

## **Insecurities in European Cities:**

### **The Case of Vienna**

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#### **1. Governance: From Municipal Capitalism to the Welfare State**

In retrospect (and in international comparison) Vienna appears as a well organized, densely regulated and orderly city in many respects, with her almost 70 administrative departments which were (and still are) quite effective and successful in coping with most sorts of “fordist” issues and challenges: Guaranteeing broad access to many social services and benefits, providing remedies and facilities for many sorts of difficult situations and crises, providing a largely satisfactory social, commercial and urban infrastructure, creating and promoting favourable preconditions for individual and collective consumption. In return, this performance was honoured by a considerable degree of acceptance and approval from the side of the population.

In keeping with a longstanding (centennial) tradition of “municipal capitalism” and the “Red Vienna” of the inter-war years there is still (and more than ever) a wide range of welfare and service institutions, programs and offers that has undergone further differentiation and extension during the 1980s and 1990s. The range of agencies comprises both municipal and state run programs and facilities, advisory and information centres, hotlines etc, but also offers that are provided by private and/or confessional organizations. The majority of agencies and programs focus on clients in trouble, on special target groups, or on concrete phenomena and consequences of marginalization – and it is only a minority of agencies and programs that put some emphasis on community integration and community relations on a neighbourhood level. Obviously there are quite a number of measures, programs and facilities that contribute to social integration and prevention in a rather broad and comprehensive sense, but are not actually considered as strategies of (crime) prevention in the first place. The concept of prevention is used relatively rarely, mainly with regard to drug and/or health related problems and when addressing juveniles as a special target group, but has been recently applied also for situations of actual or impending loss of accommodation.

## **2. The Viennese Welfare State: A Culture of Inclusion rather than Participation**

In Vienna the fordist era has been lasting until the 1990s (and beyond), and only lately certain modifications and restructuring can be observed, which up to now have little in common with the sort of neo-liberal turnaround that has occurred in many other west-European countries and cities. (To a certain degree this refusal of mainstream tendencies is also opposed to certain policy trends that partly succeeded on the national political level.) Thus, Vienna still appears as a city that is known for having maintained its welfare infrastructure, and also makes use of that image for her positioning in the international competition of cities. Public transport, public education, institutions and programs of adult education, a broad range of social services and counselling programs are available. Furthermore, an extending scope of leisure time facilities, sports and recreational areas, cultural attractions, and popular events are accessible. Other than in many European cities Vienna witnessed no essential polarization and divide in the 1980s and 1990s. Policy efforts at preventing dramatic segregation, decay and social conflict, especially in districts and quarters where there is a certain concentration of disadvantaged or marginalized groups, were more or less successful. Tendencies of “*Verslumung*” (quarters turning into slums), as diagnosed in the early 1990s for some founders’ period quarters were stopped or diminished. However, in some respects a reproduction of longstanding disparities has occurred. It is especially one pattern of discrimination and marginalization that has been persisting since the 1970s. Immigrants (the so called guest workers of the 1970s and their successors) still hold a rather marginal position in Viennese society, and opportunities for social integration and cultural participation are altogether unsatisfactory. Legal and social discrimination both on the labour and housing market, and also with regard to access to social benefits are seen as largely self evident and hardly ever discussed as problematic issues. Generally speaking, the Viennese type of local welfare state (and the corresponding mode of social inclusion) is based on the authorities’ providing a largely satisfactory (social) infrastructure rather than on the pillars of civil society and on arrangements of participation from the side of the subjects.

Apart from the special issue of immigration the dominant pattern of social integration (inclusion) can be summarized as follows: A considerable amount of pragmatic inclusion for the (Austrian) population, a policy that seeks to avoid (or reduce) segregation and conflict, and a relatively low level of actual (political, social movements, grass roots) participation, can be described as the specific pattern of a local welfare state that was established and developed without a strong basis in civil society.

## **3. Some conclusions, and explanations**

Obviously some useful prerequisites that have proved plausible when it comes to explaining the emergence of insecurities, anxieties, and fear of crime in late modern societies and cities, also exist in Vienna. The most relevant can be summarized as follows:

1/ A process of individualization has continued for several decades, with the usual consequences that have been described for most European societies: Dissolving of traditional milieus of class and status, emergence and spread of more sporadic patterns of association, according to life style and “distinction”. The whole complex also has its effects on the system of formal and informal controls, and late modern

individuals are no longer subject to the former arrangements and restraints of informal control, and “authority”. Changed life styles also affect the public sphere, and public space in particular. Informal controls on a local level are weak, in this respect Viennese society (and Viennese residential quarters) are not so different from many other European cities.

2/ Certain effects of globalisation have affected, and still do affect, Austrian society, and especially the eastern region of the country, due to the geopolitical situation and proximity to the former “Iron Curtain”. In the years following the opening of the eastern borders (1989/1992) the new mobility caused considerable changes, with regard to migration, and of course also affecting the regional labour and housing markets, tourism etc., with some of these changes causing “insecurities” and irritations, at least for the concerned segments of the Austrian population. For some urban areas waves of immigration have resulted in a substantial exchange of the local population. However, there was a return to normalcy and stability by the mid-1990s, after more restrictive legal regulations curbed immigration, and took some pressure from the city’s housing market, and its integrative capacity in general. But it is also some other, more recent aspects and consequences of globalisation that ought to be mentioned: Increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers came to Austria in the 1990s and since, with many of them finding themselves in a rather precarious situation, since political asylum is only granted to a small minority, and the others are defined as “refugees for economic reasons” (*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*). Due to the precarious and irregular status of this population there is no factual access to the official labour market and social insurance, to regular sources of income, and to social and cultural participation in Austrian society. Thus, parts of this “redundant” population engage in various fields of the shadows economy, black markets, illegal services, drug trafficking etc. (Vienna as the only large city provides the most favourable opportunity structures for these activities, and consequently is the most attractive turf and action space for the respective populations.) Of course the visible presence and the deviant activities related to these groups have caused some concern among agencies, and insecurities among groups of the local population that are confronted with the disturbing side-effects of illegal enterprises.

3/ There have been rising rates of unemployment, and an increase of precarious employment (compared to the preceding decades of fordist policy), implying that the segment of the population that can no longer or only with some difficulty maintain a moderate level of consumption is growing, even if available survey data do not provide striking evidence on the subject. (The proportion of Viennese citizens who say they feel their financial situation is somewhat critical or who define their own situation as coming close to poverty has not changed much over the last years.) Another aspect of plausible insecurity relates to the situation of the younger age brackets whose entering the labour market has become more problematic than was the case for preceding generations and cohorts. Vocational training and education no longer guarantee satisfactory jobs and income, leading to insecurities with regard to vocational careers, life and career planning etc. - There is no satisfactory information on the growth of marginal groups (for instance: homeless persons), but numbers can be assumed to have increased since the 1990s, even if acute symptoms of poverty become visible and concentrated only in specific spots of the urban landscape (homeless, beggars).

4/ The transition from “social partnership” and “consensus” to “conflict democracy” on the national level after the 1999 elections and the formation of the VP/FP government coalition in early 2000 could be assumed to cause and intensify manifold insecurities in those who are interested in a stable and solid political regime, and especially among those who have been well represented in the old social partnership model and by the traditional institutions of social partnership, and who now are at risk of losing some of their influence. It is also the ongoing political debates that could be supposed to create and spread a sense of insecurity, with their permanent subtext of signifying or rather suggesting, that many things will have to change in the near future, and stressing the necessity of reforms in many fields of politics (especially: impending cuts in order to secure the pensions and health system, limiting free access to higher education etc.)

5/ Last, but not least, the crime rate has been rising rapidly in the Vienna region since 2000/2001, especially with regard to property offences, and risks of victimization have also increased (for instance: theft from motor vehicles, pocket picking, robbery/mugging). Of course concern with this trend that came as a surprise, after a period of relatively stable crime figures, has also been reflected in media reports, and to a certain extent: in political debates on issues of security, police performance etc.

On the other hand, some other useful ingredients to insecurities and anxieties are largely or completely absent:

1/ There is no plausible scenario of urban decay or decline (suggesting that the city’s future prospects are in question or that the city might move into a negative trajectory). In contrary, there is a general discourse on the high quality of living, and most of the time the aspect of safety/security has been explicitly stressed: Vienna as a safe city (also: the social image of the city, ecological standards, cultural life, leisure time facilities and events as important factors...) Occasional city rankings support the slogan of Vienna as a very liveable city, and are proudly presented in the media.

2/ The urban infrastructure (transport, energy, services, administration etc.) is hardly ever perceived as deteriorating, unreliable, every day routines are rarely impaired by various breakdowns of the technical and social infrastructure;

3/ Extreme (spatial) concentrations of social and physical disorder (slums, no go areas, ungovernable spaces, abandoned spaces) are missing.

4/ There is no plausible scenario of moral decline and crisis;

5/ There is no understanding of marginal and residual groups as “dangerous classes” in a strict sense: Of course there are “undesirable” individuals and groups that are more or less rejected and/or considered outsiders, but not really understood as dangerous and/or a class. (“Gangs from the east”, “black drug dealers” might come relatively close to such stereotypes and appear regularly as scapegoats and troublemakers in media reports and political debates on security, but the stereotype is not primarily constructed around a notion of danger and menace);

6/ Violence as a significant aspect of urban life is largely absent and there is no obsession with aggression in public spaces, hooligans, gangs of juveniles, and political and/or xenophobic riots have not occurred during the last decades;

7/ The increase of crime and victimisation relates primarily to property offences (theft, burglary, vandalism), and not to violence and other intimidating transactions. Crime is not linked to “confrontation”, and the distribution of victimisation risks seems relatively fair, according to survey data (general urban risk rather than specific groups bearing an unacceptable load); and the more serious risks are obviously connected to specific milieus and life styles.

8/ There have been relatively few media reports and no effective political campaigns on insecurity in the late 1990s and around the millennium. (The situation was different in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the label of “crime tourism” was introduced. However, the absence of crime as a major concern has changed somewhat in recent years.)

Considering the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research the second set of factors seems to bear more significance, and largely suspends or neutralizes the interplay of forces and tendencies that can be assumed to promote and to intensify “insecurities” and “anxieties”. Some recent survey data that were collected in summer and autumn 2003 (based on a total of 8300 interviews) may serve to illustrate some aspects of Viennese living conditions, also relating to issues of security, and the way they are evaluated by the population.

73 per cent of respondents say they feel safe with regard to crime risks in their residential surrounding, 18 per cent are ambivalent/undecided, and 9 per cent say they feel (rather) unsafe. (Corresponding figures from the quantitative INSEC-survey show a proportion of 12 to 16 per cent feeling (rather) unsafe in their quarter, indicating that the respondents’ evaluation of local security is somewhat more critical in our research sites.) The survey data altogether suggest that the quality of living has improved rather than changed for the worse during the last years, especially considering the public transport network, shopping opportunities, housing quality, leisure time opportunities, design of public space, green areas, and cultural life. However, there are two more aspects and domains of urban life that are supposed to have definitely changed for the worse: Road traffic and employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

Another survey that is conducted annually<sup>2</sup> on the national level, shows that perceptions of security have been rather stable over the last decade. Even if the data point to a slight decrease in the population’s sense of security when compared to the previous year, what is more surprising is the fact that the existing patterns and distributions have remained much the same for quite some time, regardless of the specific events, crises and changes concerning the political, economic and social conditions. Furthermore, the level of (in)security proves practically the same in the city of Vienna and in small communities (with a population up to 5000). Thus, there is no evidence of specific “urban insecurities” and fears. Considering socio-demographic variables the women, the retired, the less educated, and those with low income are somewhat more insecure than the others. The considerable political turbulences in 2003 (strikes, protests and demonstrations, discussions on the pensions reform, rising crime figures, further increase in unemployment etc. on the national level) have produced no more than minor effects on the population’s

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<sup>1</sup> Source: IFES, *Leben und Lebensqualität in Wien*, Wien 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Giller, *Sicherheitsbarometer – Aktuelle Daten zum Sicherheitsgefühl der österreichischen Bevölkerung* (BMI), Wien 2003

general sense of security. (The item used in the survey does not relate to crime but addresses the respondent's feelings and evaluation with regard to safety/security.)

#### **4. Conditions of (In)Security Revisited:**

##### **Semantics of Vernacular Discontent and the Long Shadow of the Risk Society**

In the case of Vienna existing (and increased) urban crime risks and experiences of victimization do not affect the population's sense of security so much. The long shadow of the risk society is not so pervasive in the empirical data, and there seems to be no wide-spread awareness of "living in insecure times". A clear majority feel rather safe, and to the others insecurity and fear of crime are not primarily related to distinct perceptions of urban danger and risk, but are embedded in a more comprehensive syndrome of dissatisfaction (actual living conditions not corresponding to personal demands and aspirations, negative evaluation of local social change), and a more pronounced awareness of disorder. The majority's sense of security obviously coincides with the widespread impression that symptoms of social and physical disorder are sporadic and not so dramatic in the subjects' residential quarters and in the other relevant action spaces, and that there is no accumulation and extreme intensification of disorder in certain problematic settings and estates. This pronounced sense of security has remained relatively constant over the last years, and various political and economic transformations, both on the national and international level, have caused no more than minor irritations of the population's basic confidence. Furthermore there is a high level of trust in the system that is believed to provide urban infrastructure, reasonable living conditions and welfare state provisions in many respects. (Key words: Housing conditions, shopping opportunities, leisure time facilities, public transport, ecological standards, health care facilities.) "Trust in the system" has not (yet) been negatively affected by the substantial changes in the field of national politics that occurred around the millennium (transition from consensus to conflict after the breakdown of the big coalition government).

Empirical research in the framework of INSEC shows that the two (interrelated) factors "trust in the system/infrastructure" and "moderate level of disorder in public space/on estates" obviously support the population's sense of security. Furthermore, Viennese stereotypes of insecurity & crime (for instance as being "imported" from abroad) have not yet resulted in the construction of a "dangerous class", and to specific insecurities related to this class. (Even if there is a broad implicit consensus, also reflected in and reinforced by many media reports, that the recent increase in crime rates is mainly due to property offences committed by travelling and mobile offenders, and to drug related crimes committed by foreigners not belonging to the regular population etc., the stigmatised groups are not perceived as "dangerous" in a strict sense, and xenophobic attitudes and discourses rarely mix up with relevant discourses on and sentiments of "fear" in a strict sense.)

Considered from that angle, Vienna's hidden agenda of prevention (promoted and realized by means of agencies that hardly ever refer to the concept explicitly) has proved quite successful over the last decade: Focusing on integration with regard to immigrants (*Integrationsfonds*), soft urban renewal and area management (*Gebietsbetreuungen*), and preventing both rapid exchange of population and extreme

concentrations of disadvantaged strata in certain quarters and districts of the city. The empirical evidence that has been collected in the framework of INSEC basically confirms and supports some of the findings from other surveys: The quality of living in the city of Vienna is evaluated highly by a clear majority of the population, and existing problems and troubles are not primarily presented and complained about in a semantics of insecurity, anxiety, or fear of crime. In the Viennese ideological framework “global anxieties” function as a sort of counter-weight or a contrast medium rather than as amplifiers of “local insecurities”: Contrasting the scenarios of real and imaginary “global disorder”, as provided and reinforced in the media (and to a certain extent: academic discourses) makes the vernacular troubles and turbulences shrink to mere nuisances that are accepted more easily.

In and after a decade of substantial and accelerated social, (geo)political and economic change (especially: opening of the eastern borders followed by increased immigration to the country; Austria’s integration into the European Community; various effects of globalisation on the national economy, the state apparatus and on society in general; government’s efforts to cut public expenditures and continued discussions on the necessity of restructuring the welfare, and especially the pensions system; break up of the big coalition and formation of the present government; the shift from the traditional Austrian arrangements of “consensus democracy” and “social partnership” to a political system that is reshaped by tendencies of polarization, confrontation, divide and dissensus), there still seems to be a broad (ideological) consensus about living in a comparatively safe society. Compared to earlier decades, the traditional and fundamental differences between different groups, strata and age brackets have become blurred and levelled, and obviously the subject’s feelings of insecurity can no longer be described (and understood) by referring to a very limited scope of factors, especially gender, age, education and socio-economic status. More “individualized” and contingent patterns of perception have emerged, with some of them associated to the above mentioned “syndrome of discontent” rather than to issues of crime and urban danger, or to “global anxieties”.

## **5. Remarks about Crime Prevention in Vienna**

In this chapter we have tried to collect information about the organization in the city of Vienna dealing with crime prevention; we have described their activities, resources and their understanding of preventive measures on different levels. Furthermore, we have compiled the provisions and decrees concerning crime prevention on the federal and local level. Finally, we have evaluated the activities of the organization in order to understand the culture of crime prevention in Vienna.

On the map of crime prevention in Vienna, there are many blank dots and further research is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Concerning the preventive strategies of the residents we have only little information and eventually there are more organisations on the level of the City than we realize dealing with crime prevention. Based on the information we have collected, crime prevention appears to be a more individualistic than systematic and general approach in Vienna. Some persons inside the police and NPOs try to promote this perspective, having however to cope with small resources and budget cuts. Especially the persons who are active in our research sites are hesitating in defining their

activities as (crime) preventive. We could not see, that there is a public discourse on crime prevention in Vienna like in other cities. Prevention is still a private problem like the phenomenon of fear of crime and Vienna is a good example for a city in which both phenomenon did not (yet) become a public problem. Even though the Freedom Party (together with some newspapers) pushes the theme of crime and criminal foreigners during election campaigns, it became not a permanent topic in the public discourse and feeling. Evaluation of the activities, approaches and results of the preventive programmes is (with some exceptions) not common. When there is repression, there is automatically prevention, at least in the viewpoint of the police officers. The welfare state with its responsibility for (crime) problems is not dead in Vienna and especially the different units of the Fund Social Vienna are a type of penal welfare organisation.

What has been stated in the “problem profile of Vienna” for the limited significance of community policing in Vienna is also true for the whole phenomenon of crime prevention: reasons for that are “mainly rooted in the fact that on the one side ‘*problem pressure*’ has been moderate most of the time, i.e. in many districts and neighbourhoods (and especially in most residential areas) the local crime and disorder problems do not surpass the usual load of trouble that is experienced by urban residents, and can be handled in a quite effective way by means of conventional police resources and strategies. Moreover the political and governmental structures and institutions in Vienna can largely get along without participatory arrangements and active cooperation on the side of the citizens. (This is perfectly in keeping with some widespread popular attitudes and expectations toward politics and authorities: they are supposed to solve, to manage and to administer problems in a competent and reasonable way without having to rely on citizens’ participation.) Furthermore, questions of public security are understood as (exclusively or mainly) being the responsibility of the police authorities. According to that sort of perception, a municipal/communal responsibility is only plausible where police or government regulations obviously appear unsuitable to solve urgent or structural problems.”

This situation seems to be similar to that of France where still a majority of the French still takes the intervention of the state in the solution of problems for granted. They rely on public services, never question their costs, and the image of civil servants remains positive. In brief, as it has been reported, the national culture does not encourage people to resort to selfhelp.

Another feature of the Viennese crime prevention policy is their ‘defensive character’ compared to offensive preventive strategy in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in England and Wales. The Act imposes a statutory duty on the police and local authorities to establish and maintain crime and disorder partnerships and strategies. A good example for the defensive character is the activity of the Crime Advisory Service, offering information to the residents of the city in order to protect themselves against (mainly property) crime.

The activities of the Fund Social Vienna, we have described in our study, are examples of interventions of organisations which are active on behalf of the city of Vienna, focused on patients who are addicted and users of illegal drugs. Many of these clients have been criminalized in the past because of their addiction

and have been sentenced to several detentions in prisons. It is the task of the fund to take care of these patients simultaneously with the punitive interventions of the police and/or the courts. This is typically for the approach of the punitive welfare state in dealing with crime: To punish offenders and to help and force them to alter their habits, their lifestyle, their working moral etc. The combination of the threat of penal sanctions and measures of care or social prevention should 'convince' the deviants to a 'problem absorbing adaptation' of behaviour.

Another interesting feature is the reluctance of organisations in using the term prevention. The Association of Youth Centres is an example for that and simultaneously an other example for the continuity of penal welfare thinking in Vienna. It stands in opposition to the rising new criminologists of 'everyday life' like who accompany liberal concepts of crime control.

For experts thinking in predicaments of penal welfarism crime is not a normal form of behaviour, is not routinely produced by the normal patterns of social and economic life. For them – like the interviewee – crime is a deviation from normal civilized conduct and is explicable in terms of faulty socialization or social conditions in general. This perspective is still dominant in Vienna and the reluctance upon crime prevention is a consequence of this 'modern' (in opposition to a 'late modern') approach.

To sum up, it can be said that the thinking in terms of penal welfarism, established after 1945 in Austria, is less damaged in this country and in Vienna than in many other EU-countries. The new liberal concept of the 'advanced liberalism' to maintain law and order is of small(er) relevance in Austria. The 'advanced liberal programmes' changes the subject of governance conceived under this regime, located in a variety of heterogeneous and overlapping networks of personal concern and investment - for oneself, one's family, one's neighbourhood, one's community, one's workplace, is not the order of the day. The 'tyranny of activity', this phenomenon of new liberalism, is not yet fully developed in all parts of the Austrian society. Examples where we can observe liberal developments are the health system or the reforms concerning the retirement funds as well as Austria's universities. The leading idea behind this reforms is the question how much money will I have to invest personally for my pension, for my health or for the right to study at a public university? It is an interesting fact that in the field of law and order and crime control this discussion has been until now of little importance. The political field of law and order is especially in Vienna still an island in a more and more liberal society and it is an open question how long the idea of penal welfarism will be dominant.

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