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The Development of Children Protection Institutions (CPIs) in Austria

How the influence of the 19th Century Merciful Sisters of Zams is still felt today

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Abstract

In Austria, collective out-of-home care for children under age six dates to the 19th century. Circumstances such as industrialization and socioeconomic changes during the 18th and 19th centuries altered family structures and therefore required changes to how children would be cared for. For the first time, parents went to work outside the home in factories and other large-scale businesses and were left without care options for their children. These new circumstances led to child neglect and an increase in mortality rates. Despite these tragedies, the Austrian government did not establish care-based institutions for children below age six. To fill the need of care for children, *Kinderbewahranstalten* (Children Protection Institutions - CPIs) were established by private charities. A main reason for establishing these institutions was to protect the children of working-class families from neglect and socialize them as “good” citizens. Associations and individuals obtained permission from the Catholic Church to open institutions since the Church possessed the authority to establish protection institutions. The Merciful Sisters, a Catholic female order located in Zams, Tirol, played an important role in providing childcare for poor families in 19th century Austria. The denomination established one of Austria’s first private schools to educate kindergarten teachers in 19th century. Concurrently, other female orders in Austria developed similar approaches to childcare and opened CPIs in other parts of the Habsburg Empire thus providing nuns as child-carers. As of the time of publication of this thesis, the Merciful Sisters still exists and maintains the lineage that has shaped the modern educational system in Austria.

Key words: children protection institutions, childcare, Kinderbewahranstalten, Austria, Merciful Sisters, history, 19th century

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Introduction

Modern society generally accepts that early childhood education is the foundation for lifelong learning and social integration. To understand the current state of early childhood education in Europe, it is relevant to ascertain its historical roots and how the development of the system occurred. Early childhood institutions in the 19th century were established due to socioeconomic changes in Europe, such as the Enlightenment, industrialization and urbanization. In the early stages of early childhood education, the institutions lacked a centralized structure and did not follow a government mandated curriculum but instead were dependent on the person who established or managed the institution. Throughout Europe, the centers had various names but similar missions: *infant school* (England), *scuola d'infantile* (Italy), *école de l'enfance* (France) and *Kinderbewahranstalten* (Germany and Austria).

Before industrialization, children were taken care of by the collective group although the primary responsibility was with the parents (Willekens & Scheiwe, 2020). In a peasant family household, multiple generations were living together, including maidservants and farmhands. Families who were living in larger cities were living in family units. The nuclear family – as we know it today - is a product of the socioeconomic changes due to industrialization and was previously an exception rather than the rule (Konrad, 2012; Willekens & Scheiwe, 2020). Willekens and Scheiwe (2020) describe the 19th century institutions as a “collectivization.” Children were taken out of their familiar environment and taken care of and socialized by unrelated people. Working class parents, especially in the cities, essentially consigned their children while at work. This led to a weakening in the primary socialization of children by their parents and close family members and a growth in the secondary socialization by unfamiliar people who instilled their beliefs and values into the children.

Similarly to other European countries the 19th century, Austrian society saw the need for changes in the field of childcare. *Kinderbewahranstalten* (Children Protection Institutions - CPIs) were established by private associations of the bourgeoisie since the state saw no need to provide care for the proletarian children under six years of age. However, in Austria a change in thinking eventually occurred in 1872 marked by a decree from the Minister of Education.

In 1831 the Church gained the authority to establish and to monitor CPIs. The archiepiscopal consortium founded the *Centralverein für Kinderbewahranstalten* (Main-Association for CPIs). Established associations such as the *Frauenverein zur Beförderung der Kleinkinderbewahranstalten und weiblichen Industrieschulen* (Women's Association for the

Promotion of Infant Protection Institutions and Female Industrial Schools) or private people had to ask for permission to open CPIs. The Church and associations aided the poor children and raised them as obedient citizens to preserve law, morals, customs and order in the state (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). The basis of CPIs in Austria was described by Lex-Nalis et al. (2019) as a “combination of nurturing useful workers and charitable objectives.”

In 1863 Austria established the first kindergarten after the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel. In contrast to the CPIs for the working-class children, the main beneficiaries of these establishments were the children of the bourgeoisie. These kindergarten institutions were not founded solely to take care of the children but rather to educate them (Penz, 2023). Parents from the educated class were encouraged to bring their children to the kindergarten for a couple of hours daily so they could socialize and learn with similar aged children from the same social class. These kindergartens were subject to charges and for the bourgeoisie, compared to the CPIs which were gratis and served the poor class (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). Furthermore, the CPIs were established to protect children, prevent them from harm and neglect, and teach Catholic values. Both sets of establishments, the CPIs and the kindergarten facilities, are the precursor of today’s early childhood education system in Austria.

Numerous religious orders were founded during the 19th century in response to industrialization and public hardships. In 1811 Dean Tolentin Schuler established a hospital in Zams, Tirol. Zams is approximately 65 km west from Innsbruck, the capital of Tirol. He assigned young secular women including his niece, Katharina Lins, to nurse the sick and educate female teenagers in the village.

Schuler laid the foundation for the first religious order of the Merciful Sisters in Austria by sending Katharina Lins to Strasbourg where she received a multifaceted education and became a nun. The Merciful Sisters was official recognized by the Austrian government in 1826. Over the years the sisters established school branches such as the kindergarten teacher education. The Merciful Sisters were also involved in opening and supervising CPIs and were part of the promotion and expansion of CPIs in the Austrian Empire.

This thesis examines the following questions:

- 1) What were the origins and historical developments of CPIs in the 19th century Austria, and what societal needs did they address?

- 2) What was the educational role of the Merciful Sisters in Zams in the field of early childhood education?
- 3) What is the long-term impact of the educational efforts of the Merciful Sisters in Zams?

The thesis is organized into five chapters. The first explores the establishment of childcare facilities in Europe and recognizes the interconnection between individuals. The second chapter provides a brief overview of the geographical and social context of 19th century Austro-Hungarian Empire and its transformation to modern day Austria. Chapter three explains the development of the first CPIs in Austria and provides historic information of the expansion of CPIs and their purpose. Chapter four examines the influence of the Church, especially the religious order of the Merciful Sisters in Zams and their educational field during the 19th century and beyond. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a conclusion and ideas for future research.

1 The European Childcare Institutions

The 19th century in Europe saw the emergence of childcare institutions for children younger than 6 years of age. The main drivers for the institutions were ideological, religious factors and socioeconomic progress (Luc, 2015). The aristocracy and governments of European countries did not see value in protecting or educating children under 6 years. This led to the onset of non-state funded children's institutions. The settings were launched by public figures, associations, religious institutions with charitable or philanthropic motivations and welfare measures (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019) to help families and prepare children for the future as a work force (Luc, 2015). The establishment of various institutions in Europe were influenced by the local demands for early childhood education and care.

In 1771, the Alsatian protestant pastor Jean-Frédéric Oberlin who was familiar with the oeuvre of Comenius and Rousseau, arranged knitting schools in his parish for children under 6 years (Luc, 2015). The educational function of the knitting schools was to prepare children for their future work in the textile industry. Besides getting to know the art of textile and knitting the children were instructed in religion, language education (local dialect and French), natural history, geography and physical exercise (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019; Luc, 2015).

In Germany, Pauline de Detmold opened the first public protection institution in 1802 (Gary, 1995). Luc (2015) mentions that de Detmold opened the protection institution after reading about the Parisian initiative by Adélaïde de Pastoret who founded a depositary room for poor infants in 1801. As a novel concept for the time, De Pastoret's establishment was used as a childcare center and not as an educational facility. The admission was permitted to infants and toddlers who were no longer breastfed and children up to the age of 4 years (Fischer, 1873; Luc, 2015). Pauline de Detmold intentions were to make life of working-class women easier, especially during the seasons when work needed to be done on the fields (Fischer 1873). In the *Kindertagesstätte* (day nursery) the children were looked after, fed, taught to knit and to sing. Furthermore, they learned the principles of religious doctrine and were instructed in German language (Luc, 2015).

In 1815, Marie-Anne Calame, a Swiss Protestant, opened an asylum boarding school for 30 poor children near Neuchâtel. The children were taught knitting, religion, singing, reading and French. When the attendance numbers increased, children were grouped for instance the 2- to 5-year-olds were put into the "infant class" (Evrard, 1934 as cited in Luc, 2015 p.34).

In 1816, Robert Owen, a British manufacturer and Socialist reformer from Scotland, introduced infant schools for children aged 2 to 6 in his cottonwool mill in New Lanark (Gary, 1995; Luc, 2015). The infant schools offered rhythmic marches, dances and songs, religion, object-lessons, geography, natural history, and simple instructions on the 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) Luc, 2015, p.36). Inspired by the success of Owen's initiative, British Parliament members from London and local businessmen opened the Westminster Free Day Infant Asylum in 1819 and a second institution in Spitalfields, London. The appointee for the Spitalfields institution was Samuel Wilderspin whose main purposes of the infant school was to prevent parental neglect and delinquency, help older children to attend school and provide religious education (Luc, 2015).

In 1823 Wilderspin published the first Spitalfields institution reference manual. The manual was based on his own experiences as the founder of the school. He indicated the importance of raising children of the poor from age 1½ to 7 years. He queries if it is the responsibility of the rich or the state to take care of the poor children and their education. Wilderspin's question conform to the 19th century mindset (Gary, 1995). Influenced by the infant school of Wilderspin and his manual, other European countries established infant schools with similar intentions.

In the 19th century Austria, the Viennese merchant and philanthrope Josef Wertheimer played a significant part in establishing CPIs. The merchant was traveling through England and learned of the schools established by Samuel Wilderspin. Influenced by the success of the British infant schools, Wertheimer wanted to help disadvantaged children in the Austrian Empire by establishing similar children protection institutions (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019).

Wertheimer recited Wilderspin's reference manual and translated it into German, with additional personal opinions (Willekens & Scheiwe, 2020) and excerpts of other English manuals (Luc, 2015). In 1826, Wertheimer published the book "*Über die Frühzeitige Erziehung der Kinder und die Englischen Klein-Kinder-Schulen*" (On Early Education for Children and on English Infant Schools) and sparked a discussion about out-of-home caretaking for children under 6 years. The reason for the discussion was the content of the manual – it analyzed children from lower class and their early year education. High ranking personalities were concerned about turmoil from the proletariat (Luc, 2015). The argument was that the ordinary people would get too educated and start to revolt against the upper-class. This reason did not decrease the spread of Wertheimer's book and ideas.

Motivated by Wertheimer's compendium, countess Therese Brunswick from Hungary traveled to England to study the infant schools of Wilderspin. After her return to Hungary she contacted Wertheimer and in 1828 established the first children protection institution in the Habsburgs Empire. The countess had already a philosophy about how to educate children because she was of the opinion that early education was important for the reformation of society (Berger, 2005). Her intention was to help poor uneducated families to cultivate their offspring from 2 to 6 years (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). She introduced a "pedagogical concept" similar to schools where the children were taught religion, morphology, arithmetic, Hungarian and German words, natural history, division of the year, singing and posy (Berger, 2005).

Besides, working with the countess, Wertheimer worked with Abbot Ferrante Aporti who was located in the crownland of Lombardy, Italy. Wertheimer and the priest met at the university of Vienna while attending a course in pedagogy and later exchanged letters. Wertheimer's textbook and other sources of European projects inspired Aporti to establish a *scuola infantile* (infant school) in 1828. The school focused mainly on teaching religion, had little to no handicraft lessons and separated boys and girls. (Luc, 2015). The establishment of early childhood institutions in Europe exemplify the need of these institutions in the 19th century and it demonstrates that people from different countries were connected either through traveling, the media or letter exchange.

Wertheimer was concerned with social inequality in society particularly for the poor and religious minorities. He was especially concerned with the high child mortality rate in Vienna. By comparing statistics, he concluded that in the poorer districts, twice as many children died than in better more affluent districts (Gary, 1995). Wertheimer himself was from Jewish descent and experienced discrimination in his youth. Antisemitism during the 19th century was not a rarity which led to rejection of Jewish children in protection institutions. Consequently, he made an effort to open a Jewish protection institution. In 1843, the first Jewish children protection institution opened its doors for other Viennese Jews (Gary, 1995).

2 Austria

Austria has a long history being ruled by the Habsburg family. Their reign over Austria began in 1292 and ended with the loss of the 1st World War in 1918 (Britannica, 2020). Austria is located in the center of Europe and surrounded by neighboring countries such as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Italy. The country shares historical commonalities with all of these countries.

By 1914 the Austrian Hungarian Empire land area was 676.615km² with 51,4 million people (Mutschlechner, 2014). The reign of the empire covered areas such as Bohemia, Moravia, Bukovina, Transylvania, Carniola, Küstenland, Dalmatia, Croatia, Fiume, and Galicia (Britannica, 2021). Spoken languages were German, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Italian. Religious denominations were Roman Catholic, Christian-Orthodox, Protestant, Jews and Muslims (Mutschlechner, 2014).

Modern day Austria has a land area of 83.878km² and a population of 9.159.993. The main language is German but the Croatian, Hungarian, and Slovenian language are in certain regions recognized as an official languages. Austria has freedom of religion. Most of the inhabitants belong to the Catholic Church, followed by non-affiliated with the church, Protestant, Muslim and Christian-Orthodox (Migration.gv.at., n.d.) and Jews. Modern day Austria consists of nine states – Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Burgenland, Styria, Carinthia, Salzburg, Tirol and Vorarlberg. The states are divided into districts and subdivided into municipalities.

In 1774, the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa established the general school system for the Austrian nation. The compulsory school reform was intended for every child in the monarchy starting from the age of 6 for a period of 6 years. The main thought of the *Österreichischen Nationalen Erziehung* (Austrian National Education) was to teach the masses that they should love their monarch (who was the father of the country), obey the orders of the ruler and oblige to dutifulness and faith (Németh, 2013). The timeframe for the school year varied between the cities and countryside due to seasonal work. Furthermore, the empress and government believed that the proletariat were not capable to nurture and educate their own children. With the introduction of the compulsory schooling education of children over 6 years became a state affair (Gary, 1995).

Before the introduction of the compulsory school system, the children received an informal education by their parents, close relatives or networks such as neighborhood communities. The offspring of the working class were expected to work from a young age (Willekens et al, 2015). They were prepared for their life by watching the adults managing the daily work and later by helping. Children were given small suitable chores according to their age, maturity and size. The tasks increased yearly through development. For instance, children helped during the harvest times or making textiles at home. Children were seen as financial contributors for the family (Heywood, 2018) thus child labor was a common occurrence. In 1885 the trade regulation amendment banned children from work (Penz, 2023).

In the middle of the 18th century social changes began to occur and altered the family system and the domestic home. The number of homes increased while the number of people living in each home decreased. The family structure was changing due to industrialization (Engelbrecht, 1986).

Industrialization throughout the Austrian Empire occurred differently in the states (Gary, 1995). States such as Lower Austria, Vorarlberg and Vienna grew up to 45 percent as a result of faster industrialization whereas in Tirol a growth of 26 percent was recorded (Dietrich, 1992 as cited in Weißeisen, 2021). Furthermore, work shifted outside of the home environment and people, including children, were becoming employed in factories. Home was no longer an environment of labor but rather a place to eat and sleep (Konrad, 2012; Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). Survival now relied on heteronomous work. This caused a lack of caretaking for infants and younger children by their family. The consequences were neglect and child mortality.

19th century Austria faced a high child mortality caused by various factors such as poor medical care, dire social conditions, poor housing situations, employment of the mother or illegitimacy (Wiki-Bearbeiter, 2019). A pivotal point in Austrian's child mortality rates accrued in the middle of the 19th century. Table 1 of child mortality from Tirol and Vorarlberg, the western part of Austria, will exemplify the situation.

Table 1. Child Mortality from 1830-1890 in Tirol and Vorarlberg

| Year | Birth up to 1 month | 1 month to 1 year | 1 year to 4 years | From birth to 4 years |
|------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1830 | | 27,36% | 11,43% | 47,17% |
| 1860 | 14,69% | 11,90% | 11,82% | 38,41% |

| Year | Birth up to 1 month | 1 month to 1 year | 1 year to 4 years | From birth to 4 years |
|------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1890 | 10,93% | 12,74% | 8,49% | 32,16% |

Note Adapted from Bolognese-Leuchtenmüller (1978) as cited in Weißisen (2021), p.12

Reasons for the decline in child mortality can be attributed to better hygiene at birth, medical progress, and the reduction in infectious diseases and malnutrition (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). This led to a natural incline in the population and a longer expectation of life. Moreover, the upper class responded to the difficult situation of the working class by establishing the first CPIs in the 1830's (Engelbrecht, 1986). Together, these societal changes can be seen as improvement in health and well-being of children.

3 Children Protection Institutions (CPIs) in Austria

3.1 The Founding Years

The founding of the Austrian CPIs in the 19th century can be traced back by evidence of historical events. The establishment of CPIs as mentioned in chapter 1 was not state funded. Charitable associations, private individuals (aristocracy or affluent bourgeois) or institutions associated to the Catholic Church helped to set up the establishments (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019).

In 1811, the *Gesellschaft adeliger Frauen zur Beförderung des Guten und Nützlichen, Wien* (The Association Society of Aristocratical Women to Promote the Good and Beneficial, Vienna), tried to fund children protection institutions in Vienna. The purpose was to offer working parents a place for their children where they were looked after. The government and the Church rejected the project. The realization of the first child protection institution in Vienna was delayed for 19 years. One reason for declining the project was that the lower class could become a threat to the government if they get unduly educated (Berger, 2005). That is, the powerbrokers of Austrian high society were concerned that they would lose control over the masses if they became educated.

In 1830, two years after countess Brunswick established the children protection institution in Hungary, Vienna launched its first institution. The founder was Josef Wertheimer who was mentioned in chapter 1 and the priest Johann Lindner. During the first year the child protection institution counted 160 children (Fischer, 1873). The same year Vienna gained two additional institutions formed by priests and secular citizen. From there onwards cities of the Habsburg Empire opened protection institutions after the Viennese example (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). In Innsbruck, the capital of Tirol, the *Frauenverein zur Beförderung der Kleinkinderbewahranstalten und weiblichen Industrieschulen* (Women's Association for the Promotion of Infant Protection Institutions and Female Industrial Schools) established three centers in the 1830's (Primus, 2005). By 1894, 400 to 500 children were taken care of in the CPIs in Innsbruck (Ariadne - Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, n.d.). Reports from Klagenfurt in 1834, the regional capital of Carinthia, demonstrate the distinction of the social classes. Affluent families demanded a separate fee-based protection institution for their offsprings due to the fact that the charitable protection institutions utilized by the lower-class. CPIs were first established in big cities such as Vienna, Innsbruck or Salzburg. From 1848 onwards municipalities and villages followed the example and founded CPIs as well (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019).

The German pedagogue and theologian Christoph Kröger indicated in a travel report from 1840 that 900 children were taken care of in six CPIs in Vienna. (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). In 1871 the attendance of Viennese children was four times higher than in 1840. In Vienna, 3,710 children attended 20 CPIs (Fischer, 1873). This demonstrates that CPIs were in high demand by the lower-class families of the 19th century.

In Wien 20 Kinder-Bewahranstalten, mit einem Lehr- und Aufsichts-Personale, dessen Zahl 60 betrug, und besucht von 1851 Knaben und 1859 Mädchen; zusammen 3710 Kinder.

| | Anstalten | Lehr- und Aufsichts-Personale | Kinder |
|---|-----------|-------------------------------|--------|
| In den anderen Orten Niederösterreichs: | 18 | 37 | 2903 |
| „ Oberösterreich: | 32 | 80 | 3825 |
| „ Salzburg: | 3 | 9 | 311 |
| „ Steiermark: | 5 | 9 | 346 |
| „ Kärnten: | 2 | 4 | 121 |
| „ Krain: | 1 | 2 | 145 |
| „ Triest, Görz und Istrien: | 43 | 56 | 844 |
| „ Tirol und Vorarlberg: | 13 | 28 | 1543 |
| „ Böhmen: | 42 | 307 | 5097 |
| „ Mähren: | 12 | 15 | 815 |
| „ Schlesien: | 2 | 4 | 165 |
| „ Galizien: | 5 | 26 | 674 |
| „ Dalmatien: | 3 | 13 | 275 |

Figure 1. Children Protection Institutions in the Austrian Empire (Source: Fischer, 1873, p.16)

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the protection institutions, the employees, and the number of the children in the crownlands. In 1871, the entire Habsburg monarchy accommodated 20,774 children. The numbers of children attending the protection institutions were high. Depending on the crownland the carer-child ratio was 1:16 in Böhmen (Bohemia) up to 1:79 in Niederösterreich (Lower Austria) (Fischer, 1873). Fischer (1873) also states that in the carer-child ratio the executive committee members who established the CPIs were included although these were not responsible in taking care of the children. (p.17). For this reason, the carer-child ratio is actually much higher. The high carer-child ratio indicates that it was impossible for the carer to nurture and educate children from 3 to 6 years.

In addition, the founders of the CPIs ordered weekly inspections by a doctor. The purpose was to check the sanitation of the institution and the health of the children. The medic was either a member of the association of the protection institution or the local health professional. Through the literature it was not clear if the doctor worked for free or was paid by the association. The available literature did not specify the doctor's compensation (Gary, 1995).

In 1863, the first private *Fröbel Kindergarten* opened in Vienna by Georg Hendel. The proponents of the kindergarten were against the CPIs due to too much drill and memorizing of biblical verses and praying and not enough free play (Penz, 2023). In response to the demand, more Fröbel kindergarten were opened in Austrian cities like Graz, Kufstein, Trieste (now part of Italy), Linz and Klagenfurt (Berger, 2005). Families who wanted to send their children to these kindergartens had to pay a monthly fee. However, the working class was not able to afford the cost (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). Kindergarten were for the children of wealthy families since the focus was in educating the children and not in teaching them cleanliness and moral

3.2 Ecclesiastical Infant Protection Institutions

The Catholic Church was not in favor of out-of-home supervising due to their believes that family is the center of social life. However, the Church made an exception when parents were unable to look after their child or when the child was orphaned but employment in and of itself was not a valid excuse. Consequently, the Catholic Church did not approve an out-of-home upbringing. However, over time, economic and social circumstances changed the view of the catholic church. Proletarian families were now under social distress and children became neglected. Therefore, the church had a reason to aid the people and contribute to change its stance and support society's new direction (Konrad, 2012).

During the 19th century Konrad (2012) references that several Catholic female orders dedicated to welfare work were established. The result was the catholic church had a large pool of well-educated nuns at hand. The female orders were a good source of talent for social fields such as CPIs, crèches, infant homes, hospitals, poor and benevolent houses, orphanages, rescue houses and girls' schools (Berger, 2016). In the early days of CPIs, nuns and secular employees did not have relevant pedagogical training (Konrad, 2012).

Different Catholic congregations around the Habsburg Monarchy supervised CPIs (Berger, 2021) and other educational organizations. Municipalities, city administrations, associations and parishes saw the advantage in employing nuns for their children protection institutions (Berger, 2016). A benefit of utilizing nuns was that they provided services for free due to the support of their religious orders. Additionally, the Church could rely on charity within the community, which helped to secure financial sponsors (Willekens et al, 2015,). Moreover, the women congregations fulfilled a big role in increasing the perceptibility of the church through their achievements in social work (Penz, 2023). For instance, the catholic order of the merciful sisters in Vienna managed their first protection institution in 1850. Later the order

had CPIs in districts 4, 5, 6, 14 and 15 near the homes of the suburban population and the factories. The admission of the children was handled by the local priest and the funding was through the women's charity association. The number of institutions which were taken over by the Viennese merciful sisters between 1850-1913 were 9 in Vienna, 13 in Lower Austria, 5 in Upper Austria and more in other crownlands of Austria. In total, the congregation of the Viennese Merciful Sisters managed 40 institutions throughout the country (Penz, 2023).

3.3 The Purpose and Regulations

The purpose of launching CPIs do not have one singular intent. The associations agreed to the fact that there was a need to take care of children aged 2 to 5 years. The intention was to protect the children from neglect and criminalization while parents were at work and not capable to look after their progeny. Another argument was to socialize the proletarian children to be obedient, civilized and laborious people of society (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). The objective for CPIs therefore served as poor relief by helping working parents to nurture and protect their children and decrease mortality. Furthermore, the state was able to form a society suitable to their agenda.

Empress Karoline Auguste, wife of Franz I, was convinced that the CPIs were serving a good purpose and supported the idea, but later she doubted her the decision. One of her concerns was that the working-class children could get over educated, lose their obedience to the Empire and become aware of their terrible situation. Consequently, in 1831, the *Zentralverein für Kinderbewahranstalten Wien* (The Association for Children Protection Institutions Vienna) was established by the Catholic Council of Cardinals to monitor the institutions (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019).

The Church officially took over the rights to control the CPIs in February 1832. Article 90 of the Austrian Poor Law 1832 of the state regulation declared that the institutions are supervised by the Episcopalian consistory. Private associations or non-Catholic organizations had to obtain a permission form the church before opening a children protection institutions. In addition, the protection institutions were dependent on private donations. Financial support from a school or other fund were prohibited and the children protection institutions were not schools. Children over the age of 5 years were not allowed to attend (Willekens & Scheiwe, 2020).

In the same year, 1832, Leopold Chimani a writer and educator was approached by the Association for Children Protection Institutions to develop a guide. The guide “*Theoretisch-praktische Leitfaden für Lehrer in Kinder-Bewahranstalten*” (Theoretical-Practical Guidelines for Teachers in Children Protection Institutions) can be viewed as the “first curriculum” in Austria. The manual describes the institutions as a meeting place for children aged 2 to 5 years. They are physically and mentally monitored in the absence of their parents. Additionally, their physical strength and mental abilities are stimulated, and the children receive religious, moral and spiritual training for their future in primary schools and for the rest of their life (Chimani, 1832, p. 1). The handbook table of content exhibits extensive responsibility of the staff in the children protection institutions (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). To the extent on how the guide was applied by the carers is difficult to analyze because there were no official teacher education courses offered for the children protection institutions at the time. Employees were simply advised to read the guide and there was no clear system of measuring the results (Gary, 1995).

In 1848 the Ministry of Public Education was created. The state took over the responsibility for the school system but not for early childhood education (Gary, 1995). In 1869, the *Reichsvolksschulgesetz* (Imperial School Act) mentions a “dual system” for early childhood education. It was now codified that CPIs were for the lower-class and kindergartens were for children of the upper-class. However, the distinction did not indicate in which sector, charity or education, the kindergarten would fall. Additionally, the act removed the Church’s control over the early childhood education (Gary, 1995 p.36; Scheiwe, 2015).

In 1872 the *Minister für Kults und Unterricht* (Minister for Education) published a decree for institutions such as kindergarten, protection institution and crèche (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). The decree was distinguished into three sections A, B, and C. Section A describes the purpose and the organizational structure of the kindergarten and the teacher education. For instance, article 21, specifies the duration for the kindergarten teacher course which was 1 year. The maximum number of participants for the course were 40 and the minimum age to attend the education was 16 years but no older than 30 years. People who were interested in becoming a kindergarten teacher had to pass an entrance examination. They had to exhibit moral integrity, physical ability and a musical hearing with a good singing voice (Nationalbibliothek, n.d.; Willekens & Scheiwe, 2020).

Section B defines the CPIs. While the kindergarten had the function to educate children, the protection institution main focus was on taking care of the children by teaching them “cleanliness, tidiness, manners and the love to work” (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019; Nationalbibliothek, n.d.). The teachers of the children protection institutions had to obtain the same education as the teachers for the kindergarten.

Section C outlines that the crèches are for children under 3 years and must conform with the sanitary standards (Nationalbibliothek, n.d.). The sanitary standard was not explained in the decree of 1872.

The decree codified the differences of the institutions. CPI’s main purpose was to support the basic needs while the kindergarten had an educational function. Besides there was an admission age for the different institutions. Children who attended kindergarten had to be 4 years old. CPIs took in children starting with 3 years and crèches under 3 years (Nationalbibliothek, n.d.).

Despite the transfer of the supervision rights from the Episcopal delegation to the school authorities the catholic church still dominated the educational sector, by providing teaching personal. For instance, in the federal state of Tirol the Catholic Church regulated provincial school committees and placed teachers such as nuns and priest. The reason was that the state did not pay a teacher salary before 1910 (Willekens & Scheiwe, 2020).

In 1878, both the CPIs and kindergarten were under state supervision. The state education authority and district school inspectors were responsible for the institutions. A committee was responsible for overseeing the institutions. Private institutions had their own supervisors. Some of the kindergarten and CPIs were under the protectorate of the empress or an ecclesiastical figure (Gary 1995).

4 Merciful Sisters in Zams

4.1 The Congregation

The order of the merciful sisters was established in 1633 in France by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac under the name *Filles de La Charité*. The community received the pontifical licensure in 1668. In 1790 during the French Revolution the congregation was abolished. However, the order managed to sustain their communal life until the readmittance in 1800. From then the sisterhood expanded through Europe and the world (Kirchinger et al., 2022). Currently the merciful sisters are represented in 94 countries in the world and are one of the biggest female catholic communities (Vinzenz Gruppe, 2024).

From 1805 until 1831 dean and priest Nikolaus Tolentin Schuler served the community in Zams, Tirol. It was in 1811 when Schuler established a hospital and recruited in the same year women from the village to nurse the sick and educate female teenagers. One of the young women was the secular Katharina Lins a relative of Schuler (Kätzler, 1986). Lins and other women took over the nursing of the sick and educated the girls in the village school although neither had a teacher education (Reindl, 1936 as cited in Weiß Eisen, 2021).

In 1822 Schuler sent Katharina Lins to the Merciful Sisters in Strasbourg. There the novice received an education in home economics, nursing practice, producing pharmaceuticals and theological education. Katharina Lins officially became a member of the merciful sisters in 1823 and changed her name to Sister Josepha Nikolina Lins. She returned to Zams and became the first superior of the order (Penz, 2023). In 1825 the Zams nunnery received an official monastery certificate. The imperial and royal government in Innsbruck confirmed it and inaugurated the nunnery in 1826 (Kätzler, 1986; Penz, 2023). Over the following years more women joined the community. Subsequently, more branches were opened in the state of Tirol (Rudig, 1915).

In 1831 the government of Vienna requested the Merciful Sisters to travel to Vienna and take over a hospital. In 1832 superior Lins, 3 sisters and 2 future candidate traveled to Vienna and took over the hospital (Penz, 2023; Rudig, 1915). Superior Lins returned to Zams in 1835 due to health reasons and died the following year (Penz, 2023). More subsidiaries were formed in 1837 in other cities of the empire. The establishment in Vienna became autonomous from the motherhouse in Zams (Rudig, 1915).

A setback hit the merciful sisters from Zams in March 1870 when the nunnery and the school burned down. In the same year the Merciful Sisters were able to move into an “emergency house” while a motherhouse was built in a new location. The nuns were able to move into their new home in 1872 and continue their work in the field of education and nursing of the sick (Rudig, 1915).

4.2 The Educational Institutions

A main tenet of the Merciful Sisters was to educate young female. The association established during the 19th century in Zams was especially strong in its pursuit of this ideal. The Merciful Sisters sought to standardize its principles through its instructional writings, specifically, the *Lehrerinnenbildungsanstalt* (Teacher Education Institution), *Handarbeitslehrerinnen* (Manual-Work Teacher), *Bürgerschule für Mädchen* (Bourgeoise-School for Girls), *Hauswirtschaftsschule* (Domestic Economic School) and *Bildungsanstalt für Kindergärtnerinnen* (Educational Establishment for Kindergarten Teacher) (Rudig, 1915).

Over the centuries the nature of the Austrian school system changed, and the merciful sisters had to adapt. The internal education of the Merciful Sisters changed from a general intergenerational training in the postulancy and novitiate to a specialized one due to state laws and regulations (Penz, 2023). This meant that the order had to develop a division of labor within their organization.

Currently in 2025, the school is still private regulated with an integrated public law. The public law gives the school the right to issue school certificates for their students and are publicly approved. At the present time the institution in Zams offers students of both sexes an education. The school types are, the *Praxismittelschule* (Secondary School), *Oberstufenrealgymnasium* (High School) and the *Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik* (Educational Institute for Elementary Education) (Katharina Lins Schulen, n.d).

4.2.1 The Children Protection Institutions of the Merciful Sisters

In 1894, the book *Die katholischen Erziehungs- und Unterrichts-Anstalten in Österreich* (The Catholic Educational- and Teaching-Institutions in Austria) regarding Catholic educational institutions from novitiate to higher education to CPIs was published. The publication was indented as a guide for catholic parents to help them find the right education for their children. The arrangement of the guide is grouped into the dioceses of the Habsburg Monarchy.

The book describes the in 1894 existing educational branches of the Merciful Sisters in Zams. Girls from the age 6 to 19 years got educated in the private teacher education institution or in the boarding school. The boarding school was for girls aged 6 to 14 years and managed by 1 catechist and 5 sister. The teacher training institution was for girls aged 15 to 19 years and managed by 2 catechists and 6 sisters. Furthermore, the CPI in Zams is mentioned as well. The children who were attending the CPI were from 3 to 6 years (Panholzer, 1894, p. 103-104).

The book, the Catholic Educational- and Teaching-Institutions in Austria, did not mention how many teachers were managing the CPI in Zams. However, an original description from 10 January 1884, states that there was 1 teacher, who was a nun from the order, and 1 assistant (Beschreibung der Kleinkinderbewahranstalt, 1884). Furthermore, the merciful sisters taught girls in public elementary schools in other villages in the county of Tirol (Panholzer, 1894).

In the county of Tirol, the motherhouse of the merciful sisters from Zams oversaw 33 CPIs, including a kindergarten institution with a municipal orphanage house. Most of the protection institutions were attached to schools. The following table is an excerpt and illustrates the protection institutions and elementary girl's schools in Tirol. The other states which were part of the county of Tirol during the 19th century are excluded in in Table 2.

Table 2. CPIs in the county of Tirol from the Merciful Sisters in Zams

| City/ Village | CPIs | Elementary/Girl's School | Private school for factory children | Orphanage house |
|----------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Silz | 1877 – 1938 | 1838 – 1938 | – | – |
| Landeck | 1884 – 1939 | 1840 – 1938 | – | – |
| Nauders | 1893 – 1915 | 1846 – 1938 | – | – |
| Zirl | 1880 – 1922 | 1847 – 1938 | – | – |
| Hötting (Innsbruck) | 1879 – 1939 | 1858 – 1938 | – | – |
| Wilten (Innsbruck) | 1882 – 1938 | 1867 – 1902 | – | – |
| Inzing | 1887 – 1938 | 1869 – 1939 | – | – |
| Matrei am Brenner | 1878 – 1939 | – | 1871 – 1921 | – |
| Telfs | 1884 – 1939 | 1878 – 1939 | – | – |
| Ehrwald | 1905 – 1938 | – | – | – |
| Reutte | 1886 – 1939 | – | – | 1879 – 1939 |
| St. Anton | 1934 – 1938 | – | – | – |

| City/ Village | CPIs | Elementary/Girl's School | Private school for factory children | Orphanage house |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Arzl bei Imst | 1893 – 1938 | 1900 – 1938 | – | – |
| Rietz | 1901 – 1939 | 1894 – 1939 | – | – |
| Neustift/Stubaital | 1908 – 1920 | – | – | – |
| Zams | 1883 – 1940 | – | – | – |
| Lermoos | 1925 – 1938 | 1884 – 1938 | – | – |
| Prutz | 1910 – 1938 | – | – | – |
| Pfunds | 1925 – 1938 | – | – | – |

Note Adapted from *Kinderbetreuung in sogenannten, Kinderbewahranstalten* (n.d), Archiv Mutterhaus, Barmherzige Schwestern, Zams, Tirol, Austria

The school in Matrei am Brenner was a private school for factory children and in Reutte the child protection institution was together with an orphanage house. As evident in Table 2, the merciful sisters had established protection institutors without schools in some villages (*Kinderbetreuung in sog. Kinderbewahranstalten*, n.d.).

An original description from January 1884 gives insight about the opening of the protection institution in Zams. The institution was founded by the local community council in conjunction with the merciful sisters of Zams and opened in July 1883. The statement gives insight about the size of the house, furnishing, and teachers in charge. Furthermore, the admission was free of charge and the sisters service was gratuitous (*Beschreibung der Kleinkinderbewahranstalt, 1884*). The CPI had to be closed in 1940 due to the reign of the Nazi party and was reopened as a Kindergarten after the 2nd World War (*125 Jahre Kindergarten in Zams*, ca.2008).

In a letter to the *Bezirkshauptmann* (Responsible Person in-office of the Administrative District Authority) in Landeck from June 1884, Number 11571 from the *Landesschulrat für Tirol* (State Education Authority of Tirol), the opening of the protection institution in Landeck had to be postponed due to sanitation issues. Besides, the letter stated that the certificates of the expected sister in charge were not valid, and the order of the merciful sisters was not judicially in the position to educate and issue certificates for kindergarten teachers. The issue with the certificate was not a barrier for not opening the CPI but the sisters who were meant to be in charge had to prove that they were working previously in a CPIs (*Widmann, M.P., 1884*). The order was put in a position where they had to find a solution for their issued

certificates since these were not judicially valid. In response to that Sister Bonifatia Schnell started the kindergarten teacher education.

4.2.2 The Kindergarten Teacher Education

In 1889 sister Bonifatia Schnell completed and graduated from the first private kindergarten teacher education seminar in Kufstein, Tirol (Kätzler, 1986) The kindergarten teacher education in Kufstein was established by priest Matthäus Hoerfarter in 1872. At the beginning the duration of the course was 1 year. In 1880 the study increased to 2 years and was the first kindergarten teacher program in Austria which was held for that long. The syllabus Hoerfarter composed included anthropology of childhood, dietetics and care of the child, fundamentals of the Froebelian pedagogy and theoretical and practical approaches of the kindergarten (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019).

After sister Schnell completed the training, the order of the merciful sisters applied to be officially recognized as a private kindergarten teacher education school. The first officially recognized kindergarten teacher education course in Zams launched for the school year 1891/92 (Kätzler, 1986). Prior prospective students had to pass the aptitude test. Paragraph 21 rubric II of the decree of the minister of education from 1872 had to be fulfilled as mentioned in chapter 3.3. to be considered as a candidate (Nationalbibliothek, n.d).

An official decree from the *kaiserliche - königliche Landesschulbehörde* (imperial and royal state school board) from October 1891, Nr. 21.116 approved the educational establishment for kindergarten teachers to perform the proficiency test for future kindergarten teachers in Zams. The examined teaching subjects were, *Religion* (Religion), *Sprach- und Sachunterricht* (Language- and Subject Matter Lessons), *Freihandzeichnen* (Drawing), *Formenarbeiten* (Mold Work), *Gesang* (Singing) and *Turnen* (physical education). Moreover, sister Schnell had to test the candidates in *Erziehungslehre* (Education), *Theorie des Kindergartens* (Theory of the Kindergarten) and *praktische Übungen* (practical Plan of Execution) (Der k.k. provisorische Landesschulrath für Tirol, 1891). The order opened the kindergarten teacher school and educated and trained future teachers from their own ranks and secular female students.

The archive of the merciful sisters preserved a transcript of the first official examination assignment for the students from 1892. The document was written in the old form of German handwriting called *Kurrentschrift*. The transcript reveals that the exams were held over the

course of 2 days, September 30th (antemeridian and postmeridian) and October 1st (antemeridian). The document encompasses names of the examinees and indicate that they were nuns since all of them have the word “Sister” written in front of their names. In virtue of the successful completion of the studies the students were able to begin to work as certified kindergarten teacher in CPIs or kindergarten (Themata f. d. Praxis d. Kindergärtnerinnen, 1892)

By 1902 the kindergarten teacher institution in Zams was 1 out of 7 private kindergarten teacher schools in Austria (Gary, 1995). Private courses were mainly offered by the catholic church and attached to already existing catholic schools or educational establishments. (Lex-Nalis et al., 2019). Until 1914 the kindergarten course in Zams was a 1-year program form then forward the education was increased to 2-years. The 2-year training followed after the first convention of kindergarten teachers in Vienna 1912 (Berger, 2005). From 1892-1938 the private kindergarten teacher training institution in Zams educated 322 women (Kätzler, 1986).

In September 1939, during the reign of the Nazi party, the official rights to educate women were taken away and all the educational institutions of the merciful sisters had to close. After the war ended in 1945 the sisters reopened the school. The 2-year kindergarten teacher education had in the school year 1945/46 after the reign of the Nazis 8 registered students.

Starting from 1955 the duration of the education increased to 3-years, followed by a 4-years in 1962. In 1982 a new school system took over. The education for kindergarten teacher shifted to 5 years. (Kätzler, 1986). The scholars completed their education with a *Matura* (proficiency and a matriculation examination). This gave students the possibility to immediately work in a kindergarten setting or continue to study at a university.

In 2024 the school offers the 5-year *Matura* program for teachers and a 3-year vocational school for kindergarten assistants. A change in the decree in 2024 revealed that the admission criteria will include an updated aptitude test for the coming years. Interested students will only get tested in *Kontakt- und Kommunikationsfähigkeit* (Contact- and Communication-Skills), whilst previously the test consisted of music educability, physical education, creative educability and contact and communication skills (Katharina Lins Schulen, n.d).

5 Conclusion

Societal changes in 18th and 19th century Europe, such as the Industrial Revolution, changed the function of childcare and ultimately transformed the way young children were educated and socialized.

The expansion of children's institutions in Europe attest that educating and taking care of young children became a necessity due to societal changes such as the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Independent people in various European countries were setting up institutions for destitute children to protect and educate them. These independent people setup their own curriculums for their institutions since there was no centralized, governmental curriculum in place and local demands varied. Depending on the institution the children were instructed in knitting, language education, religion, or singing. In addition to an education, some of the schools provided their students with food.

In the 1820's the English man Samuel Wilderspin wrote a manual about his work experience in the infant school in London. The book became a source on how to work with the children of the lower class. People from different countries took the English system and Wilderspains manual as examples for establishing early childhood institutions in their home countries; however, these foreign schools did not strictly follow Wilderspains' manual. The liberties taken in the implementation of Wilderspains' manual is well documented by the example of the Viennese merchant and philanthropist Josef Wertheimer. Wertheimer brought the manual of Wilderspin to Austria, translated it, added his own suggestions and published it in 1826. Wertheimer can be recognized as a central figure in establishing CPIs in Austria. Despite an attempt by the *Gesellschaft adeliger Frauen zur Beförderung des Guten und Nützlichen, Wien* (Association Society of Aristocratical Women to Promote the Good and Beneficial, Vienna) which tried to establish CPIs in 1811, but their idea was rejected by the ruler of the Austrian Empire and the church.

In 1830 the first CPI was established in Vienna by Wertheimer and the priest Johann Lindner to counteract the neglect and high mortality rates of the proletarian children. Parents often had to neglect their non-school-age children due to work outside of the home environment. Older siblings were not able to look after the younger ones due to their own school obligations or

outside jobs to help finance the family. This gap in care for working-class children under six can be seen as one reason that CPI facilities were created.

In 1832 the Church obtained the rights to control and supervise the CPIs. Associations which wanted to establish a CPI had to ask the Church authorities for permission. CPIs were connected with private associations, unlike proper schools which were public institutions. The literature shows that CPIs were financed by the aristocracy, the Church or private associations and were maintained through donations. For example, three main CPIs in Innsbruck, with up to 500 children, were established by the local *Frauenverein zur Beförderung der Kleinkinderbewahranstalten und weiblichen Industrieschulen* (Women's Association for the Promotion of Infant Protection Institutions and Female Industrial Schools) showing what could be accomplished from a single institutional sponsor.

In 1863 the first kindergarten after the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel was established in Austria. The kindergarten was not intended for the working-class children. The kindergarten served as a preparation for school and was subject to a monthly tuition payment. To differentiate the kindergarten from a CPI, laws were enacted. In 1872, the Minister of Education published a decree where it distinguished between the different early childhood education institutions and the kindergarten teacher training. The decree mentions that the main function of the CPIs was to instruct the children to cleanliness, tidiness, manners and to love work. Furthermore, due to the law changes the Church's influence over the CPIs was reassigned to the school authorities.

Both before and after the reassignment of the Church's influence, several catholic female orders were involved in the founding or supervising of CPIs. The congregations provided nuns free of charge to look after the children. This can be confirmed based on the description from the archive of the Merciful Sisters in Zams which states that the order established a CPI in conjunction with the local community council in Zams and provided the services without costs.

The CPI in Zams stayed open until the year 1940 and was reopened after the end of World War II as a kindergarten. In total, the congregation established 33 CPIs, including the CPI in Zams in the county of Tirol but it is unclear which of the other 32 institutions reopened after the War. The CPI establishments all over the county of Tirol show the influence of the Merciful Sisters outside their founding village of Zams.

During the 19th century, the order of the Merciful Sisters had to keep pace with the changing trends in society and governmental law. This is evident by the private archive sources of the Merciful Sisters. The documents and materials provide insight on further education outside of the congregation by attending a kindergarten teacher course. Due to the successful completion of the course in 1889 by Sister Schnell the order was able to apply to become a private kindergarten teacher education center. The certified Merciful Sisters started their official kindergarten teacher education course for women in the schoolyear 1891/92. By the beginning of the 20th century the order made up 1 out of 7 private kindergarten teacher education centers in Austria which offered training to young women.

In addition to the private kindergarten teacher education, the Order expanded their influence by opening different schooling branches in Zams for female students such as a bourgeoisie school for girls and a domestic economic school. With the change of society, laws and educational paths some of the branches became outdated and no longer exist. Presently, the long-term impact of the merciful sisters in Zams and their interest in education is still visible. The school still exists as a private regulated institution and is integrated with public law. The school offers three facilities which are secondary school, high school, and the educational institution for elementary education. The Merciful Sisters still follow their tenet to educate young females although they now take in male students. These dedicated efforts of the Merciful Sisters of Zams to embrace transformation and stay modern has allowed them to adapt to societal changes and serve the ever-changing needs of the community.

Future research on the Merciful Sisters of Zams and their CPI establishments of the 19th century could provide more information about the child-carer ratio, size of the institutions, financing and educational planning. Research into the changes in political power and the renewed attitude towards the masses in a post French Revolution Europe would provide interesting insight into how the upper class viewed its role in shaping public opinion. Finally, the effect of the schools on the workforce and worker productivity would be an interesting way to measure the success of the new learning institutions.

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