

Austrian Government Employees and Conduct of Life (1918 – 1940)

Government employees were a multifaceted socio-professional group that was formative for Austria's society in the early 20th century. They represented the state and its reputation. Thus, appropriate conduct in both their professional and private lives was part and parcel of their employment code. The aim of this research project is to write a social, political and administrative history of Austrian government employees with a special focus on their conduct of life. It raises questions of the development of the welfare state and of the changing function of government employment in a time of crises and political changes towards an authoritarian system. "Conduct of life" (Max Weber) is understood as consciousness of status as it is internalized and put into practice. In this project it will be used to explain private, professional and political behavior of government employees and to establish a link to aspects of civil service system research.

What happened to government employees' conduct of life in a period of economic crises and political changes? What were the consequences thereof for the Austrian state and society in terms of trust in government? Between the end of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 and 1940, when the former Austrian administration was incorporated into the Nazi German administration, government employees experienced a change of status and the loss of professional and economic security hitherto vested in their employment. The relationship between the state and its employees became destabilized. Massive reductions of the state apparatus due to the financial reconstruction and economic crises were detrimental to the ethos of the state bureaucracy.

Historical research on government employees lacks interwar scholarship that goes beyond the analysis of high-ranking officials. This project will investigate government employees, regarding the lowest to highest strata and taking into account aspects of gender, age, religious and political affiliation. To this end, a collective biography will be composed. Conduct of life will be investigated by looking at (auto-)biographies as well as at transgressions of norms, as they figure in disciplinary files. Public opinion about government employees will be investigated and complemented by self-perceptions of government employees, found in their newspapers as well as in self-written documents. Furthermore, political activities of government employees in advocacy groups and the extent of National Socialist purges of the state apparatus will be explored. Particularly the use of disciplinary files as one of the central sources is innovative in that the focus on conflict and the breach of normal order elucidates notions of correct behavior. Methods of the digital humanities (e.g. text-network analyses) combined with statistical techniques (e.g. geometric data analysis) will be applied for the analysis.