

A fifth area of research (Module V) emerged from a closer examination of the situation surrounding one particularly relevant "agent," namely the Soviet occupying power. It seemed reasonable to assume that in other Soviet-occupied parts of Europe, such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or the Soviet occupation zone of Germany (SBZ), practices similar to those observed in Austria were applied, and that these regions might even need to be considered as interconnected in terms of camp structures. Accordingly, this dimension could not be excluded from the analysis; indeed, it proved essential for a proper understanding of the camp system in Austria.

Contributions and findings of the research project

The implementation of the research efforts, as well as the research questions outlined above, find their first presentation and response in the four contributions to the present volume. In his article "Soviet Policy and Administration of Refugee Issues in the Context of the Early Cold War," Dieter Bacher presents findings on Soviet refugee and repatriation policy, thereby providing a necessary framework for understanding the camp system established in postwar occupied Austria, particularly with regard to the role of the Soviet Union as an "agent." His contribution demonstrates that numerous Soviet bodies and administrative authorities were involved in the establishment and management of camps, often pursuing markedly divergent agendas. It also reveals the various influences that shaped the planning and establishment of camp structures and shows how, above all, the evolution of Soviet repatriation efforts continually altered both camp infrastructure and its functions.

In "Landscapes of Encampment – Spaces and Categories of Internment and Accommodation: A Systematic Survey," Katharina Bergmann-Pfleger outlines the research conducted within Module I, which focused on the identification, documentation, and spatial localization of individual camps, an endeavor regarded as the foundational basis of the project. She emphasizes that both the availability and the nature of source material posed considerable challenges, as fragmentary archival records primarily reflected the perspective of the "agents," namely the administrative authorities responsible for operating the camps. These documents exhibited significant gaps, particularly with regard to everyday life within the camps. To supplement these administrative sources and to enrich local

memory, various forms of chronicles, as well as the evaluation of existing oral history interviews and newly conducted witness testimonies, were used (Module IV). Bergmann-Pfleger also addresses additional challenges such as geographical localization and dating before presenting, for the first time, the 247 camps identified within the framework of the Encampment project in tabular form. Finally, through several case studies, she subjects selected camps to both typological and relational analysis.

Focusing on Vienna, Anne Unterwurzacher presents findings from research Modules II and III in her article "Invisible Makeshift Accommodation: Administrative Challenges in Vienna, Places and Living Conditions." By examining the administrative difficulties involved in accommodating people in the Soviet sectors of the city, she illustrates the tension between the two "agents," the Austrian authorities and the Soviet occupying power. From the perspective of the Viennese authorities, the Soviets acted rigidly within their sectors, making arbitrary decisions and at times intentionally remaining inactive. With the official closure of refugee camps beginning in January 1946, accommodation in urban homeless shelters gained importance. The article also sheds light on the living conditions faced by people in these makeshift shelters, also referred to as "Austrian camps" (*Österreicherlager*).

In his contribution "Migration and Settlement in Different Zones: A Cross-Border Comparative Study on Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary," Hannes Leidinger addresses issues from Module V and focuses on camp accommodation after the end of the Second World War in Austria's Central and Eastern European neighboring countries. This research approach is particularly relevant because the Central Group of Soviet Forces (TsGV), which replaced the Red Army's former front organization at the end of May 1945, was responsible not only for the re-emerging Alpine Republic of Austria but also for Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The comparative analysis draws in part on Hungarian scholarly literature and archival documents from Berlin and Moscow and is supplemented by sources and situation reports from the Soviet occupation zone in Germany. The study examines, among other issues, the conditions and treatment of various groups, including repatriates and victims of the "Third Reich," as well as displaced persons, resettlers, prisoners of war, Nazi war criminals, and other "politically suspect" individuals, from the perspective of Moscow and the new authorities in Central and Eastern Europe. Particular attention is also given to the continuous use of accommodation and internment sites across historical junctures.

The contributions offer insight into the research findings of the aforementioned FWF project while also highlighting aspects that may serve as points of departure for further investigation. At the same time, the articles provide answers

to many of the questions posed in the research design, while demonstrating, due to the fragmentary nature of the sources, that others cannot be fully addressed.

An overview of all 247 camps documented within the project is also available on the *Encampment* website[24], which has been online since June 2025. The site offers a more detailed view of a landscape of camps that, although still requiring further elaboration in many respects, has been outlined in its broad contours through this initial body of work.

Website *Encampment*

24 www.encampment-bik.lbg.ac.at.

Articles

Dieter Bacher

Soviet Policy and Administration of Refugee Issues and Camps in the Context of the Early Cold War and Soviet Repatriation

During the last months of the Second World War, the position of the Soviet side toward postwar displaced persons (DPs) and refugee camps seemed to be simple: there should be no need for them. Like the Western Allies, the Soviet Union had a clear plan for how to deal with the expected hundreds of thousands of DPs, refugees and expellees on the territory of the former "German Reich."[1] During the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the Allies had agreed upon a secret additional agreement to the official decisions of the conference. Non-German-speaking DPs and refugees who were encountered in the occupied territories were to be repatriated as quickly as possible, on transports organized by Allied forces. For German-speaking expellees, mainly from regions in Eastern Europe, this would not be an option, as their countries of origin would consider them "collaborators" of the Nazi regime and "traitors," and would not take them back. The solution would thus be to transfer them to occupied Germany for resettlement.[2]

1 This research for this article was produced in the context of the FWF-funded research project Encampment: Camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone (P 34085), led by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Barbara Stelzl-Marx and conducted at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War, in cooperation with the Department of History at the University of Graz and the Ilse Arlt Institute for Social Inclusion Research at St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences.

2 Cf. Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); Florian Freund, Bertrand Perz and Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeiter und Zwangsarbeiterinnen auf dem Gebiet der Republik Österreich 1939–1945* (Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004). (Veröffentlichungen der Österreichischen Historikerkommission 26/1); Ulrike Goeken-Haidl, *Der Weg zurück. Die Repatriierung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener und Zwangsarbeiter während und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2006); Dieter Bacher, "Eine neue Heimat. Eine Motivanalyse in Österreich verbliebener Zwangsarbeiter anhand des Aktenbestandes des 'Österreichischen Versöhnungsfonds'," in *Zwangsarbeiter in Österreich 1939–1945 und ihr Nachkriegsschicksal. Ergebnisse der Auswertung des Aktenbestandes des "Österreichischen Versöhnungsfonds." Ein Zwischenbericht*, edited by Dieter Bacher and Stefan Karner (Innsbruck – Vienna – Bolzano: Studienverlag, 2013), 271–323.

Considering the situation in the occupied regions, the plan sounded reasonable. The measures were to be taken swiftly, without the need to use too many resources to accommodate and supply a large number of people at their current places of living. In this way, Allied military structures, occupation administrations, and also the new local administrations of the "liberated," war-torn territories would not need to raise resources for them. Other expected problems, such as public security or questions concerning legal status or work permits, would also be solved instantly—that was the expectation and the plan, in theory. But could this plan appropriately respond to the challenges Soviet forces faced in postwar Austria during the occupation period? In retrospect, it could not. The number of DPs, refugees, expellees, and other groups who were in urgent need of provision and housing was too large to be instantly resettled or repatriated, and they stayed much longer in the zone than the Soviet side had expected. Moreover, many Soviet "repatriants" needed to cross the Soviet zone in the course of the first stage of their repatriation, making structures on site necessary. For these structures, proper administrative arrangements were needed. As the occupation forces considered the situation of DPs, refugees, and expellees to be their responsibility and within their authority (for the Western powers, at least until the end of the 1940s; for the Soviet side, until 1955), this administration had to be part of the Soviet occupation apparatus, including its military, public, as well as intelligence and security forces.[3]

It is an interesting question whether the Soviet side during the war really did not see a need for camp structures for the postwar period. The decisions of Yalta and Potsdam suggest that this necessity was in fact not perceived, and perhaps even deliberately avoided by the Soviet side: in Yalta, it was decided to send non-German-speaking refugees, i. e., displaced persons, home as soon as possible, and in Potsdam, it was determined that German-speaking minorities from several Eastern European countries would be resettled to Germany. For Austria, as the Allies had concluded, this meant that the housing and provision of these groups were to be kept at a necessary minimum, both in terms of time and resources.

The developments after May 1945, however, tell a different story, also in the Soviet occupation zone. Camp structures were needed, as was recognized. Therefore, the more appropriate question is whether the Soviet side saw the use of camps and their administration as a "temporary," improvised solution in Austria, or as an integral part of their repatriation and resettlement efforts there. This question can be answered to a certain extent by taking a closer look at the administration of Soviet camps in Austria.

3 See Gabriela Stieber, *Nachkriegsflüchtlinge in Kärnten und der Steiermark* (Graz: Leykam 1997).

Which Soviet bodies were responsible for camp structures in the Soviet zone of Austria? What main strategies concerning the establishment and use of camps did they follow? And what factors influenced the development of Soviet administrative structures? Drawing on existing research on Soviet repatriation and refugee policy in postwar Austria and on available Soviet documentation[4], this article seeks to answer these main questions in order to provide an overview of Soviet camp administration and policy as an aspect of the postwar and early Cold War period in Austria.

"Forerunner Structures" of Camps in the Soviet Occupation Zone

Like the Western occupation powers, the Soviets also had the advantage that they could develop their efforts and structures on already existing sites, resources and "know-how." The Soviets obviously followed the example of their system of "frontline camps" for the repatriations and resettlements in postwar Austria, a system they had already developed during the war. Administered by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (*Narodnyy Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del*, NKVD) and its Main Administration for Prisoners of War and Internees (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Voennoplennykh i Internirovannykh*, GUPVI), these camps were organized in the hinterland of the front.

The primary task of these camps was to receive and register people who were picked up or captured along the front lines, to provide them with basic care for a few days, and to prepare them for further transport. The camps were not stationary but mobile, as they had to move with the frontline. They were either set up in a makeshift manner within existing infrastructure, such as buildings, or erected in open fields using the simplest of means. The Soviets referred to these places as "reception camps," "assembly points," or "front transit camps." For captured soldiers of the German Wehrmacht, for example, these sites were the first stop during their captivity, from where they were taken by rail to the sta-

4 Soviet archival materials on Soviet refugee and DP administration and on repatriation policy and administration in Austria can be found mainly in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (Gosudarstvennyy Archiv Rossiyskoy Federatsiy, GARF) and the Russian State Military Archive (Rossiyskyy Gosudarstvennyy Voennyy Archiv, RGVA), in the holdings of various Soviet public administrations: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstvo inostrannykh del, MID), the Ministry of State Security (Ministerstvo Goduarstvennoy Besopasnosti, MGB), the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstvo Vrutrennykh Del, MVD) and the Ministry of Defense (Ministerstvo Oborony, MO). Large parts of the files on the system of filtration are also kept at the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service (Tsentralnyy Archiv Federalnoy Slushbi Besopasnosti, TsA FSB) and are therefore not available for research. Due to the impossibility of conducting archival research in Russian archives for Western historians since February 2022, published collections of files in Russian have become an important alternative.

tionary GUPVI camps in the Soviet Union. Soviet civilian forced laborers who came into contact with Soviet military units were also gathered there to organize further steps toward their repatriation.[5]

Some of these "front camps" remained in place even after the frontline had ceased to exist in May 1945 and were used for various purposes by the Soviet military and the NKVD, such as transit points for arrested officials of the Nazi regime or for the continuing repatriation of Soviet civilian forced laborers and prisoners of war. They served as a way to bridge the initial period after the end of the war, before the Soviet administration could establish other structures.

A second important basis for Soviet postwar camps was the camp infrastructure of wartime Nazi Germany on Austrian territory. From 1938 to 1945, camps had been part of life for many people living under Nazi rule. On the one hand, they served to isolate parts of the population for political, ideological or racial reasons, such as inmates of concentration camps or foreign civilian forced laborers, who were often also interned in camps. On the other hand, even for "Germans," living in a camp was not necessarily uncommon or negative—camps could provide accommodation during vacations (for example, camps of the "Kraft durch Freude" movement [KdF]), were used to house workers during their one-year labor service in the Reich Labor Service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*, RAD), or served as temporary housing for homeless people. And, of course, the military forces of the German Reich also needed barracks on the territory of the "Ostmark." These requirements were met by the construction of a network of camp infrastructures that could accommodate millions of people.[6]

This infrastructure, despite war damage, did not disappear in May 1945. The Soviet administration incorporated large parts of it. Even former prisoner-of-war and concentration camps were adapted to Soviet needs, such as the former *Stammlager* (Stalag) XVII A Kaisersteinbruch[7] or the camps in Gusen[8]—concentration camps within the Mauthausen camp system.

5 On these frontline camps, see especially Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI. Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956* (Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 38–42; see also Föderale Archivagentur der Russischen Föderation et al. (eds.), *Orte des Gewahrsams von deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in der Sowjetunion (1941–1956). Findbuch* (Dresden – Kassel – Moscow: Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten et al., 2010).

6 See Marc Buggeln and Michael Wildt, "Lager im Nationalsozialismus. Gemeinschaft und Zwang," in *Die Welt der Lager. Zur "Erfolgsgeschichte" einer Institution*, edited by Bettina Greiner and Alan Kramer (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013), 166–202.

7 On the Stalag XVII A Kaisersteinbruch, see especially Hubert Speckner, *In der Gewalt des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenenlager in der "Ostmark" 1939 bis 1945* (Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003). (Kriegsfolgen-Forschung 3).

8 On the camps in Gusen, see Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Bd. 4: Flossenbürg. Mauthausen. Ravensbrück* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006), 371–81.

The Soviet Union itself and its use of camps must be seen as the third factor, as the use of them was already common practice within its sphere. In 1945, thousands of camps existed in the USSR as part of the two large camp administrations within the NKVD: the "Main Administration of Camps" (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerey*, GULag)[9] system for convicts and political prisoners, and the already mentioned GUPVI[10]. Considering that the NKVD and its successor, the Ministry of the Interior (*Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del*, MVD), were also the structures responsible for the front camps and postwar repatriation, it seems plausible that camps were regarded as the appropriate instrument for addressing postwar challenges in the Soviet zone in Austria, since such structures had already proven their effectiveness within the Soviet sphere.

Soviet administrations for camps in Austria

Besides the camps for Soviet administrative and military personnel that were administered by the occupation forces and the Red/Soviet Army themselves, those related to repatriation and resettlement were administered by occupation authorities in close coordination with the NKVD/MVD. During the first postwar year, the organization of existing camps for prisoners of war captured in the last days of the war, as well as for repatriation and resettlement, was partly the responsibility of the Red Army and partly of the so-called "inner troops" of the NKVD. These units emerged from former NKVD border troops that had joined Red Army units as the frontline moved westward. Organizationally, they were part of the NKVD due to their origin as border protection units, but their commander-in-chief was subordinated not only to the NKVD but also to the chiefs of staff of the Red Army.[11] Throughout the war, these troops operated behind enemy lines to prevent diversion and sabotage, as well as to capture deserters from their own ranks. They were also primarily responsible for collecting and administering certain groups of civilians, such as Soviet citizens among the displaced persons. In this way, they were part of the

9 Ralf Stettner, *"Archipel GULag." Stalins Zwangslager. Terrorinstrument und Wirtschaftsgigant. Entstehung, Organisation und Funktion des sowjetischen Lagersystems 1928–1956* (Paderborn et al: Schöningh, 1996).

10 Cf. Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI.*

11 Cf. Natal'ja Eliseeva, "Zum Schutz des Hinterlands der Roten Armee. Der Einsatz der NKVD-Truppen in Österreich von April bis Juli 1945," in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich. Sowjetische Besatzung 1945–1955. Beiträge*, edited by Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx and Alexander Tschubarjan (Graz – Vienna – Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), 91–104; Nikita Petrov, "Die Inneren Truppen des NKVD-MVD im System der sowjetischen Repressionsorgane in Österreich 1945–1946," in *Die Rote Armee in Österreich*, edited by Karner, Stelzl-Marx and Tschubarjan, 219–40.