

Rassismus Platz

The dilemma

Erase-and-replace or comment-and-contextualize – these are the questions that bother those who are dealing with the fate of memorials, sculptures, monuments and street names for problematic figures and times in history. In Austria unfortunately, there are more than enough of these monuments, street names, etc. Should all of these be erased and replaced? Or should there be another sign placed next to each sculpture and plate, commenting its existence and trying to explain the motives and historical consequences? In the future, will there be a raw of signs commenting and explaining each other?

Dr. Karl Lueger, one of Hitler's mentors, probably does not deserve the honour of a public memorial. However, will removing it and replacing it with a memorial against racism or anti-Semitism, remove also his impact on history? Can the traces of history that have contaminated the Present and also the Future evaporate? Can their dominance be broken by telling another story, bringing the "other" (maybe more hidden) voices to the open, give the public space of a memorial to the ones WE want to commemorate, to build an alternative tradition for an alternative future?

It is definitely worth trying, making Vienna a nicer looking city, a bit more like a cosmopolitan city where everyone is welcome or a city that takes responsibility for its past. However, history will not change if its protagonists become invisible, if their memorials and representations disappear from the public perception. The opposite: Masking out and denying was the way Austrians usually dealt with their part of racism and National-Socialist history. At school pupils do not learn about the long tradition of Anti-Semitism. Sadly enough, even without deleting and replacing these Memorials or street names of Anti-Semites and Racist Austrian figures, most people do not know the stories behind them.

Time of change

As there are many of these monuments commemorating racists, fascists and Anti-Semites in Austria and as many initiatives and proposals to intervene with them or remove them from public space, we wish to devote Dr. Karl Lueger's square to this movement of awareness.

We offer to trace and collect all sculptures and monuments of Austrian racists and to install them one by one, next to each other, all in this square.ⁱ If the place will run out, we will stack them on top of each other and/or dig under the ground and continue to install there. Dr. Lueger will continue to stand in the same place, among his fellow racists in this overly crowded sculpture garden: the first *Austrian Racism Square*. The square will be visited by various groups of all ages, coming to learn not only the chapters of Austrian racism, but also about decades of denial, hypocrisy and lies. The place will become a museum for the history of racism in Austria with an activities' program, on-going research and guided tours to explain the origins of the different sculptures and their stories. This institution could complement the "Haus der Geschichte", which is planned to be established in the near future by the city of Viennaⁱⁱ.

The city of Vienna will be able to proud itself, not with an anti-Semite Mayor, but by being able to deal with its history with courage, honesty and maybe a bit of humour as well.

In the meantime

Until the proposed *Austrian Racism Square* will be established, we will create an extension to the official Austrian tourist guided tours' program. The guides using this extension will take visitors and tourists in Vienna through relevant spots in the city telling the history of Racism, Fascism, Anti-Semitism, National Socialism and Extreme Right-Wing in Austria, as well as revealing the mechanisms of denial, suppression and fantasyⁱⁱⁱ.

Tal Adle and Karin Schneider (ritesinstitute)

ⁱ As a reference to our proposal for the “Austrian Racism Square, please visit the Hungarian “Szobor Park” (Statue Park) in Budapest, an original tourist attraction and education site for Real Socialists statues, built by Hungarians as a way to deal with the Stalinist history.

ⁱⁱ The “Haus der Geschichte” is a controversial and debated project of the City in Vienna. Most of the controversies have been centered around the question if this “Haus der Geschichte” in Vienna has to focus on the holocaust or not.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example: The “Polizeigefängnis” at the Roßauer Lände for the struggle against Austrofascism and National Socialism and in front of the prison the “Deutschmeisterdenkmal” for Hapsburg’s and Dr. Karl Lueger’s militarism, the “Flaktürme” for the fact that in Vienna the Nazi time is present and ignored at the same time, to memorials like the one for the “Opfer der Stadt Wien” at the Zentralfriedhof and the Alfred Hrdlicka-„Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus“ at the Albertinaplatz to show that not the Holocaust but the theses of “Austria is the first victim of the Nazis” was focused in Austria’s commemoration policy, to the “Siegfriedskopf” in the Aula of the University of Vienna as the most prominent example for the discussion of contextualization and the artistic approach in this debate, to some of the many problematic street-names like the Josef-Weinheber-Platz in the 15/16th district or the Arnehoferstraße in the 2nd district; and last but not least of course some of the known homes of the radical write wing “Burschenschaften” will be visited, like the huge “Roter Hof” of the Teutonia in the 8th district.

Sources e.g.:

Dietrich, Christa: Regimentsdenkmäler als Symbole für Reichseinheit und militärische Tradition. Eine Wiener Sonderentwicklung in der ausgehenden Monarchie. In: Steinernes Bewusstsein. Hrsg. Stefan Riesenfellner. Böhlau: Wien 1998

Vasek, Thomas: Das Schwein des Siegfried. Die Auseinandersetzung um das Heldendenkmal in der Aula der Uni Wien. In: UniInfo, Rechtsextremismus an Österreichs Universitäten. Wien 1996

Vasak, Alexandra: Sichtbare Erinnerung. Der Umgang mit Denkmälern in Österreich. Peter Lang Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften. Frankfurt am Main 2004