

## **Vienna's World Fair 1873 as a spectacle for the masses? (Daniela Javorics)**

### **Short biography:**

Daniela Javorics studied in Vienna, Berlin and Urbana-Champaign. She is currently working on her PhD thesis "Re-shaping Europe through historians: The influence of R.W. Seton-Watson's network on politics" at the Andrassy university in Budapest. Her research focuses on the late Habsburg monarchy, modern history and minorized subjects.

### **Keywords:**

Women and gender roles, Vienna World's Fair, Habsburg monarchy, popular culture

### **Abstract:**

The Vienna World's Fair played an important role as a representational event for the Habsburg monarchy. However, instead of focusing on the famous visitors or technical innovations the World's Fair potential for inclusion of the masses will be analyzed. People with lower income were also allowed. The great World's fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were expressions of particular periods of social, cultural and economic development and resulted from a specific combination of historical forces, ideas and conditions<sup>1</sup>.

This article focuses on the inclusion of certain people into the concepts of the World's Fairs such as women and people with lower income or people from Ottoman empire or the Japanese and the discussions followed these innovations in the newspapers. The Vienna World's Fair serves as an example since it was the first time for example women were granted space to participate in world's fairs and created their own committee. Therefore it was a step to democratize the World's Fairs and transforming the event of the elites into one for the masses. The inclusive character of the World's Fair und whether or not it can be seen as part of the popular culture at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will be also discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> Haltern Utz (1971), Die Londoner Weltausstellung 1851: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der buergerlich-industriellen Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert. Muenster.

### **White masculine World's Fairs?**

“Saturday, 3 May [1873]. A long day at the Exhibition. Being an expensive day, (admittance 10/- each) there were few visitors, especially in the morning, but there were numbers of exhibitors and officials and thousands of workmen, for there are 10,000 at work by day, and 4,000 by night. The Exhibition is in a deplorably unfinished state; some parts look perfectly hopeless, and can certainly not be ready for months. One can hardly yet form a fair idea of the merits of the various sections, but one can compare their stages of completeness. Austria, the Orientals, Switzerland and Germany are the most advanced; France, Italy and America the furthest en retard. Great Britain comes about midway. [...] England stands absolutely alone in the glorious distinction of bad taste. [...] Going from the British section to the tastefully arranged, harmonious Austrian department, or to the rich brilliance of the Orientals, one is filled with shame and confusion of face.”<sup>2</sup> The newly wed Emily Birchall, who held her honeymoon with her husband in Europe made this statement. After visiting France and Paris, they arrived in time for the opening of the World's Fair in Vienna, participating in the opening ceremony and visiting the fair almost every day in May. As the statement, made by a female visitor shows on the one hand that the World's Fair only fulfilled its purpose as an arena of national representation for countries. On the other hand, since it was not at all finished during the opening, the visitors could see and interact with workers, who build missing pavilions. Sometimes they gave the visitors sneaks of the coming parts. Therefore the class and status differences were eliminated for a short moment.

The Vienna World's Fair in 1873 was the first time women were granted space to participate in world's fairs through an exhibition titled “female work” in Vienna, which was created by women within their own committee.<sup>3</sup> The integration of women into world's fairs continued in the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition. Their experiences inspired the female organizers at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. In Chicago, the “Women's Building” was built and a women's congress was formed. Seven years later, the world's fair in Paris showed through the “Palais de femme” the largest and last space for women at world's fairs.

What did women make out of this new space and what things did they consider worthily to represent Austrian Hungarian womanhood? Aglaja von Enderes, who was part of the organizing committee gives an answer to these questions:

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<sup>2</sup> Verey David (Ed.) (1985), *Wedding Tour January-June 1873 and Visit to the Vienna Exhibition* Emily Birchall, New York. p.128.

<sup>3</sup> Barth-Scalmani Gunda; Friedrich Margret (1995), *Frauen auf der Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873. Ein Blick auf die Bühne und hinter die Kulissen*. In: Mazohl-Wallnig Brigitte (Ed.) (1995), *Bürgerliche Frauenkultur im 19. Jahrhundert*. (L'Homme Schriften, Bd. 2) Wien.

“Wir sehen da die golddurchwebten kronenartigen Hauben, welche die Frauen Steiermarks zum Sonntagsputze trage, die schwere, braune Lodenjacke Tirols reich mit bunter Stickerei bedeckt, da sind die silberglitzernden Mützen, die Gürtel, die gewebten Satteltaschen, die prächtigen, mit orientalischer Farbenmischung gewebten Teppiche Dalmatiens, da sind die gestickten Bauernhemden, Schürzen, Kopftücher, die faltigen Halskrausen, die golddurchwirkten Mieder und seidenen Unterleibchen, die viele Ellen lange Strümpfe, die uns theils Mähren, theils Schlesien zugesandt”.<sup>4</sup> This means the women’s organizing committee focused mainly on clothes to represent itself and the different parts of the monarchy. Left out were products made by female industrial workers or pictures of women in official positions within the state such as teachers.

In light of the importance of world’s fairs in general and the social relevance of female visitors and exhibitors, it is astonishing that the transnational networks of the female actors as well as their political actions have not been widely examined. There are only three English dissertations, which focus on the American World’s Fairs and one Austrian dissertation on historical art. With the presence of women from colonized nations or enslaved peoples, including Africans, American Indians, and Asians, who were forcibly brought to the fair interactions between white “elite” women and the “others” happened. One of the most famous women, who’s notes about these interactions are published, is May French-Sheldon. Her African travel journal made her a star at the Chicago World’s Fair. Without questioning colonial praxis in general, she wrote about the people she engaged with.<sup>5</sup> There are several accounts that mention their presence as spectacles for the most part and as “agents” on occasion. For instance, the book *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*<sup>6</sup>; Robert Rydell’s *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*<sup>7</sup>, and *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition*<sup>8</sup> by Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler. One of the full-length studies to appear on women’s involvement at expositions is Virginia Grant Darney’s, ‘Women and World’s

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<sup>4</sup> Von Enderes Aglaja (1873), *Catalog fuer die Ausstellung oesterreichischer Frauen-Arbeiten*, Wien. p. IX.

<sup>5</sup> Boisseau TJ, *White Queen: May French-Sheldon and the Imperial Origin of American Feminist Identity*. Indiana Univ. Pr 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Thomson Rosmarie; Horowitz David (1996), *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York Univ. Press, New York.

<sup>7</sup> Rydell Robert (1987), *All the World’s Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

<sup>8</sup> Parezo Nancy; Fowler Don (2009), *Anthropology goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exosition*. Critical Studies in the History of Anthropology. Univ. of Nebraska Press.

Fairs: American International Expositions, 1876-1904'<sup>9</sup>. Darney explores the social backgrounds and plans of the female organizing committees at American fairs. Mary Frances Cordato's 'Representing the Expansion of Women's Sphere: Women's Work and Culture at the World's Fairs of 1875, 1893 and 1904'<sup>10</sup> focuses, like Darney, on exhibitions held in the United States and women's social status. Jeanne Madeline Weimann's dissertation 'The fair women'<sup>11</sup> explores the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the female struggle for space at this fair as well as the conflicts between the different female organizers. She incorporates the social and the racial components as criteria to participate at this fair. The fourth thesis accessible in Austria was written by Manu v. Miller: 'Philadelphia 1876 - Chicago 1893 - Paris 1900. The Amazons of Art'<sup>12</sup>. The Chicago World's Fair plays an important part in her research and the main focus is the position of the female artists at fairs. One of the newest books on women and gender roles at World's fairs is titled 'Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs' focusing mainly on Fair's held in the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Other scientific papers are Mazohl - Wallnig (1995), which is about the Vienna World's Fair<sup>14</sup>, or Boisseau (2010) which deal with the exhibitions held in the United States. All the other scientific works focus mainly on the general relevance of world's fairs in society<sup>15</sup>, as well as their architecture, industry or their description of other nations and empires<sup>16</sup> without including the category 'woman'. In 2014 an exhibition was held in the city museum Vienna, where the theme women, workers and foreign visitors were included in the exhibition and in articles in the exhibition book.<sup>17</sup> A book seeing the World's Fair of Vienna

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<sup>9</sup> Grant Darney Virginia (1982), *Women and World's Fair: American International Expositions, 1876–1904*. Diss, Emory University.

<sup>10</sup> Cordato Mary Frances (1989), *Representing the Expansion of Women's Sphere: Women's Work and Culture at the World's Fairs of 1876, 1893 and 1904*. Diss, New York University.

<sup>11</sup> Weimann Jeanne Madeline (1981), *The fair women*. Diss, Chicago Academy, Chicago.

<sup>12</sup> von Miller Manu (1998), *Philadelphia 1876 – Chicago 1893 – Paris 1900. Die Amazonen der Kunst: Frauen erobern Weltausstellungen*. Dissertation, Universität Salzburg.

<sup>13</sup> Boisseau TJ; Markwyn Abigel (Ed.), *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs*. Illinois Univ. Pr. 2010.

<sup>14</sup> : Mazohl-Wallnig Brigitte (Ed.) (1995), *Bürgerliche Frauenkultur im 19. Jahrhundert*. (L'Homme Schriften, Bd. 2) Wien.

<sup>15</sup> To cite one as an example for many other works composed in the beginning of the 1990's: Pemesl Jutta (1989), *Die Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873: Das gründerzeitliche Wien am Wendepunkt*. Wien/Köln.

<sup>16</sup> The thesis here mentioned should serve as an example for others focusing one special aspects of the World's Fair in Vienna: Vrba Susanne (2003), *Weltausstellungsarchitektur: 1851–1942*. Dissertation, Universität Wien.

<sup>17</sup> Kos Wolfgang, Gleis Ralph (2014), *Experiment Metropole 1873: Wien und die Weltausstellung*. Czernin Verlag, Wien.

as part of the popular culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of the city as well as the role women played at the fair is still missing.

### **The Vienna World's Fair in general**

The idea to organize a World's Fair in Vienna were made right after the Austrian visitors returned from London 1851. After the reorganization of the city by building the new *Ringstrasse* instead of the old city walls hosting an international fair became more and more realistic. Even though the ring buildings were far from being finished, Vienna presented them to the audience in 1873. This way the city performed itself as a modern metropolis instead of showing the world an old castle it was before. The organizing committees had 20 years of discussions where to locate the fair and finally decided for the space of the Prater. Since the area was just used for leisure time activities, the infrastructure of the city needed a modernization to be prepared for the amounts of visitors. New bridges were built and the public transportation system was newly organized.<sup>18</sup> The big plans to reorganize the transportation system were working as the strike of the horse carriages at the beginning of the exhibition showed. Since the horse omnibuses worked to capacity, the horse carriages had fixed rates from the city government, which did not cover the costs.<sup>19</sup>

The spacial needs of the fair should top the one of Paris and with 26 different groups and 174 different sections this goal of the organizers were met. The industrial palace alone measured 70.000 m<sup>2</sup> and the central building, the *Rotunde*, 40.000 m<sup>2</sup>. Together with the hall for machinery, two agrarian halls and the art hall visitors not only needed money but also time.<sup>20</sup>

For which main audience were the fairs designed? Already the first World's Fair organized by the Royal Society of Arts in London 1851 wanted to picture the humanity as a whole as well as the whole knowledge of World of that time.<sup>21</sup> There are several documents, which serve as evidence of the widespread adoption reception of these fairs as evidenced by newspaper and official reports that gave accounts of the high number of visitors. These visitors were at the beginning aristocrats, industrialists, specialists and journalists, which saw the exhibition as a chance to get new costumers as well as gain more knowledge of the different productions and

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<sup>18</sup> Groeger Roman-Hans (2012), Wege in Wien 1873: zum 140. Jubiläum der Weltausstellung. Wien. p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Krasny Elke (2004), Auf Spurensuche in der Landschaft des Wissens. Die Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873 im Kulturleben der Gegenwart. In: Welt Ausstellen. Schauplatz Wien 1873. Wien. p.66.

<sup>21</sup> Felber Ulrike, Camilleri Carla (2004), Welt ausstellen: Schauplatz Wien 1873. Eine Ausstellung des Technischen Museums Wien. Katalog. Wien.

inform oneself and the public about it.<sup>22</sup> Specialists visited the exhibition in Vienna more than one time as the director of the monarch's garden, Franz Antoine wrote in the introduction of his book about his notes of the plants and its usage at the World's Fair in Vienna 1873.<sup>23</sup> However, not only Austrian-Hungarian experts visited the fair, but also a lot of foreign reporters and journalists even portrayed in a photo album archived in the technical museum of Vienna.

“To his excellency Baron Schwarz-Senborn, Director General of the Vienna Universal Exhibition. May it please your Excellency on the occasion of the hospitable reception given by you to the English Artisan Reporters. You expressed a wish to receive from each one, his Photographic Portrait with name and designation.” The album addressed to Baron Schwarz-Senborn examples, how internationalization, reporting and the transfer of knowledge were intertwined.<sup>24</sup> From other parts of the world the interest in the World's Fair had other reasons and the delegation sent to Vienna consisted not only reporters, but also officials as for example the delegation of the USA. They were highly interested into the organizational matters since Philadelphia was next in line to host the event. In four official volumes the delegation detailed the themes, organization as well as European articles of special exhibitions groups.<sup>25</sup>

### **Can the Vienna World's Fair seen as part of the popular culture?**

There are two different views, if World's Fairs can be seen as part of mass culture or not. On the one hand, German culture ethnologist Kasper Maase stated, that popular culture started just one decade before the outbreak of the First World War in Europe.<sup>26</sup> Following this argument, the Vienna World's Fair would be seen as part of the folk culture of Vienna since modern popular culture has its roots in the amusements of the folk culture.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the social scientist Michael Makropoulos wrote that mass culture is a medium of

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<sup>22</sup> Felber Ulrike, Krasny Elke (2000), *Smart Exports: Österreich auf der Weltausstellung 1851-2000*. Wien.

<sup>23</sup> Franz Antoine 1878, *Das Pflanzenreich auf der Wiener Weltausstellung im Jahre 1873*. Notizen über die exponierten Pflanzen, Pflanzenstoffe und Produkte sowie über ihre bildlichen Darstellungen, Wien Einleitung.

<sup>24</sup> English reporters at the World's Fair in Vienna, Birmingham 1873, photo album made by L.G. Larkins. In: Krasny Elke (2004), *Auf Spurensuche in der Landschaft des Wissens*.p.60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p.61.

<sup>26</sup> Maase Kasper (1997), *Grenzenloses Vergnügen. Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850-1970*. Frankfurt am Main p.20.

<sup>27</sup> Horak Roman (2014), *Vor der Massenkultur. Formationen der Wiener Unterhaltungslandschaft*. In: Wolfgang Kos, Ralph Gleis (Hrsg.), *Experiment Metropole 1873: Wien und die Weltausstellung*. Wien p. 257.

modern experiences and products of industrialized leisure time-, consumption and media worlds, which led to hegemonical cultural realities of modern societies<sup>28</sup>. As a consequence World's Fair with its presentation of modern countries with their national industry, culture and progress as exhibitions of technical accomplishments and amusement and leisure time events as well as educational purposes fit into this concept of mass culture. World's Fairs are experiments of showing the connection of economy and culture through the omnipresence of goods as part of the consumption culture and through the international exchange as part of the experience culture.<sup>29</sup> Locating the World's Fair of Vienna in 1873 in the area of the Prater, which was after its opening for the public 1766 one of the places where people from different social backgrounds met and shared the space in their leisure time.<sup>30</sup> The 50 Kreuzer day was also an innovation to grant access to people of lower income as well as guarantee the separation of different social classes. However, the planning of the World's Fair space was also used to regulate this space to gain more control over the masses. New broad straight streets instead of the small ones were built for shaping the mobility within the space and 180 new little houses for consumption of food and other amusements to produce and to satisfy the needs of the people.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly, the democratisation of the World's Fair as a spectacle for everyone went hand in hand with the economic needs of the exhibition and new regulations to control these masses.

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<sup>28</sup> Makropoulos Michael (2008), *Theorie der Massenkultur*. Muenchen p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> König Gudrun (2014), *Der Schauwert der Dinge: Weltausstellungen und Museen als Institutionen des Zeigens*. In: Prügel Roland (Ed.), *Geburt der Massenkultur: Beiträge der Tagung des WGL Forschungsprojekts 'Wege in der Moderne. Weltausstellungen, Medien und Musik im 19. Jahrhundert.'* Nürnberg p.18.

<sup>30</sup> Salten Felix (2004): *Wurstelprater. Ein Schlüsseltext zur Wiener Moderne*, Wien. p127.

<sup>31</sup> Horak Roman (2014), *Vor der Massenkultur. Formationen der Wiener Unterhaltungslandschaft*. Wien. p. 259.

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