

Living Conditions and the Lack of Privacy in Vienna's Collective Apartments

Presenter: Michaela Raggam-Blesch

Immediately after the Anschluss in March 1938, the greed for better apartments in Vienna led to spontaneous appropriations (“wild Aryanizations”) of Jewish apartments by local Nazi party members as well as next-door neighbors and the regular population. Already in summer 1938, the city officially started to evict Jewish tenants from the popular communal apartments – more than half a year before the official abolishment of Jewish tenants’ rights in April 1939. Jewish residents were also denounced by their neighbors who wanted access to better apartments. As a result, Jewish families had to move in with friends and family members. With the systematic evictions (Judenumsiedlungsaktionen) by the city of Vienna, which commenced as early as the spring of 1939, the Jewish population was concentrated in specific districts, which not only shaped the city’s topography. The evictions also resulted in the first collective apartments (Sammelwohnungen), where Jewish families had to live together with strangers in crowded living conditions, which worsened over time. The lack of privacy created additional tensions—in some cases up to six people of various age groups and social strata, as well as different religious adherence and beliefs, had to share a single room. There is little research on this topic because these collective apartments were only a waystation before deportation. Drawing on a micro-historical as well as topographical approach, this paper will investigate the living conditions and lack of privacy in these collective apartments during the years of Nazi control in Vienna.