

Prague City Archives, Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Faculty of Humanities of Charles University, Institute of History of Faculty of Arts of J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem and Institute of History and Archival Studies of Pedagogical University of Cracow

A CITY ENTERTAINS ITSELF – FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO 1848

PRAGUE AS A CENTRE OF CULTURE

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Since the Middle Ages, entertainment has been connected with city life to the extent that we can consider it one of the features of urbanity. Depending on a degree of social stratification and economic potential, cities became historically centres of cultural life, which differed in terms of variety and forms of amusement and recreation. The Prague towns – i. e. since the end of the 18th century, connected City of Prague – offered many specific opportunities how to spend free time or take part in entertainment facilities.

Entertainment has been given both private and public space by cities. In the Middle Ages, it took place in public spaces, such as squares, streets, markets, town halls; indoor spaces included inns, later on joined by coffee houses and wine bars. Private burgher households offered various everyday leisure activities, like card and table games, reading, or active music performing, dancing, literary activities etc. Domestic celebrations – exceptional occasions for entertainment – were connected with elementary transitive rituals, such as baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Markets, fairs, carnivals or some activities of guilds (e. g. marksmen) or fellowships with religious background (writers' brotherhoods) offered regular opportunity for amusement in the Early Modern era. The burghers mostly amused themselves with dancing, music performances, theatres, along with street amusement and lately, with sport. These activities have been institutionalised with the commencement of the processes of the Enlightenment and the following industrialisation. Permanent theatres were built, even municipal theatres, concert halls were emerging and dancing was moved into dance halls, and private dancing parties became public and commercial. Tumblers, animal trainers, singers and other street artists moved into cabarets, circuses, menageries, freak shows etc. Entertainment became professional and its actors were educated in professional schools, such as ballet schools, music conservatories etc. New forms of entertainment, public presentation of technical inventions and innovations appeared with the commencement of industrialisation.

On top of that, nationalism started to play key role in entertainment in the 19th century. Its performance became inseparable of endeavours both to rule and define the city space, however it often crossed the borders of the cities and moved into their closest neighbourhoods. The richest burghers constructed rural villas, surrounded by gardens, in the vicinity of towns as early as the end of the 17th century. Other urban citizens turned to the nature later on. They relaxed on Sunday trips and promenades which got space in



the newly created parks, situated both in city centres and on their borders, as the municipal ramparts were torn down. Many European cities experienced the emergence of predecessors of amusement parks in their suburban areas in the 18th century. Spa towns thrived in this period, with a significant surge in social entertainment.

Public entertainment has never been a completely free and unregulated activity – quite on the contrary, it was a subject of permission and surveillance. These policies became stronger in connection with the implementation of the “Gute Policey” since the Early Modern era. Simultaneously, this regulation created space for instrumentalisation, in terms of spending free time. A significant phenomena of humour and satire, reflected chiefly in printed media, such as calendars, almanacs, newspaper and journals, are closely connected.

Entertainment in cities has represented a way of relaxation, schooling and education. On the other hand, it has been a source of livelihood, and a method how to strengthen links inside individual segments of the urban society, defined socially, confessionally, professionally and ethnically; as a tool of instrumentalisation, extended on politics of both secular and ecclesiastic powers, and simultaneously, as a mean of communication.

We would like to present transformation of these functions, along with many other aspects (e. g. what was considered entertaining at various stages of urban development, how were forms of entertainment modified, how was it perceived and experienced by inhabitants of towns, how was it regarded by municipal rulers – secular and ecclesiastical representants – or how was it commented on by intellectuals). This will be demonstrated on the example of Prague, from the Middle Ages to the advent of civil society, and, as usual, in a comparative notice. *The situation in Prague will be the subject of comparison with the urban space in the Bohemian lands and in the European metropolises.*

Applications are to be submitted, along with abstracts, at the latest by April 15, 2019 on the address below. The organisers reserve the right to choose; the chosen and/or presented papers can be submitted for publication in the monothematic volume of the journal *Documenta Pragensia*. Foreign participants will be provided with accommodation, with the costs being covered by the organisers. There is no charge for participation. Conferences languages: Czech, German (possibly English). Simultaneous translation (German/Czech) will be provided.

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