

Prices and Wages in Salzburg and Vienna: c. 1450–1850

Abstract

The proposed project takes a comparative European perspective on examining prices and wages in Salzburg and Vienna between 1450–1850: The study of prices and wages (as the cost of labor)—those key data of economic development—is a fundamental task of economic and social history. In the currently discussed “great divergence,” for instance, real wages since 1600 in 16 European cities are used as support for the assumed economic and social advancement of the ‘Northwest’ over the ‘rest.’ Yet it evidences that the current state of real-wage analysis suffers from a relative scarcity of Central and Eastern European data and from a lack of adequate consideration about their quality.

Whereas more recent investigations of some nations do exist, in the case of Austria the data collected during the 1930s still constitute the state of the art. The aims of our research project are: first, apart from improving the quality of existing data samples (Vienna, Klosterneuburg), to collect new data (Salzburg) and on this basis to design consumer baskets and to arrive at estimates for real wages. Toward this end, the account books of almshouses for the care of the poor and elderly in Vienna, Klosterneuburg and Salzburg, will be consulted, from which a long series of prices and wages can be gathered extending over three centuries. The focus will be on two East Alpine regions or cities: Vienna as a growing court capital and highly integrated in the market, supplied not least by trade along the Danube; as well as Salzburg, as a medium-sized European town and the seat of a small prince-bishopric dependent on its surrounding regions. The goal is: on one hand, to make possible the compilation of wage and price lists—from a European perspective—for regions of Europe that have hitherto hardly been taken into account; on the other hand, from such records to choose an optimal number of pertinent goods to assemble a consumer basket that reveals changes over time. With reference to newer research and the debate on basic wages, kinds of wages, effective earnings, options for, or extent of self-sufficiency our ambition is to view prices in high resolution, their volatility, from a social and economic perspective—in order to obtain a more accurate assessment of the standard of living by interpolation.

The proposed research project has been developed by a group of scholars (Cerman, Burhop, Ertl, Pammer, Reith). It will be carried out by researchers based at the University of Salzburg (Reinhold Reith, chair of economic, social and environmental history) and the University of Vienna (Thomas Ertl, chair of economic and social history).