

THE EVACUATION AND FLIGHT OF GALICIAN REFUGEES IN THE HABSBUrg EMPIRE DURING WORLD WAR I: AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELOCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

As a result of war hostilities which began in the Habsburg Monarchy in 1914, migrations of the civilian population started, resulting from the movement of war refugees from the eastern front, i.e. Galicia, and also since May 1915 from the Italian front. Austria-Hungary had to face relocation and accommodation of hundreds of thousands of civilians, who were put in special refugee camps or outside of them in various towns and cities in the monarchy while being housed with their residents or in specially adapted buildings. The article shows selected aspects of the system of barrack camps created during the World War I in the Habsburg Monarchy, focusing on the efficiency of the system in the face of real challenges of the war period.

Keywords: refugees, World War I, evacuation, Austria-Hungary, refugee camps.

INTRODUCTION

During the World War I masses of civilians fled or were evacuated from Galicia. While fleeing was people's independent reaction to an extreme situation that war was, evacuation of civilians was related to ongoing hostilities in Galicia. It was then that a lot of civilians left their abodes and found themselves in a new, wartime reality, in exile.¹ The area where Galician ended up was vast: from easternmost territories of

¹ There is no place to put a current state of research in this field. Nevertheless, a main work in this subject need to be indicated, cf.: W. Mentzel, *Kriegsflüchtlinge in Cisleithanien im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Wien 1997 (unpublished manuscript in a collection of University of Vienna Library); idem, "Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Habsburgermonarchie während des Ersten Weltkrieges" [in:] *Aufnahmeland Österreich. Über den Umgang mit Massenflucht seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, Wien 2017, pp. 126–155; B.

their home crown land Galicia to the Alpine countries of the Habsburg Monarchy. In a consequence, a lot of them landed up in Cisleithania and Transleithania. The war refugees from Galicia were a heterogeneous group: they represented all social, ethnic, and religious groups inhabiting this crown land: Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Germans. It was not the only wave of war refugees which the Austrian government had to handle organizationally. From May 1915 refugees were also crowds of civilians from the Italian front open right after Italy declared war on Austria. That group was also diversified: it included Italians, Slovenians, and Croatians. In the course of war, new evacuations took place from Galicia in 1916 and 1917. Moreover, structures of defensive nature, like the Kraków Fortress, remained endangered and from there people were also evacuated in the spring of 1915.²

The civilians who had landed up in exile within the Habsburg Monarchy were accommodated in two main categories of places. The first one was refugee camps, specially arranged for provisional accommodation of civilians. Another category was places of temporary accommodation in the vicinity of the residents, created by adapting various buildings or renting out some apartments. The main difference was that in the first case the refugees remained at a distance from the locals and in the second one both groups had some contact.

This article aims to present the system of barrack camps for war refugees and to answer a few questions: How were the camps organized? What were the living conditions there like? To what extent did the system fulfil its role and how did it influence the state and the Austrians? The answers will be illustrated with examples, using unpublished archival sources mostly.³

Hofmann-Holter, "Abreisendmachung". *Jüdische Kriegsflüchtlinge in Wien 1914 bis 1923*, Wien 1995; F. Frizzera, *Cittadini dimezzati: I profughi trentini in Austria-Ungheria e in Italia (1914–1919)*, Bologna 2018; idem, "Refugees (Austria-Hungary)" [in:] *1914–1918-online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds. U. Daniel, P. Gatrell, O. Janz, H. Jones, J. Keene, A. Kramer, B. Nasson, Berlin 2017, <http://www.1914-1918-online.net/> [accessed: September 16, 2019]; R. Klein-Pejšová, "Beyond the 'Infamous Concentration Camps of the Old Monarchy': Jewish Refugee Policy from Wartime Austria-Hungary to Interwar Czechoslovakia," *Austrian History Yearbook* 2014, vol. 45, pp. 150–166; idem, "Between Refugees and the State: Hungarian Jewry and the Wartime Jewish Refugee Crisis in Austria-Hungary" [in:] *Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War*, eds. P. Gatrell, L. Zhvanko, Manchester 2017, pp. 156–176. The current state of research in a field of WW1 refugees in the Habsburg Monarchy one can find in introduction to the book: K. Ruszała, *Galijski eksodus: uchodźcy podczas I wojny światowej w monarchii Habsburgów*, Kraków 2020 (cf.: *Przegląd badań* [State of research]).

² The first trial of evacuation was held in September 1914, then the second one in November 1914. Cf.: B. Ogórek, "Ewakuacja mieszkańców Krakowa podczas I wojny światowej. Przebieg, próba kwantyfikacji, warunki życia ewakuowanych," *Krzysztofory – rocznik Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa* 2014, t. 32, s. 53–72; idem, *Niezatarte Piętno? Wpływ I wojny światowej na ludność miasta Krakowa*, Kraków 2018. In 1915 the city and fortress stayed under threat from potential Russian invasion and evacuations were undertaken on a smaller scale.

³ These arguments provoke a vivid and further discussion, which called also for multidisciplinary co-operation, like history with architecture, cf.: A. Senarclens de Grancy, "Different Housing Spaces: Space, Function, and Use of Barrack-Huts in World War I Refugee Camps," *Zeitgeschichte* 2018, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 457–482. K. Sierakowska, *Śmierć, wygnanie, głód w dokumentach osobistych. Ziemia polskie w latach Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 136–186 (including inhabitants of Galicia

CHAOS IN EVACUATING CIVILIANS

The evacuation of civilians was carried out in several stages. I will present here examples of evacuations from Galicia. First, fortress cities like Przemyśl and Kraków were evacuated, as well as the capital – Lviv.⁴ Next, there were civilians from smaller towns with access to railway lines; otherwise, they had to cover the distance on their own. Where there were no railway connections, evacuation would turn into a spontaneous escape of civilians into different directions. The main problem for historians is the fact that they cannot fully grasp the accurate directions of those escapes and evacuations, particularly when carried out at people's own expense, but also when organized by evacuation authorities. Those migration movements may be connected with the dynamics of changes on the front line; thus a few evacuation waves can be distinguished, which began in the late summer / early autumn of 1914 and in fact lasted up to October 1917, i.e. until the so-called Kerensky Offensive. The problem with evacuation was that – especially in the beginning – it did not have any features of a premeditated and organized plan. The person who drew public attention to that was Władysław Długosz, deputy to the Imperial Council in Vienna (Reichsrat), who pointed it out in his speech delivered at the Vienna Parliament in December 1917 – that the civilians were completely unprepared for evacuation and until the last moment remained fully unaware of the events. Also press propaganda had an impact on the events, not providing reliable information on Austria's defeats on the front line in the early stage of the war, which would have given both local authorities and civilians some time to take proper measures.⁵ No wonder then that the evacuations came as a great surprise for civilians, which was combined with crowd psychology and considerable panic; for the authorities, they presented a logistic challenge, hardly manageable.

Similarly problematic remains the answer to the question, how many people had been evacuated from Galicia during the World War I. Early evacuations, carried out without a plan, unpremeditated, due to general chaos, did not show exact numbers. We can obtain them only by analyzing the numbers of civilians displaced deep into Austria, with the status of war refugees. It is worth noting that the status involved receiving a benefit from the Austrian government, and it was only the beneficiaries that featured in official statistics. It was only the later evacuations, i.e. the one in the summer of 1916, an effect of the Kerensky Offensive, that indicated better-organized

and Congress Poland area and refugees in Russia). A trial of comparison a diverse views opinion refugee camps was published by the author, cf. K. Ruszała, *Galicyski eksodus...* (chapter: "(Nie)codzienne życie barakowe" [(Un)usual everyday life on a barrack camps]).

⁴ Further reading considering evacuation of Kraków see footnote 2; about Przemyśl before and during the war cf.: J. Fahy, "Undermining a Bulwark of the Monarchy: Civil-Military Relation in Fortress Przemyśl (1871–1914)," *Austrian History Yearbook* 2017, no. 48, pp. 145–158; A. Watson, *The Fortress: The Great Siege of Przemyśl*, London 2019; about Lviv/Lemberg/Lwów cf.: Ch. Mick, *Lemberg, Lwów, Lviv, 1914–1947: Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City*, West Lafayette 2016.

⁵ His speech was published in a wartime as a leaflet. Cf.: *Mowa Władysława Długosza wygłoszona dnia 14. grudnia 1917 r. w komisji wojskowej delegacji Austriackiej*, Kraków 1917.

evacuation plans and included a specific number of people in a specific area: 60 thousand civilians in Hungary.⁶

What attests to the lack of preparation of evacuation on the part of civilians, military authorities and civilian authorities at local and government levels are a lot of accounts from that time. An example may be a report of 3 October 1914 in which its author – Wilhelm Fink – describes the conditions in which civilians were transported from Kraków to Pohořelice in Moravia. He recorded lack of any food supplies for the evacuees whatsoever. We need to remember that those transports often took a whole day, sometimes a day and night or even longer. Everything depended on the destination, which remained unknown to the evacuees and as it turned out, it was also unknown to those in charge of the transport. The mentioned report points out a considerable disorder in the organization of the transports: the successive stations were not notified of the arrivals of the trains with the civilian evacuees, and Moravian authorities did not feel obliged to supply any food to the refugees. That was another effect of the early stage of evacuating civilians, and a new experience for each side. What is more, in Břeclav, i.e. on the route from Přerov⁷ to the destination, Pohořelice, Fink apparently learned that on arrival the evacuees would find “barracks provided by the state [Austria – K.R.] to comfortably house 6000 people” – he was assured. When they got there, it turned out that the building of barracks in Pohořelice was still being planned. The work on them had started a few days before the transport with civilians was sent off from Kraków to the supposedly ready place of refuge. As a “consolation,” Fink, who also acted as an attendant to that group of evacuees, was told that about 1600 people could be accommodated in mid-October, which meant that they would have to wait almost two weeks for the construction of barracks to be completed, without any actual temporary shelter. It was not possible to provide accommodation for the whole group of evacuees in the nearby Pohořelice, a town with a population of about 3000. Its residents were ignorant of both that first transport and that others were coming soon. To remedy the situation, the civilians were temporarily accommodated in stables, sheds, and other corners of local farms. The refugees ended up building barrack camps for themselves. It is difficult to blame local authorities for the situation; Fink himself wrote in the report that both commune and district authorities tried to face up to supporting the evacuees.⁸ However, it was not feasible in such a short time to provide accommodation for a thousand people, and the number was still growing. The whole thing remained beyond anybody’s control: when transport

⁶ Similarly, in archival sources one can find plans for the evacuation of civilians from the Kraków Fortress in the spring of 1915. It means, the further potential evacuations seem to be better organised, but in fact, it brought a lot of chaos and problems. For example, a plan for spring 1915 is gathered in: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (hereafter: ÖStA), KA, KM, HR, Abt. 10, Karton (hereafter: Kt.) 1016, Zl. 1915/19A–19–7; Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie [The National Archives in Kraków] (hereafter: ANK), Kraków City Hall (hereafter: MagKr), sign. 4742: “Instruktion für den Abtransport und die Unterbringung von Evakuierten und Flüchtlingen aus Krakau”, Zl. 12304/1915.

⁷ In Přerov was located a one of the control stations, assessing the refugees condition and planning a further translocation.

⁸ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, report by Dr Wilhelm Fink to the Presidium of the City of Kraków, 3 October 1914.

of Jewish families from Kraków was directed to Pohořelice in late September and early October 1914, it turned out that there already were Eastern Galicians there, including Jews, in the number of about 5000.⁹ Adding to that over a thousand Jews from Kraków, twice as many refugees ended up in Pohořelice as there were the residents. A telegram of 9 October 1914 from the Moravian governor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that there were more refugees in camps in Pohořelice (on that day 6023 altogether) than the planned wooden barracks could accommodate (the maximum number had been established to be 6000).¹⁰ That accumulated number was not perhaps as outrageous as the double number of refugees in relation to residents. Nobody had realized then yet that in the future they might become rivals in everyday life. Another shock was the fact that October 1914 was only the beginning of the war, movements of troops and ensuing forced migrations of civilians. Eventually, the construction of the camp was completed by the end of November, i.e. nearly two months after the arrival of the first transports. The situation in Pohořelice was not an isolated one. In the case of a camp situated several kilometres to the east in Kyjov, Moravia, it was very similar: the camps were not ready before transports started arriving in the town. There, too, by 9 October the presence of over 1200 refugees had been recorded, and it was planned to construct barrack camps until the end of the month.¹¹ Yet not everywhere did things look so dramatic: e.g., in Choceň, Bohemia, a large camp had been created to house about 18 500 people, while at that time (i.e. in mid-October 1914) there were about 6000 refugees.¹² It was reckoned that there would be 500 people per one barrack (which was an affront to personal freedom anyway, considering the average space per one refugee). Hence there was some extra space provided, which soon filled up with civilian refugees, but the maximum number predicted was not reached; the largest group of refugees was staying there in March 1915 and it amounted to 16 705 people.¹³

The chaos in the early stage of the war in the context of forced displacement of Galician civilians also stemmed from the fact that besides lack of control over refugee movement, lack of proper preparation for a long journey and no plans how to distribute the evacuees, there was also frequent abuse of the civilians. Some refugees e.g. happened to be groundlessly interned. This applied above all to civilians from the Ruthenian ethnic group, which meant Ukrainians, Lemkos and Carpathian residents of Eastern Galicia. A large group of those people, instead of being moved to refugee camps, was sent to an internment camp in Thalerhof near Graz in Styria.¹⁴ The people

⁹ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, Wilhelm Fink's letter of 11 May 1915 to the Presidium of the City of Kraków.

¹⁰ ÖStA, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv (hereafter: AVA), Ministerium des Innern (hereafter: MdI), Allgemeine Reihe (hereafter: Allg.), Kt. 1921, Zl. 40926/1914.

¹¹ ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Kt. 1921, Zl. 40926/1914.

¹² ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Kt. 1921, Zl. 40989/1914.

¹³ ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Kt. 1944, Zl. 43367/1915.

¹⁴ The latest research in this field cf.: N.M. Goll, "Russophile Zivilinternierte aus Galizien im Lager Thalerhof bei Graz im Ersten Weltkrieg" [in:] *Update! Perspektiven der Zeitgeschichte*, ed. L. Erker, Wien 2012, p. 29 and further; eadem, "...dass wir es mit zwei Kriegen zu tun haben, der eine ist der Krieg nach Aussen, der andere nach Innen": Die Ruthenen und das k.k. Zivilinternierlager Thalerhof

were transported first, and only then was the rightness of the decision checked. That brought a lot more problems to the governor's office in Graz, which was later forced to appoint a commission responsible for verifying the suspected and those without any charges. Things were different when verifying Russian citizens of Polish origin, i.e. the residents of Congress Poland. They used to be classified as interned right from the start.

Abuse of another kind concerned cases when refugees were not allowed to choose the place of their temporary exile. Apart from the fact of the incredible chaos of evacuation, escapes and no records of civilian migration movements, many people would find shelter on their own, with local people. Admittedly, there varied reaction to the newcomers, yet some of the locals were able to show sympathy and understanding of their situation. Still, a lot of refugees were forcibly, sometimes with violence, transported to barrack camps. It is worth to recall what happened in Mikulov (Moravia), where some Jewish refugees had found a shelter, at one night in October 1914. Having left the synagogue, they were showered with insults and taken by force to a nearby refugee camp.¹⁵ The authorities probably wanted to control the migration that way, as the lack of control could increase the chaos in Austria even more. Practically throughout the war the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna received individual or group requests from refugees to be relocated. On the other hand, the forced relocation to camps was supposed in the authorities' opinion to relieve the issue of food supplies for the town where masses of refugees were staying.

THE REFUGEE CAMP SYSTEM

To organize temporary refuge for civilians in the Austrian part of the Habsburg monarchy, a system of barrack camps was devised.¹⁶ In fact, it applied to Cisleithania only. In Transleithania refugees and evacuees were put in concrete places, specially adapted, or rented to that end, but at the expense of Austrian government. Refugee camps were then organized in Moravia, Bohemia, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Styria and Salzburg. The principles of accommodating refugees were laid out in an instruction of 15 September 1914, which clearly indicated the places of accommodation, according to the mentioned key. The instruction listed the following places: a camp for Ruthenian refugees in Wolfsberg in Carinthia, a camp for Jewish refugees in Mikulov and in Pohořelice – both in Moravia. Further the instruction talked about accommodating Polish refugees in Bohemia and Carniola, without mentioning a spe-

bei Graz 1914–1917,” *Historisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Graz* 2010, H. 40, pp. 277–303; N.M. Goll, G. Hoffmann, P. Lesiak, *Thalerhof 1914–1936: Die Geschichte eines vergessenen Lagers und seiner Opfer*, Herne 2010.

¹⁵ ÖStA, AVA, Mdl, Allg., Kt. 1922, Zl. 42092/1914.

¹⁶ General remarks cf. M. Hermann, “‘Cities of Barracks’: Refugees in the Austrian Part of the Habsburg Empire during the First World War” [in:] *Europe on the Move...*, pp. 129–155.

cific refugee camp, and added that a camp was being constructed in Česká Třebová.¹⁷ Those plans were slightly modified. While the camps for Jewish refugees were established according to plan in the two Moravian towns, there were also others in Kyjov, Moravia, later also in Bruck an der Leitha (a camp originally meant for Ukrainians, later Jews) and in Havlíčkův Brod in Bohemia. Further, according to plan, a camp for Ukrainian refugees was arranged in Wolfsberg in Carinthia. Ukrainians were also accommodated in the two Lower Austria camps, i.e. in Hollabrunn and Gmund, in Sankt Michael, Styria, and Moravská Třebová. A camp for Poles was established in Chocěň, Bohemia, but also in Wagna, Styria, near Leibnitz, where Italians were later situated. Refugee camps were also created in Upper Austria in Braunau am Inn, where Italians found refuge from October 1915. For the refugees from the Italian front also camps in Lower Austria were set up, i.e. Mittendorf, Pottendorf, Steinklamm and Mistelbach. In the case of Alpine countries, a camp was established only in Grodig-Niederalm in Salzburg for Ruthenians from Volhynia. Another thing was a temporary camp for migrants in Galicia (i.e. in Oświęcim) which was connected with different directions of migration: mostly for a seasonal worker, who came back to Galicia, but also in a small part for returning refugees from the western part of the country. As regards Austrian crown lands, no camp was set up in Tirol or Vorarlberg, on account of not easily accessible alpine areas, and the same with Carniola or Austrian Littoral. That situation was liable to changes, which resulted from a few factors, e.g. closing some camps to refugees, the return of some refugees since the summer of 1915, or new waves of refugees.

The main principle of accommodating civilians – selecting a specific camp according to the needs of ethnic groups – was usually followed. It was probably the only premeditated aspect of temporary accommodation of refugees during the war. The idea to accommodate together people from the same ethnic groups may have resulted from the Austrian government's practical approach. Communication was much easier between refugees from one camp and its administration when only one interpreter was needed. There was also the financial aspect: in order to meet the basic needs of the civilians, like religion or education, it was not necessary to build a few churches for different denominations, provide different foods according to what was allowed by religion, or employ teachers speaking different languages. The official aspect of the guiding principles, i.e. creating comfort for the evacuees, seems to have been of secondary significance.

¹⁷ Instruction, cf. e.g.: ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, Abschrift, Instruktion betreffend die Beförderung und Unterbringung von Flüchtlingen aus Galizien und der Bukowina, k.k. Minister des Innern, Zl. 11854/1914.

REFUGEE CAMPS: PLACE OF SHELTER OR MISERY? A LOOK AT THE LIVING CONDITIONS

It could seem that Austria wanted to create for its citizens suitable conditions for taking shelter from the horrors of war. Whether it was the case, one can learn reading a lot of source materials, where refugees themselves describe the life in camps¹⁸.

Never and nowhere before has as much human pain and misery accumulated as here. The camp, surrounded by a wire fence and with military guards, looks like a huge prison even from a distance.¹⁹

This quotation does make us think about the living conditions. Indeed, the very shape of the refugee camp was a huge barrier between local people and the refugees, creating an impression of dangerous villains being kept there instead of miserable Galician civilians.

This caused another problem, which was stigmatization of the refugees and treating them as inferior citizens. Refugees were a very diversified group: often in one barrack camp intellectuals and underclass lived together. However, the locals who observed the refugees either in barrack camps or accommodated in towns usually saw in them the same Galician rabble. In a report by a delegate of the Society for the Moral Welfare of Émigrés from his visit to the refugee camp in Wagna, Styria, on 17 March 1915, there is an example of how that influenced the perception of refugees:

At first the barrack people were allowed to leave the camp, yet when one day several of them entered a shop in Leibnitz, and two of them did the shopping while the others stole stuff or got into mischief, they were forbidden to leave the barracks altogether . . . There are a lot of dregs of society in the barracks, criminals, ex-prisoners from Wiśnicz etc., who are a plague.²⁰

In many cases, the refugees' freedom was very limited. However, not all camps were closed; for instance, refugees accommodated in camps in Moravia could move freely, but it was not necessarily the same in the Bohemian town of Choceň. Still, the atmosphere was prison-like, often enhanced by the presence of camp service, the governor, and the military policemen responsible for the order. They often actually

¹⁸ Published sources cf. e.g.: L. Kasprzyk, *Z baraków w Chocni*, Kraków 1915; *Wysiedlenie wojenne Krakowa w r. 1914–1915*, Kraków 1916; *Jedna z kart pracy na wychodźstwie w czasie wojny 1914–1915. Sprawozdanie Centralnego Komitetu Opieki Moralnej dla wychodźców z Galicyi (skrót. nazwa C.K.O.M.) z siedzibą w Wiedniu za czas od 7 stycznia do 10 września 1915*, Wiedeń 1915; *Szlakiem tulaczym. Księga pamiątkowa wychodźstwa polskiego 1914–1918*, red. A. Senensieb, Wiedeń 1919; Z. Lasocki, *Polacy w austriackich obozach barakowych dla uchodźców i internowanych. Wspomnienia z czasów wojny światowej byłego posła do parlamentu austriackiego*, Kraków 1929; V. Makovs'kyj, *Gmind. Tabor ukrajyns'kix zbihchiv i viselenchiv u chasi svitovoi vijny 1914–1918*, L'viv 1935. This paper excludes those sources, giving a way to unpublished archival sources mostly.

¹⁹ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, Report by a delegate of the Society for Moral Welfare of Émigrés of a visit to Leibnitz on 17 March 1915.

²⁰ *Ibid.* There was a prison in Nowy Wiśnicz near Bochnia established in 1783 in the Discalced Carmelite monastery closed in the time of Emperor Joseph II.

humiliated the refugees, which is also reflected in the letters of those accommodated in the camp in Wagna near Leibnitz:

Any complaints of the poor people are to no avail, because the all-powerful boor, i.e. the commissioner, together with the doctor, chase away the poor mothers, saying off with you, woman, shut up etc.²¹

It was repeatedly postulated that a person in charge of the camp ought to be a suitable one for the civilians accommodated there and that there should be some common ground between them. That meant the administrator should show understanding of the refugees' plight and there should be no language barrier between them. It was vital that the function was performed by a person of the same nationality as the refugees, but in practice, it could be different. In fact, a lot of complaints about the administrators came in; sometimes they would bring about some changes in the jobs. That was the case e.g. in the camp in Pohořelice. A Jewish newspaper *Wiener Morgenzeitung* emphasized that the new camp administrator Dr Wolletz, unlike his predecessor, was "a man of a noble character and delicate nature, whose kind-heartedness and friendliness can be seen in his face, reflecting sympathy for the refugees." It was further added that the new administrator was perceived more like the refugees' companion than a commissioner.²² That change positively influenced the welfare of Jewish civilians. Wilhelm Fink, who had been taking care of Galician refugees in Moravia ever since the evacuation of Kraków, wrote in a letter to an officer for the refugees at the Ministry of Internal Affairs that he had noticed a sudden turn in his refugees' mood, the reason of which was undoubtedly a change in the camp management.²³ Apparently, it was an important factor which was supposed to differentiate between a refugee camp and a prisoner camp. In many refugees' opinion, barrack camps were a kind of mental prison for everyone: both for the refugees and the locals looking at the barrack camps. For instance, the refugees from the camp of Wagna near Leibnitz in Styria (at the beginning of 1915 there were over 16 000 of them, mainly Poles from Galicia), when asked what bothered them, said that they were thinking all the time of their possessions left behind at the mercy of Russian invaders, and added that they had not committed any crime, therefore they did not understand why they were treated like prisoners.²⁴ Also, camp administrators did not always handle extreme tension well. An example may be one Błocki, an administrator of the camp in Wagna near Leibnitz in Styria, who already in early December, i.e. a few weeks after opening the refugee camp resigned from this position because of – as he wrote in a telegram to the Styrian governor – a complete physical and mental strain, which led him to a nervous breakdown.²⁵

²¹ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, a copy of letter to the Sekretariat of the Central Committee for Moral Welfare of Émigrés from Galicia, no. 27.

²² *Wiener Morgenzeitung* 1915, 16 Feb, no. 40, p. 2.

²³ ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Kt. 1926, Zl. 7062/1915.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Zl. 8565/1915.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Zl. 45575/1914.

Generally, the conditions in a camp were quite poor. We have already mentioned that the camps were not ready when the refugees started coming. They were sometimes put under tents, which were substitutes of a barrack camp, definitely not fulfilling its functions. The camp in Bruck an der Leitha, according to the report of 23 November 1914 was supposed to hold over 2000 Ruthenians from Eastern Galicia and partly from Bukovina; however, the camp at the time was just a tent, without walls. Considering the weather in late November, i.e. dampness and cold, plus poor food supplies, the refugees kept feeling physical and mental fatigue. An additional factor was a shortage of clothes, which was particularly acute in the case of children, who went about barefoot and half-naked. To make matters worse, infectious diseases were rife, including Asian cholera, which enforced a quarantine for all refugees accommodated there.²⁶ Refugee camps constituted a place of direct epidemic hazard, as they were relatively small spaces concerning the number of residents. Diseases in the camps were a plague, and medical services proved inefficient in the face of the problems. Many medical accounts from that time provide a lot of details in that regard, however, due to the limitations of this text, the author is not going to analyze them here.

The level of hygiene was not sufficient either; there were shortages of clean underwear and clothes, and a lot of war refugees had not been able to take more with them during their escape or evacuation. Mortality was highest among children. In the camp in Choczeń in the spring of 1915 the most lethal diseases were pneumonia and measles, then scarlet fever, marasmus, infections of the alimentary canal, tuberculosis, but also other coexistent diseases, like diphtheria, pyaemia, eclampsia, kidney inflammation, chronic bronchitis, convulsions, pernicious anaemia, heart defects, meningitis, cirrhosis, typhoid fever, tetanus, sepsis, and erysipelas.²⁷

The already mentioned food shortages in many camps were common. A letter sent from the camp in Wagna near Leibnitz describes them bluntly:

Our full board consists of unsweetened tea with a piece of bread, the lunch is a splash of soup with 3–4 decagrams meat or peas, maize porridge for dinner, black coffee without sugar and bread. There are days when there is no bread whatsoever, and when we ask for it the next day, it's out of the question. Very many children are dying because there is no health care. They die almost every day . . . Two of mine have already died of a cold and pneumonia, aged 3½ and 1½.²⁸

As one can see, the weak points of the system made the refugee camps a symbol of misery. One Pelagia Bone, a refugee in a Styrian town of Gonobitz in her letter of 7 April 1915, turned towards the Committee for Moral Welfare of Galician Émigrés with a request to release her brother with his family from the camp in Wagna to where she was staying. She wrote she wanted to take out:

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Zl. 3922/1915.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Zl. 26611/1915.

²⁸ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, a copy of letter to the Sekretariat of the Central Committee for Moral Welfare of Émigrés from Galicia, no. 27.

my brother, his wife and their two children of these terrible barracks. Wretched is everyone there; I have often heard what the barracks are like, I could not believe it, unable to imagine the atrocities, what with the epidemics like typhus fever and many other infectious diseases. 20–30 people die there every day, I can give my word for that, as I heard it from the people who had managed to escape, even though it is not allowed to poke one's head out of there. The place is surrounded by military policemen and wrapped twice around with barbed wire.²⁹

She then described her refuge in Austria, saying that even though they slept on the ground and lived in poverty, compared with the conditions in the barrack camps their own place was paradise. The very choice of words, “releasing” a civilian (neither a prisoner of war nor a criminal or internee), instead of “moving” or “relocating” him, is significant. This is further evidence that in their opinion the camps were miserable prisons.

A MODERN OR INEFFICIENT CAMP SYSTEM?

The refugees in the camps felt like a burden for the state, not like victims of war, who had had to flee from their homes. Observers, who visited the refugee camps, had similar impressions. Reports of such visits do not let us harbour any illusions about it. A lot of descriptions can be found in the press of the time, although many press notes were censured anyway, as they did not present the Austrian government favourably; white spots in the contemporary press are evidence enough. In one such published text, its author pointed out negative effects of accommodating civilians in Austrian refugee camps. He stressed that the Austrian government in a very ill-considered way took the decisions about the form of shelters for refugees:

What has become a terror for our helpless war exiles are government barracks in which they are accommodated, living at the expense of the government. I don't know what it is like elsewhere, but as regards the Choceń barracks, I can say those people are right who consider them to be institutions the least fit to house people who have lost everything back home and must seek refuge in exile. We should rightly demand that war victims that all those refugees find kind care and support from the government, and not be considered a burden to get rid of as soon as possible.³⁰

The criticism goes further, as the author states clearly that Austrian government, seeing the problems, did not try to improve the civilians' living standards in any way.

One may ask, how come this happened, as it can't have been a deliberate move by the government to act against its citizens during a terrible war. On the one hand, this showed helplessness of government administration in the face of so dynamic changes during the war. The helplessness also stemmed from the fact that most civil-

²⁹ Ibid., no. 796.

³⁰ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, a copy of a press article from the collection of the Sekretariat of the Central Committee for Moral Welfare of Émigrés from Galicia. The article was published in February 1915 in the *Rodak* newspaper, one of the Polish a weekly newspaper edited and published by Polish refugees in Vienna in a wartime.

ian decisions depended on the decisions of military authorities, owing to which state authorities might have had their hands tied. The refugee problem, though it concerned war migrants as well as local people, was just one of many other problems the government had to deal with at the time. Moreover, it was all happening during a state of war, i.e. considerable dependence on military authority. For a long time, there had been no consolidated legal foundations concerned with taking care of refugees. Their situation was initially regulated by directives and instructions, usually issued as problems arose, or based on precedents. Nonetheless, such a large scale of migration within a country, during an ongoing war, was something new and required significant legal solutions. The Parliament's activity remained paralyzed until the assassination of prime minister Karl Stürgkh, who suspended its sessions when the war broke out and governed with the help of decrees and military authorities. It was only later, in the spring of 1917 that Parliament resumed its work, among others dealing with the problems of refugees and in effect passing a law on the welfare of refugees. Thus, refugee camps were part of political games. The government, through many propaganda photographs, would show how it was taking care of its citizens. However, criticism of the government had always been part of the political game; that was also the case among the Vienna elites at the time. Some politicians did show interest in war refugees, yet one can also perceive their work – otherwise very conscientious, listening to the refugees and visiting the camps – as an element of a political campaign.³¹

On the part of the state, the interest in refugees changed along with the lingering war. It was not known how long it would last, hence the provisional character of civilian shelters continued. Initially, i.e. already from early 1915, spiritual and educational needs of the refugees in the camps were met. That step secured jobs for Galician teachers and helped maintain the continuity of children's and youth's education. It is interesting to what extent education in exile influenced the level of literacy of the youngest Galicians; in exile, they had no choice but to go to school, even out of boredom; at home, during peacetime, it could be different. Refugees also assisted with work in the fields, just as additional pairs of hands. It was only from 1916 or 1917 that the government got involved in organizing successive forms of relief for the refugees, for example reading rooms or workshops.³² Through such actions not only boredom and fatigue were fought but above all, the human potential was stimulated, although it remains debatable whether in a productive way.

³¹ Cf. K. Ruszała, "Działalność polityków Koła Polskiego w Wiedniu na rzecz pomocy Polakom zesłanym w głąb Austro-Węgier podczas I wojny światowej (zarys problemu)" [in:] *Front wschodni I wojny światowej. Studia z dziejów militarnych i polityczno-społecznych*, eds. M. Bączkowski, K. Ruszała, Kraków 2013, pp. 153–170.

³² About reading rooms for refugees cf.: ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Kt. 1895, Zl. 26160/1917. A various workshops and courses were organised in refugee camps and beyond them. An official report from 1915 indicated 64 different workshops and courses, among them in refugee camps: Choceń (7 workshops and courses), Mikulov (8), Kyjov (1), Pohorelice (2), Bruck an der Leitha (1), Gmünd (5), Wagna (2), Wolfsberg (2). Cf.: ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Fasz. 19, Kt. 1940, Zl. 44348/1915; *Księga pamiątkowa i adresowa wygnańców wojennych*, vol. III: *Prowincya i Bukowina*, Wiedeń 1915, s. LIX; Kärntner Landesarchiv, Landespräsidium, Präsidiale, Sch. 381.

The created system of refugee camps did not fulfil its role as a temporary and safe shelter for citizens against the horrors of war, and this is how it was remembered by society. Information about the conditions in refugee camps spread very dynamically, which influenced people's behaviour already at the stage of evacuation. For example, when on 1 November 1914 voluntary evacuation of the Kraków Fortress was announced, people were by no means interested in fleeing deep into the monarchy. On the one hand, they did not want to live among strangers, on the other hand, they were afraid of the refugee camps and the conditions there.³³ Such reactions were quite prompt: the already mentioned Wilhelm Fink from Kraków observed them, watching from the very beginning transports of refugees from Galicia to Pohořelice in Moravia. In May 1915 in a letter to municipal authorities of Kraków he pointed out that in his opinion it was not recommendable to direct the residents affected by the latest evacuation orders to barrack camps. He indicated that they had turned out to be unsuitable for accommodating such a large group of people, so diversified, consisting of representatives of various social classes, which, according to Fink, affected the refugees' psyche – in comparison with those staying in Pohořelice but in the town, not in the camp.³⁴

Another problem was the fact that it was not known how long the barracks were going to be needed. Everything depended on the unpredictable course of events on the front. It was common knowledge that the barracks only had a temporary character and already during their construction there were debates whether they would come in useful later for other, e.g. military, purposes.³⁵ As a consequence, the builders did not seem to apply themselves much to creating permanent shelters for refugees. It could be seen, however, that along with the progress of warfare, opening a new line of front in May 1915 and successive Russian offensives in Galicia, and what followed, new civilian migration waves, the government tried to make fewer mistakes than at the early stage of the war as regarded the protection of refugees. Some steps taken by civil servants were slightly more premeditated, as they had learned from the experience of evacuation and relocation of hundreds of thousands of civilians from Galicia deep into the monarchy. The refugees from the new theatre of war were also put in refugee camps; sometimes new structures were built, sometimes the refugees were accommodated in those camps where the Galicians had stayed, some of whom started a difficult journey back after May 1915. Later evacuations and accommodation of Galician refugees were slightly more sensible, i.e. after the Brusilov Offensive of June 1916 or the Kerensky Offensive of October 1917 the refugees were either directed to precisely arranged and planned places of accommodation (mainly after 1916) or moved from eastern to western districts of Galicia, so they remained within

³³ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, a draft of a typescript by the Mayor of the City of Kraków on 4 November 1914 to the Governor of Galicia.

³⁴ ANK, MagKr, sign. 4743, letter by Wilhelm Fink of 11 May 1915 to the Presidium of the Kraków City Hall.

³⁵ In late November 1914 it was considered in this context to use the camps for military purposes, not as civilian accommodation: ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Kt. 1922, Zl. 43706/1914.

their own crown lands (mainly after 1917), avoiding long-distance relocations like those back in 1914/1915.

CONCLUSION: HOW DID THE CAMPS CHANGE SOCIETY AND THE STATE?

Establishing barrack camps for war refugees within the country was undoubtedly a new experience for the Austrian monarchy, both for the authorities and the citizens. Waves of war refugees, which began in 1914, were the first in modern history experiences of mass migration of civilians in that region. The several aspects which had an impact on that experience are related to civilians accommodated in barrack camps rather than with those staying in other places of the monarchy, outside camps. We can consider them as tensions in three correlations: between refugees and the government, between local people and the refugees and between local people and authorities.

The civilian refugees had to count on the efficiency of their state, i.e. Austria, as for securing their safety and meeting their basic needs. That experience showed that the state was not able to successfully handle the task. As living victims of the war, who had left all their possessions back in Galicia, the refugees felt aggrieved and met with incomprehension of their situation, for which they blamed the authorities. Civilian residents of the towns where barrack camps were set up, continuously watched the newly constructed buildings and their occupants. There were clear antagonisms between the two groups, which increasingly deepened with the course of the war. On the one hand, the locals looked at the refugees with contempt, on the other hand, they were their competitors to everyday supplies of food. It was known that refugees in the camps were provided with food, and an average local person did not try to go into details about its quality. An average local person, watching the refugee camps, saw that it was the refugees – strangers – who were taken care of by the government, instead of themselves. That brought about tensions not only between the locals and the refugees but between the locals and the government, too.

During the Great War no-one was ready for such a large undertaking as displacing masses of civilians inside the Habsburg monarchy. The state was not ready to secure proper living conditions for them, especially at the first stage of the war. The civilians were not ready, fleeing their homes in haste, or being evacuated in complete chaos, when it was difficult to tell which information was reliable. In the course of the war attempts were made to draw conclusions and the next rounds of evacuation and the system of accommodating refugees were much better organized from 1915 on.

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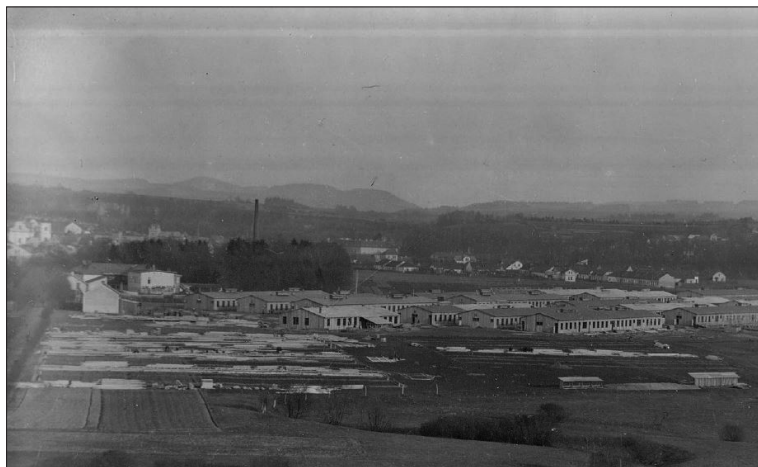
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APPENDIX



Refugee camp for Galician refugees in Choceň, November 1914
(Státní okresní archiv Ústí nad Orlicí)



Refugees in Galicia, 1916 (Zbiory Specjalne, Biblioteka Naukowa PAU i PAN w Krakowie)

