

Call for papers

**War Children in the Post-war
A West-East perspective on child policies, child experiences and
war childhood remembrance cultures in Europe since 1945**

Conference organizers:

Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres

Dr. Machteld Venken

German Historical Institute, Warsaw

Dr. Maren Röger

Location: Vienna, Austria

Date: 13-15 December 2012

This conference aims to focus on policies, experiences and remembrance cultures related to “war children” in Western, Central and Eastern Europe in the post-war period through the use of comparative and transnational historiographical approaches. The term “war children” is to be understood in a broad sense as including children and youngsters who experienced the war (Nicholas; Stargardt), children born because of the war (Ericsson/Simonsen; Mochmann), and children who were born after the war in families with parents who were perceived to have behaved wrongly during that war (Tames). After the bloodshed of World War II, children became the main object of projections of hope. On an individual level, this could be observed, for example, by the baby boom among Jewish Holocaust survivors (Grossmann), on an institutional level by the fierce competition for displaced children. In addition, there was a widespread consensus that children who had been hindered in their development by the war were to be brought up and educated in order to become future responsible national citizens. Children were to be the backbone of systems, whether democratic or communist ones.

Studies until now have concentrated either on Western, or on Central/Eastern Europe, and have presented a dichotomist view, as if the organisation and content of this rehabilitation, as well as the memories of those who experienced it, fundamentally differ. In Western Europe, it was the perceived deconstructive, irreversible impact of pre-war and war-time collective state-organised initiatives that mobilised politicians and humanitarian activists to launch individualised postwar integration programs pervaded with psychological insights on child development. By the beginning of the 1950s, such special treatment was exchanged for an emphasis on the entity of the family, which was considered the ultimate safeguard of Western European civilization (Zahra). In Central/Eastern Europe, studies emphasize that communist regimes increased the role of the nation-state in all domains of private life at the detriment of the family. Communist ideology required the children to become patriots who always placed the group before their personal and family interests, and who worked with enthusiasm for the bright social future of their nation-state (Kelly; Kosiński).

The aim of this conference is to reconsider this dichotomy. Despite differences in ideology, can similarities be found in the policies, experiences and remembrance cultures of war children settled in post-war Europe? How are transfers, exchanges and interactions across the (emerging) geographical border, the Iron Curtain, and/or across a (changing) mental border, i.e. the shifting enemy-antagonism to be evaluated?

We encourage contributions that employ approaches from history (political, economic, military, social, and everyday life history), whether or not these are integrated with insights of neighboring disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, political science, legal studies, and cultural and gender studies. Case studies and more general investigations should be based on original archival, empirical or field research. Discussions of comparative and transnational perspectives are particularly welcome.

We invite conference paper proposals addressing policy, experiences and remembrance culture issues such as, but not limited to:

- Early post-war social policy and education programs: How were war children (supposed to be) brought up? To what extent were policies towards children influenced by insights from social sciences, and vice versa?
- The everyday life of war children in the post-war: How did children give meaning to their war experiences in the post-war by means of everyday practices?
- War childhood in post-war propaganda and political instrumentalisation: How did propagandists and politicians on both sides of the (emerging) Iron Curtain make use of the stories of war children, and contribute to their important but contested role in European post-war memory cultures?
- The self-representation of different groups of war children: How do we evaluate the emergence of self-organisations and autobiographies? How can academics analyze the narratives of suffering and victimhood displayed in the uncountable popular publications emerging since war children became of pensionable age?
- Methodology: How can scholars reconstruct and/or interpret childhood and child experiences? What concepts are useful to research these phenomena, and how can sources produced by and connected with children be interpreted? What do documents produced right after the war, or only recently, tell us about growing up with war experiences?

Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) plus brief biographical information via email both to Machteld.Venken@ehp.lbg.ac.at and roeger@dhi.waw.pl by 1 March 2012.

The Organising Committee will finalize the program for the conference by 15 April 2012. The authors of the selected abstracts will be invited to submit their written papers by 1 November 2012.

Full versions of papers will be due by 1 March 2013. After peer review, a selection of the papers will be published in an edited conference volume or a special issue of an international journal.

The organisers are currently applying for funding to cover travel and accommodation costs. Participants from countries with disadvantageous exchange rates will be guaranteed full assistance.