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### **Prostitution as a problem of the city of Wrocław in the 19<sup>th</sup> century\***

It is a well known fact that prostitution has been amongst those problems which, especially in the cities, constantly recurred as particularly difficult to solve, if at all solvable<sup>1</sup>. Over centuries, two primary approaches to prostitution can be observed: a 'hard-line' one, which prohibits establishing and running brothels as 'hotbeds of sin', 'breeding ground for perversion', and later even centres for 'white slavery'; and a 'pragmatic' one, which tolerates brothels as the 'lesser evil' and allows prostitutes to be examined by physicians, thus making it possible to pick women with venereal disease, so that they would not spread it further. Of course, in between these two extremes, many other were considered, especially that it turned out in practice that 'barracking' prostitutes was not helping to reduce the incidence of the disease. In any case, centuries of experience indicated that prostitution could not be eradicated without draconian measures, and that it was only possible to restrict it to some degree<sup>2</sup>.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw escalation of this problem resulting from the early-century wars (wars always bring about some decline in morality), from the inflow of people from rural to urban areas and from the need to re-address the issue of poverty in large agglomerations<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, a question arises: what was the approach of Wrocław city authorities and citizens towards prostitution after the revolutionary-Napoleonian times, which saw a move away from the sexual freedom of the Enlightenment, during the

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\* I would like to thank Professor Witold Molik of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań for helping me prepare the relevant literature.

<sup>1</sup> A. Weber, *Die Großstadt und ihre soziale Probleme*, Leipzig 1908, p. 112; M. Leinert, *Die Sozialgeschichte der Großstadt*, Hamburg 1925, pp. 18–19; M. Bargon, *Prostitution und Zucht-hälterei, Zur kriminologischen und strafrechtlichen Problematik mit einem geschichtlichen und rechtsvergleichenden Überblick*, Lübeck 1982, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> P. P. Dufour, *Geschichte der Prostitution bei aller Völkern von der Urzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 1925, *passim*. Already in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Johann Jacob Heinrich Ebers, a local physician from the All Saints' Hospital, protested against the theory according to which brothels help reduce disease incidence: 'diese Häuser als die wahren Pflanzschulen der Lustsuche betrachtet werden müssen'; J. J. H. Ebers, *Das Armenwesen der Stadt Breslau nach seiner früherer, und gegenwärtigen Verfassung dargestellt; nebst einem Versuch über den Zustand der Sittlichkeit der Stadt in alter und neuer Zeiten*, Breslau 1828, p. 350. Similar was the opinion of doctors at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See: E. Delbanco, A. Biumfeld, *Das n-Merne Prostitutionswesen... (Einführung in das Prostitutionsfrage*, ed. A. Pappritz, Leipzig 1919, pp. 44–45).

<sup>3</sup> W. Stieber, *Die Prostitution in Berlin und ihre Opfer*, Berlin 1846, pp. 48–67. At the end of the period covered herein, a contemporary author wrote: 'die Prostitution als soziale Erscheinung... ist eine zweifelhafte Errungenschaft unserer Tage. Namentlich in den Kulturzentren, den großen Handels- und Industriestädten ist die Prostitution zu einem Beruf geworden, dem zwar das Prädikat der Schamlosigkeit anhaftet, der sich aber dennoch einer allgemeinen Anerkennung erfreut. Man bezeichnet die Prostitution auch als ein notwendiges Übel, gegen das es keine Abhilfe gibt'; J. Gaulke, *Die Prostitution*, Leipzig 1905, p. 6.



period collectively referred to as the Victorian era, in which, however, rationalist tendencies gradually grew in strength. Both contemporary and current literature have hardly addressed these issues<sup>4</sup>.

The answer to this question can be searched both in Wrocław's press publications and in the city's archives, particularly those covering the issues related to the police moral crime department, as well as health services and prostitutes. In fact, these materials form the basis for the present article. Unfortunately, it must be stated that their coverage is grossly insufficient.

At the outset, we should refer to legal regulations in effect in Prussia from 1794 on: the Domestic Law passed in that year permitted prostitution only in state-controlled brothels (Article 999). The brothels were to be tolerated (at least in theory) only in large, populated cities, and could be established only with the consent of the authorities (Articles 1000, 1001). Prostitutes who operated without the police's supervision could face 3 months imprisonment followed by displacement to a 'Labour house' (Articles 1023, 1024). It is also worth noting that compulsory medical tests were introduced in Prussia already in 1769.<sup>5</sup>

First interest of the city authorities in prostitution can be dated back to 1810. It was undoubtedly initiated by king Frederick William III who, fearing an outbreak of sexually transmitted disease that were brought to the country by the French troops and that potentially threatened to cripple the Prussian army, asked general von Tauentzien and the Chief of Berlin Police von Gruner to take radical measures in order to control prostitution. At that time, doubts started to emerge as to if brothels really were the necessary evil. A rule from October 17th, 1810, ordered all such establishments to be moved outside city limits, and prohibited increasing the number of both brothels and their 'employees'. Additionally, Berlin was required not to tolerate prostitutes in the streets and not to allow them in promenades, theatres and other public places. It demanded to punish brothel owners who employed underage girls. The hopes were that this would lead to gradual elimination of prostitution centres. However, as a result, outside Berlin's walls (Königs-Mauer) an entire brothel district was created<sup>6</sup>.

Wrocław Regierungsbezirk was faced with a similar problem. They decided, however, to leave the relevant decisions to the city council. As is known from more general publications, prostitution had been plaguing Wrocław for centuries (the first known case of venereal disease comes from 1496!). It could thrive, for example, thanks to the Wrocław large river port, frequented by many sailors, and a strong garrison with many soldiers. As a result, already in the 18th century, centres for brothels (then called 'Freudenhäuser') or street prostitutes ('Freudenmädchen') were found in several locations within the city, especially near the Oder river and the military barracks.

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<sup>4</sup> Ebers, *op. cit., passim...*; A. Schneer, *Über die Zustände der arbeitenden Klassen in Breslau*, Berlin 1845, pp. 16–19, Stieber, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–74; see also G. Scheuermann, *Das Breslau Lexikon*, vol. I, Dülmen 1994, pp. 115–116.

<sup>5</sup> *Allg. Landrecht für die Preußische Staaten von 1794*, Frankfurt – Berlin 1970, part 2, Tit. 20

<sup>5</sup> 999, 1001, 1023, 1024; see: C. Brinitzer, *Strafrechtliche Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Prostitution*, Kiel 1933, pp. 73–77; Ch. Hilpert-Fröhlich, *Auf zum Kampfe wider Unzucht. Prostitution und Sittlichkeitsbewegung in Essen 1890 bis 1914*, Bochum 1991, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> H. Ostwald, *Sitten-Geschichte Berlins*, Berlin 1912, pp. 403–404; Brinitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 91; Stieber, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–53; see H. Dohna to Chief of Police in Berlin, October 17th, 1810, copy for the Pomeranian Regierungsbezirk, State Archive Szczecin, the Szczecin Regierungsbezirk, Presidium Department, v. 8537, bp.



Particularly famous for high concentration of prostitutes was a hill near today's University, officially referred to as Sperlingsberg, and commonly called Venusberg<sup>7</sup>.

The question of what was to be done with brothels was first publicly raised in early 1810, in a manner most characteristic of a principled clergyman, by Carl Gottlieb Rah, a Wrocław city councillor and a priest of the evangelical St. Spirit parish. His speech caught the interest of the local press; journalists admitted that since the state had begun to treat people not as 'the mass' but as independent and moral individuals, everything that had a substantial impact on manners and morality had to be given utmost care<sup>8</sup>.

Interestingly enough, the 'Schlesische Provinzialblätter' journalists expressed a more pragmatic attitude. They noted that in considering the issue one should take into account the 'laws of nature' and the principle of 'lesser evil'. They used quite Malthusian arguments, such as that if everyone had gotten married and had children, there would not have been enough food left for the entire population. Historical arguments were also raised. The case of Venice was cited, where 'after expelling all prostitutes in 1500, they needed to be imported again as respected wives and daughters could not rid of admirers and rapists'. Overall, the journalists appreciated the noble ideas of the priest but doubted if it was realistic to think that all evil could be rooted out with such simple measures. Instead, they proposed to restrict the freedom of action of prostitutes, e.g. to oblige them to wear special clothing and stay away from main streets, theatres and other places of entertainment<sup>9</sup>.

The issue addressed by the councillor must have been of importance to Wrocław citizens if in that same year 1810 a brochure by Dr Heidemann (most likely a physician) was published entitled 'Was ist für und wider die öffentlichen Freudenhäuser zu sagen?'. He presented calmly and rationally arguments both for and against banning of public houses, and left it to the reader to draw conclusions. As for the arguments against banning brothels, historical examples were once again cited, this time from Athens and Rome. He stressed that such solution allows for better control of venereal disease. On the other hand, Heidemann admitted that tolerating brothels gives them a sanction and makes it easier to use these establishments and to accustom to immoral conduct. What is more, the state would lose many women who could make useful citizens, and would lose many new citizens that the women could have given birth to. For it was a well known fact that brothel employees had abortions much more often than other women. Also, brothels were supposed to bring about moral losses and health issues, causing indifference towards the institution of marriage, while it was not true that they helped control venereal disease. Eventually, the author opted for a compromise — to restrict the activity of brothels and to possibly outlaw them in the longer perspective. In his opinion, it would be very helpful to clearly specify responsibilities for brothel owners, warn children and adolescents against such institutions, as well as support people in

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<sup>7</sup> Ebers, *op. cit.*, p. 350; Scheuermann, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 115–116.

<sup>8</sup> Schlesische Provinzialblätter (hereafter referred to as: SPB), 1810, No. 3, p. 258, 'Chronik'. It is worth to note the rhetoric of the councillor who, demanding total liquidation of brothels, used very strong words, emphasising especially the moral losses caused by the establishments: 'Wie können wir, heißt es, einen Augenblick länger ein Unheil dulden, wodurch die ganze Sittlichkeit so schrecklich verderben, die Jugend verpestet, das Familienglück gefährdet und zerstört wird, wodurch der Unzucht und der Bosheit, der Schamlosigkeit und Niederträchtigkeit alle Thore geöffnet, wodurch täglich neue Werkzeuge und Schlachtopfer der feilen Wollust hingeopfert, durch ihre Menschenrechte mit Füßen getreten, wodurch sie zum Thier herabwürdigt werden?'

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.



finding employment and provide the poor with subsidies so they could normally get married<sup>10</sup>.

It seems that measures against brothels undertaken both on national and local level yielded some results. In 1810, in accordance with the King's decree, Wrocław city council decided to deprive brothel owners of city citizenship. Next year, they agreed not to issue any new concessions, and apparently forbade running brothels<sup>11</sup>. According to a later research, 11 such institutions either went bankrupt or were closed down between 1811 and 1814, and only three survived. The effects of these actions were soon evident. When in 1814 the Berlin Chief of Police asked the Wrocław police what the result of the brothel liquidation had been, they replied that no improvement in morality was observed, while venereal disease incidence rose significantly<sup>12</sup>.

It seems that the fight against prostitution was a losing battle. Some 20 years later it was estimated that in Wrocław ca. 500–600 girls and women were employed in 'the oldest profession', plus those sporadically engaged in the business. Three categories of prostitutes were then distinguished: 1) those having their own flat, 2) those living and working in illegal brothels, and 3) those working in the streets<sup>13</sup>. It was typical of Victorian morality that the first of these categories was believed to be least 'harmful'. As in many other cities, the police mostly ignored them, as long as they did not 'spread moral corruption' in public, and their health remained satisfactory. According to the researches, prostitutes inhabited virtually all districts of Wrocław.

Concealed in various small inns, the so called Animirkneipen, and dancing establishments, secret brothels were then chiefly located in the Old Town, or in busy areas near the barracks, namely in the presently non-existent streets in the vicinity of the Dominikański Square: Górką Kacerską (Ketzerberg), Zaułek Niski (Graben), and in Oławską (Ohlauerstr.), Wierzbowa (Weidenstr.), Piotra Skargi (Taschenstr.), Kazimierza Wielkiego (Hummerei), Mennicza (Kleine- und Grosse Groschengasse). It is highly likely that, as in other cities, policemen and officials, even if strongly cracking down on brothels and prostitutes *foro publico*, in practice tolerated such institutions, and secretly used their services. After all, it is difficult to assume that human conduct during the very same era and in the same culture could have been so diametrically different, and it was easier to hide one's sins in a large city than in a smaller town.

It is also surprising that at the time when Wrocław brothels were persecuted, in nearby Świdnica, one of the largest Silesian towns, operated a legal 'Bordell' run by widow Engemann and employing many women known from Wrocław brothels. To be hired, each candidate had to obtain a permission from the municipality. If a prostitute wanted to leave 'for holidays' or get out of Świdnica for other reasons, she had to present to the municipality Ms Engemann's consent to be issued a passport! In other words, the job was treated as any other profession<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Litterarische Beilage zu Schlesische Provinzialblätter, 1810, No. 4, pp. 97–108.

<sup>11</sup> Stieber, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Schneer, *op. cit.*, p. 18; see: K Wolzendorf, *Polizei und Prostitution* (Zeitschrift für die gesammte Staatswissenschaft, 67, 1911, p. 230).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Locating brothels near barracks was typical of the era. See: S. Krafft, *Zucht und Unzucht. Prostitution und Sittenpolizei in München der Jahrhundertwende*, München 1996, pp. 140–141; A. Neher, *Die geheime und öffentliche Prostitution in Stuttgart, Karlsruhe und München mit Berücksichtigung des Prostitutionsgewerbes in Augsburg und Ulm, sowie den übrigen größeren Städten Württembergs*, Paderborn 1912, p. 58; see also: S. Kienitz, *Sexualität, Macht und Moral*, Berlin 1995, pp. 1–40; On Świdnica, see State



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In Wrocław, 'Street prostitutes' were frequently encountered in the densely populated north-western parts of the Old Town, with most popular streets being: Nowy Świat (Neuwelt), Białoskórnicza (Weissgeberstr.) and A. Cieszyńskiego (Burgfeld)<sup>15</sup>. Closing down legal brothels caused prostitution to become increasingly tied to crime. Procuresses often watched hospital doors, picking girls who had no money to support themselves. Sometimes underage women were simply trained for prostitution. As anywhere else, prostitution would increase during trade events. During Wrocław wool market several hundreds of girls would come to the city from the provinces and Bohemia to take advantage of an increased demand for 'sexual services' and to leave with large sums of money<sup>16</sup>.

Following the liquidation of brothels, the issue of prostitution rarely make the papers in Wrocław, except for particularly outrageous cases that deserved a few lines. For instance, in December 1822 a shocking case was revealed of shoemaker Dorn who not only sexually abused his 13-year old daughter but also forced her to prostitution<sup>17</sup>.

Regarding prostitution, in accordance with regulations issued by Prussian Ministry of Internal Affairs (dating from June 23rd, 1810), the city authorities dealt mainly with sanitary issues. Doctors employed in city medical institutions were obliged to report to the police the names both of infected prostitutes and of those by whom a given person had been infected. Treatment was a good opportunity to catch and punish prostitutes. It was apparently assumed that this would discourage other women from engaging in prostitution. Under a Wrocław Regierungsbezirk regulation of July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1824, prostitutes known to the police, after having been cured of venereal disease, were to be sentenced to 4 to 6 weeks in the Labour House (Arbeitshaus)<sup>18</sup>.

As we can see, the Regierungsbezirk and city authorities, having additionally to cope with the ever changing views of their superiors, could not finally decide the strategy to fight prostitution. The problem was further increased by the controversies as to if eliminating brothels helped or hindered controlling venereal disease. There was no consensus even among physicians, not to mention journalists. Already in 1814 doctors reported significant increase in syphilis infections resulting from closing down most of the city brothels. Similar opinions were expressed in the mid-1840s. There was even a saying: 'Breslau ist verrufen wegen seiner ausgebreiteten Syphilis'<sup>19</sup>. This was probably also related to the famine of mid 1840s and the influx of a large number of unemployed girls and women to large Prussian cities. These were factors associated with the significant increase (up to 10,000–12,000) in number of prostitutes in Berlin. However, as mentioned above, in 1828 a local doctor J. J. H. Ebers opposed the argument that brothels helped to control venereal disease<sup>20</sup>.

A decree of the king of Prussia from October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1845, ordered all Prussian brothels be closed down within 3 years. Police was also not to tolerate street

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Archive in Wrocław (hereafter referred to as: SAW). Świdnica City Archives s 621, *passim*. I would like to thank Reiner Sachs for referring me to this publication.

<sup>15</sup> Schneer, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–18, see: Shoemaker Elsner to Municipality, 19.12.1874, SAW., Wrocław City Archives (hereafter referred to as: WCA), III/8418, sheets 177–181.

<sup>16</sup> Schneer, *op. cit.*, p. 19; Stieber, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> SPB, vol. LXXVII, 1823, No. 1, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> C. F. Wenzig, *Repertorium der polizeilichen Gesetze, Verordnungen und Bekanntmachungen für Breslau und den Breslauer Regierungs-Bezirk*, Breslau 1837, p. 117.

<sup>19</sup> Schneer, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>20</sup> Stieber, *op. cit.*, p. 62; Ebers, *op. cit.*, p. 350.



prostitution. Typically, however, some larger cities needed many years to fulfil this order. For example, Cologne closed brothels in 1880 and Leipzig as late as in 1889. What did Wrocław do in this situation? In fact, we can only rely on an order of the chief of Wrocław Regierungsbezirk from 1852 (still in force in 1860s!) which did not refer to brothels at all. In an obvious reference to Article 146 of the new Prussian Penal Code of April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1851, which provided for imprisonment or Arbeitshäusern for professional prostitution, the order declared categorically: 'Engaging in prostitution professionally shall be generally prohibited.' However, the following sentences suggested that prostitution was tolerated in practice if it was not too conspicuous and if prostitutes abode by certain rules. It warned that immediate imprisonment and a fine of up to 3 thalers was provided for shameless behaviour of women, including alluring men, by intentionally attracting their attention in the streets, promenades and other public places. It was also forbidden for women to stand in doors or windows. Women already convicted or suspected of prostitution were to report to the police every time they changed their place of residence. They were also subject to regular medical examinations. Those who voluntarily admitted having venereal disease were promised free treatment in city hospitals<sup>21</sup>.

After the unification of Germany, the primary legal regulation relating to prostitution was the amended Penal Code of February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1876, which in Article 361 point 6 provided for imprisonment penalty both against women who, while under police supervision, did not comply with relevant police rulings, as well as against women who professionally engaged in prostitution without the supervision of the police. In other words, if a prostitute abode by the rules, she could generally do her job. Simultaneously, Article 180 of the Code made it possible to punish pimping; if one wanted, this could be extended to brothels.

The decision on whether a prostitute should be supervised was made by Chief of Police or his deputy. The main aim was to subject prostitutes to regular, weekly medical examinations. Again, prostitutes were forbidden to stroll public places, attract clients etc., but we can clearly observe an increasing number of restrictions<sup>22</sup>.

It seems that in Wrocław the problem of prostitution was not as serious as for example in Frankfurt. Frankfurt municipality sent out a circular to other cities of the Reich in 1883, proposing to jointly request amendment to existing regulations, as the city simply could not cope with prostitution after the official close-down of brothels. The city centre was completely overrun with prostitutes and pimps, and the so called respected society moved out to the suburbs. Additionally, prostitutes from the countryside flocked the city in large numbers. Police had to arrange real 'roundups' at least to pick up those infected with syphilis<sup>23</sup>. As can be seen from the reply of the Wrocław Chief of Police office, the officials did not perceive the problem as so alarming

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<sup>21</sup> Brinitzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–97; R. Evans, *Prostitution. State and Society in Imperial Germany* (Past and Present, No. 70, 1976, p. 110); *Polizei-Verordnungen für die Stadt Breslau vom 20. September 1852 mit Zusätzen und Ergänzungen. Neue amtliche Ausgabe*, Breslau 1863, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, ed. 3, Breslau 1877, p. 507. Article 180 of the Code was key to liquidating brothels: 'Wer gewohnheitsmäßig oder aus Eigennutz durch seine Vermittlung oder durch Gewährung oder Verschaffung von Gelegenheit der Unzucht Vorschub leistet, wird wegen Kuppelei mit Gefängniß bestraft...'; see Brinitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 111; Ostwald, *op. cit.*, p. 409, and a printed order: *Polizeiliche Vorschriften für Weibpersonen, welche wegen gewerbsmäßigen Unzucht einer polizeilichen Aufsicht unterstellt sind*, erlassen, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1876, SAW., WCA, III/13981, sheets 6–7.

<sup>23</sup> Circular of Frankfurt am Mein Municipality, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1883, SAW, WCA, III/8418, sheets 258–261.



and believed that the existing regulations provided for sufficient measures to fight prostitution, as well as control venereal disease. As a matter of fact, Wrocław was not regarded as a prostitution 'fortress' like Frankfurt am Mein, Hamburg, Kiel, Bremen, Lübeck, Cologne, Dortmund, Essen, Mannheim or Nuremberg. Local officials had not marked off any special zones for prostitution<sup>24</sup>.

Drawing on highly incomplete material, we can conclude that civic engagement was a significant element of the fight against prostitution. In the acts of the Wrocław Chief of Police office there are many denunciations, from a relatively short period of time, regarding innkeepers and pimps keeping prostitutes in Popowice (then outside the formal city limits)<sup>25</sup>.

Strangely enough, judging from the preserved archives, as far as prostitution was concerned the city authorities were chiefly concerned with where medical examinations were to be held and who was to pay for them<sup>26</sup>. Often only after starting to look for a place to examine prostitutes it would turn out that citizens did not wish such an institution to be located in their neighbourhood. Moreover, when analysing the costs of maintaining city hospitals, it became evident that the officials would have preferred the cost of treatment to be borne by prostitutes themselves.

Periodic examinations of prostitutes were in place already at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were originally performed in the All Saints Hospital. However, because of large numbers of the women to be examined (250–300), the doctors protested against extra responsibilities that disrupted hospital's daily work. In the early 1840s the examinations were therefore moved to the police prison where they were conducted by the court physician. However, prostitutes started to boycott the place, clearly fearing that once in the prison, they could have not gotten out of it, especially that, as mentioned above, engaging in prostitution could be punished with imprisonment. This alarmed the Chief of Police who noted that an increasing number of prostitutes evaded the police and sanitary control<sup>27</sup>. The issue of finding a new place to examine prostitutes became the subject of many letters between the Chief of Police, who tried to move it back to the hospital, and the city municipality, who opposed this as much as possible<sup>28</sup>. In the 1850s the examinations were temporarily moved to the so called Friedrichs-Kasematen which were used as a prison at that time. Because of its terrible condition<sup>29</sup>, the building was designated for demolition, which started in 1858. Therefore, in mid-1858 the examinations were again moved back to the All Saints Hospital. In order not to disrupt the hospital's work, the facility was located on the ground floor, near the morgue. This

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<sup>24</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, March 6th, 1884, *ibid.*, sheet 262; E. Fuchs, *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. III, München 1912, p. 402.

<sup>25</sup> R.T. to Polizei-Verwaltung Poepelwitz 31 III 1874, WCA., Polizeipräsidium Breslau, L 839, p. 1; Carl Hoffmann to Wrocław Landrat May 22nd, 1874, *ibid.*, p. 6; M. Piessowsk to Polizei-Verwaltung Poepelwitz May 23rd, 1874, *ibid.*, p. 4; and many similar. Such denunciations were also common in other cities, see Krafft, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–29.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, we cannot be certain of that. In a discussion on this paper, Z. Fras rightly noted that the police had a specialised vice squad that, as can be seen from archives preserved in other cities, were very diligent in keeping records on prostitution. Surprisingly, few materials exist in the Wrocław archives and they concern mainly sanitary and financial issues. This suggests that city authorities regarded these particular issues as most relevant, and did not pay much attention to other problems. Oddly enough, in contrast with other German cities, prostitution was completely absent from municipality annual reports.

<sup>27</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, May 7th, 1842, SAW., WCA, III/8418, sheets 1–2.

<sup>28</sup> Municipality to Chief of Police, June 4th, 1842, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, February 29th, 1856, *ibid.*, p 30.



also met with complaints, especially from families of the deceased. In effect, the hospital administration attempted to get rid of the unwanted guests, but the city authorities were reluctant to deal with problem again and refused<sup>30</sup>. The argument about moving the prostitutes out of the hospital continued for another three years. The correspondence between the Chief of Police office and the municipality suggests that the number of prostitutes was on the rise. In 1870, sanitary control was ruled in the case of 900 women who had been convicted of prostitution, out of which 500 attended regular examinations. It should be noted though that these numbers may not be adequate as in the following year that same office reported 740 regularly controlled women and an estimated total number of 1500 prostitutes in the city<sup>31</sup>.

For the police, supervising prostitution was difficult as many lower class women and girls, formally working as tailor assistants, cleaners, buffet attendants, housemaids etc., worked overtime as prostitutes. Policemen based their observations on the women's provocative clothing, behaviour in public places, and as well as on contacts with pimps and procuresses. However, police supervision could only be applied to those women who were either convicted for prostitution by the court or who admitted to prostitution while being treated for venereal disease. The police was aware that this required not only large but also exceptionally trustworthy and skilled personnel. Meanwhile, only one policeman was in charge of moral crimes in 1871. But when the Chief of Police requested for a special fund of several hundred marks to be established in this regard, as in other cities, the city council refused. They were clearly afraid of corruption in the police<sup>32</sup>.

In the mid-1870s the problem of relocating the medical facility for prostitutes re-emerged as the building where the examinations had previously taken place was demolished during hospital renovation. They were then temporarily located in the police prison building at Szewska 46<sup>33</sup>. The governor of the Silesian province protested, noting that there were 4 schools in the area, and ordered to immediately move the examinations elsewhere<sup>34</sup>. This, however, was not that easy.

The very prospect of moving examinations from the Arbeitshaus to ul. H. Sienkiewicza (Sternstr.) made 45 inhabitants protest to the city council<sup>35</sup>. The city authorities, also under pressure from the Chief of Police, appointed a special committee chaired by burgomaster Forckenbeck. The committee analysed different locations but as all of them were protested against, they finally chose the unused Barbara Barracks (Barbara-Kaserne) near the moat and the St. Barbara's church<sup>36</sup>. However, when the building at 31 Białoskórnicza was eventually selected, the inhabitants filed a protest, saying this would affect the value of their houses and land, compromise the reputation of their wives and daughters and impact the moral conduct of employees of the nearby

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<sup>30</sup> Hospital administrator to Municipality, November 28th, 1865, and the reply from Municipality, April 10, 1856, *ibid.*, pp. 110–113.

<sup>31</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, June 23rd, 1868, *ibid.*, sheet 131; Chief of Police to Municipality, December 10th, 1870, *ibid.*, sheet 145.

<sup>32</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, May 10th, 1871, SAW., WCA, III/13981, pp. 3–5; reply from June 20th, 1871, *ibid.*em.

<sup>33</sup> Municipality to Chief of Police, April 17th, 1874, *ibid.* 154; Chief of Police to Municipality, May 18th, 1874, *ibid.*, 155.

<sup>34</sup> Governor to Chief of Police, September 15th, 1874, *ibid.*, sheet 161.

<sup>35</sup> Residents of Sternstr. to Stadtverordneten-Collegium, no details., *ibid.*, sheets 159–160.

<sup>36</sup> A note in the archives, September 26th, 1874, *ibid.*, sheet 164.



slaughterhouse. Also, this part of town would 'regain its former bad reputation'<sup>37</sup>. But the Wrocław municipality was not going to take serious interest in the needs of its poor citizens, even if those had managed to win support of several councillors. Besides, it was obvious that any proposition would be met with similar protests. Thus, the council designated funds to quickly upgrade the building<sup>38</sup>. Soon after opening the medical facility in Białoskórnicza, a hotel owner Oskar Rotter and his 150 neighbours filed another petition, complaining about prostitutes and pimps who overran the Św. Mikołaja street (Nikolaistr.) and posed threat to children. Petitions were also sent by the Białoskórnicza residents<sup>39</sup>.

The municipality, however, did not want to give in, at least as far as the location of the facility was concerned. They would not change their stand even after receiving a police note stating that the number of prostitutes requiring sanitary control had reached 1600. It is worth to note this number as it means that at that time Wrocław, with its 240,000 inhabitants, was among German cities with the largest number of registered prostitutes. In most other large cities the number did not exceed a few hundred. Wrocław definitely ranked behind Berlin which had twice as many registered prostitutes, but before Hamburg, with ca. 1000–1200 prostitutes, or Cologne (500–600) and other major cities of the Reich. Even when taking into account approximate police data on the number of unregistered prostitutes, which was usually higher than of registered ones, Wrocław seemed to be among the leaders. It should be noted that according to critics of prohibitionism, in cities that were most 'popular' among prostitutes the real number of prostitutes was at least 10 times higher than that of the registered ones<sup>40</sup>. The fact that the problem was largely neglected might be surprising, but looking at the police attitude in other cities, it seems typical of the period. Only to conclude, we should add that in the late 1880s, when the archives end, the residents of the Białoskórnicza were still protesting<sup>41</sup>.

Another issue of constant interest to local authorities was related to the costs of examining and treating prostitutes. The sums were rising fast. According to the first piece of information we have on the subject, it was agreed in 1854 that the two physicians examining prostitutes would receive an annual fee of 100 Prussian thalers. This meant that even in 1870 the costs would not exceed 220 thalers including cleaning services. It was then decided that due to increased workload the salary should be doubled, and the total costs reached 500 thalers. The changes came into effect in 1871<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Shoemaker Elsner and a group of residents to Municipality, December 1874, *ibid.*, sheets 177–181.

<sup>38</sup> Municipality to Elsner, January 4th, 1875, *ibid.*, sheets 183–184; City Council to Municipality, November 26th, 1874, *ibid.*, sheet 185.

<sup>39</sup> Petition of Rotter and his companions, May 1876, a copy, *ibid.*, sheets 212–213; Emil Rieger, a landlord, to Municipality, January 8th, 1878, *ibid.*, sheet 219.

<sup>40</sup> Municipality to Rotter, September 22nd, 1876, *ibid.*, 217–218; a memo of police secretary, October 7th, 1879, *ibid.*, sheet 220; reply from Municipality, October 24th, 1879, *ibid.*, sheets 220–221; Delbanco, Blumfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–43; K. Scheven, *Die sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Prostitution (Einführung in das...*, pp. 141, 144; see: A. Jenders, A. Müller, *Nur die Dummen sind eingeschrieben. Dortmunder Dirnen- und Sittengeschichte zwischen 1870 und 1927*, Dortmund 1993, pp. 41–44; Krafft, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Petition 'Bürgerverein für den westlichen Theil der inneren Stadt' from February 27th, 1885, *ibid.*, sheet 270; petition of ca. 100 residents, from May 17th, 1888, *ibid.*, sheets 287–290.

<sup>42</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, December 10th, 1870, SAW., WCA, 111/8418, sheet 145; Municipality to Chief of Police, February 2nd, 1871, *ibid.*, sheet 149.



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The problem was dealt with much more seriously at the beginning of the 1880s. It was calculated that the annual cost of treatment of 658 prostitutes who spent a total of 24,556 'person-days' in the All Saints' Hospital amounted to 18,417 marks, while only 430 marks was recovered from the women. The costs posed a significant burden on the hospital's budget, so the administration requested the authorities to devise some method of recovering the money, suggesting support from the police. It noted that with 1516 women currently under supervision of the vice squad, a fee of only 6 marks would cover at least half of the actual spending<sup>43</sup>. The idea was soon supported by the Hygienic Section of Gesellschaft für Vaterländische Cultur, who were alarmed mainly by the fast spread of syphilis in the city. The Section reminded that similar solutions had proven effective in Leipzig and Hamburg. However, they proposed a lower fee of 3 marks, as in the light of 'the chronic poverty of local prostitutes' it was difficult to expect them to cover high treatment costs<sup>44</sup>.

Indeed, the costs incurred by the city must have been high, as the municipality asked other German states how they approached this problem. The reply from the municipalities or other administrative organs of Nuremberg, Leipzig, Berlin and Magdeburg suggested that some of the cities have a sort of treatment fee in place. Additionally, we can see that in Wrocław, the problem of prostitution were much more serious than in Berlin, where as many as 5162 prostitutes were registered, with 4/5 requiring treatment every year<sup>45</sup>.

In April 1883, the issue of prostitute treatment costs coverage was brought up at a meeting of the hospital administration. Burgomaster Dickhuth, when reporting on the problem of the increasing burden for the hospitals and city budget, saw two alternatives: either introducing a fee (as was applied in the case of maids), or creating a dedicated health insurance fund (Krankenkasse). He opted for the former solution, viewing the latter as a form of legalising prostitution. Eventually, hospital administration chose to introduce a fee of 20 pfennigs a week. As we can see, it was assumed that there was nothing wrong in prostitutes raising their prices because it was the 'clients' who should pay for the treatment, and not the general public. Wrocław municipality fully agreed with this opinion<sup>46</sup>. However, unexpectedly for the hospital and city administrations, the Chief of Police refused (though with regret) to accept the fee, referring to existing regulations: according to Article 6 and the following articles of the Police Administration Act of March 11th, 1850, the costs of treatment were to be covered by the police. He argued that in this light one could doubt if administrative authorities had a right to use force to recover such fees, and that with low income of the women it was difficult to expect that this solution could cover the necessary costs. He noted that one should not count on prostitutes to pay it voluntarily. Out of 700 women who attended regular medical visits, at best 230 could pay the required amount, and even those would be

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<sup>43</sup> All Saints Hospital Inspection to Municipality, December 15th, 1882, SAW., WCA, III/8563, pp. 1–2.

<sup>44</sup> Hygienische Sektion der Schlesischen Gesellschaft für Vaterländische Cultur to Municipality, February 28th, 1883, *ibid.*, sheets 39–40.

<sup>45</sup> Municipality of Nuremberg to Municipality of Wrocław, December 28th, 1882, *ibid.*, sheet 34, an order from Municipality of Leipzig, Armen-Direktion from Berlin to Municipality of Wrocław, January 27th, 1883, *ibid.*, sheets 36–38, Armendirektion Magdeburg to Municipality of Wrocław, March 7th 1883, *ibid.*, sheet 41.

<sup>46</sup> Excerpt from a hospital administration meeting protocol, April 20th, 1883, *ibid.*, sheets 42–45; handwritten note without date, *ibid.*, p. 46.



difficult to persuade<sup>47</sup>. Eventually, as the compulsory fee could have been regarded as a form of taxation of prostitution, it seemed that the city authorities not only dismissed the idea but also gave up all attempts to recover treatment costs from prostitutes<sup>48</sup>. This stand was changed only by actions undertaken by other German cities. Municipality of Magdeburg suggested the Wrocław authorities to jointly ask the Ministry of Internal Affairs if a legal possibility existed to introduce a compulsory insurance for prostitutes. They cited the case of Szczecin where such insurance had been introduced based on an agreement between the *Regierungsbezirk* and the Municipality. The reply from Wrocław authorities, who seemed enthusiastic about the idea (unfortunately the archives do not report on the outcome of the action, suggesting it was not successful), provides us with information on treatment costs borne by the city. Between budget years 1885/86 and 1895/96, the number of patients increased only from 456 to 514 but as at the same time the cost of one-day treatment doubled (from 60 pfennigs to 1,5 marks), and the number of the so called 'bed-days' increased almost by half, the total cost increased from 6410 marks to 21,994 marks<sup>49</sup>. In the light of the refusal from the Wrocław Chief of Police, the municipality appealed first to the Chief of Wrocław *Regierungsbezirk*, then to the governor Silesia, and finally to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, all to no avail. Based on existing regulations, the ministry only suggested that documents be demanded from prostitutes confirming they had entered a treatment contract with a medical institution. This kind of solution was to be accepted by the courts<sup>50</sup>.

However, the Wrocław Chief of Police agreed with his Berlin counterpart, who denied this possibility. He argued that in Wrocław, 'most of prostitutes live in poorest conditions'. More often than not, they cannot afford renting a cheapest room, and can only pay their basic expenses. Some prostitutes are in fact homeless. If forced to pay additional fees, they will move out to live outside Wrocław, to cheaper locations, but will still 'work' in the city. This will make the supervision and sanitary control much more difficult. The sanitary consequences are easy to imagine<sup>51</sup>. The documents leave no records on how the issue of 'prostitute insurance' concluded. However, considering the opinion of the local authorities it seems that the idea was given up.

Grossly incomplete documentation from 1890s suggests that Wrocław, as other large German cities, filed a lawsuit against the State Treasury to recover previously incurred costs associated with treating prostitutes. However, courts of the Reich rejected such claims, arguing that according to existing regulations the costs should be paid from local budgets. Legalism and practicalism prevailed.

This failure did not mean, however, that the city authorities took no action to restrict the freedom and increase control over prostitutes. In the course of the century, relevant regulations became more and more extensive, making life ever harder for the women. This is particularly evident in the document 'Polizeiliche Vorschriften für die unter sittenpolizeilichen Aufsicht stehenden Frauenpersonen zur Sicherung der

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<sup>47</sup> Chief of Police to Municipality, August 14th, 1884, *ibid.*, sheet 62.

<sup>48</sup> A draft of Municipality regulation from August 13th, 1888, *ibid.*, sheet 69.

<sup>49</sup> Municipality of Magdeburg to Municipality of Wrocław, October 20th, 1896, *ibid.*, sheet 75; a note from October 30th, 1896, reply from Wrocław Municipality, November 7th, 1896, *ibid.*, sheets 75–76.

<sup>50</sup> Municipality to Governor of *Regierungsbezirk*, October 6th, 1896, *ibid.*, sheets 151–153; and reply from the addressee, June 18th 1897, *ibid.*, sheet 156; Governor to Municipality, January 14th, 1898, *ibid.*, sheet 269; Ministry of Internal Affairs to Wrocław Chief of Police, April 13th, 1898.

<sup>51</sup> Chief of Police office to Municipality, April 28th, 1898, *ibid.*, sheet 335.



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Gesundheit, der öffentlichen Ordnung und des öffentlichen Anstandes', published on April 10th, 1886. These regulations provided for weekly health examinations for all prostitutes, requiring them to attend extra visits in the case of illness. To enable easier control of prostitutes, they required them to report within 24 upon changing place of residence, and to subject to police searches, during the day or at night. If they behaved 'immorally', they could be forced to leave given apartment or district.

City authorities reserved the right to forbid prostitutes to reside in certain streets or places (unfortunately, we could not establish which ones they were). They also could not stay in hotels, boarding houses and inns. They were to keep out of houses of procurers (e.g. Louis) and procuresses who were known to the police. They were also not allowed to live together, and especially to live with children, or rent flats on the ground floor, facing the street. As formerly, they could not access theatres, exhibition venues, promenades, parks, zoological and botanical gardens, race courses, and the Oder embankments. They had to stay away from churches, schools, barracks and theatre buildings, at a distance of at least 150 steps. They could only access railway stations with a valid ticket and for the purpose of travel.

Prostitutes were strictly forbidden from entering the Marketplace and the streets: Świdnicka (Schweidnitzerstr.), Oławska, Ofiar Oświęcimskich (Junkernstr.), Teatralna (Zwingerstr.). Anyway, they could be also arrested for 'zwecklose Umherschleifen' in other streets and places, both during the day and at night. Moreover, they were obliged not to look out of windows and doors, raise lanterns or display any other signs or their profession, or allure passers-by. Even travelling by trams and cabs was forbidden. They could not hire young girls or be visited by underage boys. Non-compliance could result in up to 6-weeks imprisonment, or even up to 2 years in 'Arbeitshaus'<sup>52</sup>.

To sum up, it seems evident that in the 19th century Wrocław, prostitution was not considered an uncontrollable plague. In the light of the above mentioned figure of more than 1500 prostitutes, this might be surprising. The question is — did this mean reconciling oneself to the thought that one could not eliminate prostitution, or assuming that the phenomenon was not that disturbing to the bourgeoisie? Or maybe the 'profession' had the ability to stay undercover? As we know, in Berlin in the 1880s and 1890s, despite the formal prohibition to set up brothels, prostitution was on the one hand hidden in inconspicuously-looking inns, and on the other hand it was clearly noticeable in the streets<sup>53</sup>. At any place, it was disturbing. Complaints were filed by the residents of city buildings, who had particularly many occasions to interact with prostitutes. Wrocław city authorities took a calm approach to such complaints and did not give in to the pressure; and if they finally did, it was only with reluctance. They realized that no solution would satisfy all parties. But care was taken to ensure that prostitutes did not demoralise youth, were not too conspicuous, and did not challenge the sensitivity of the bourgeoisie. This attitude was clearly modelled on other cities' governments. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the 'sex industry' was seen as a means to attract visitors to Wrocław who spent money in shops, restaurants, cafés,

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<sup>52</sup> Weber-Neumann, *Sammlung aller für die Stadt Breslau giltigen Polizei-Verordnungen...*, Breslau 1887, pp. 264–266.

<sup>53</sup> Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 357.



etc., thereby supporting the city's economy<sup>54</sup>. The fight against prostitution was left to various, mostly religious, organizations, such as Verein zur sittlichen Hebung weiblichen Dienstboten (St. Maria Stift), (established in 1885), Evangelische Herberge für Dienstmädchen „Marthastift' (1863), Männerbund zur Beförderung der öffentlichen Sittlichkeit, (1890), or Evangelischer Frauenbund zu Breslau zur Bekämpfung der Unsittlichkeit (1899). The effects of their activity were quite limited. Hostels for unemployed housemaids could only accommodate a few dozen women at a time. On the other hand, each year the first of the above-mentioned organisations managed to find employment for several hundred candidates. The Association for Men (Männerbund), however, struggled to attract people. After 8 years of operation, it had only 120 members and complained about the indifference of Wrocław citizens<sup>55</sup>.

What really worried the city authorities were the costs of medical examinations, especially of treating prostitutes. Again, they took the view similar to that of authorities of most other large German cities, trying to shift the costs onto the State Treasury. Police officials, most familiar with the problem of prostitution, were also most sceptical as to whether it could be countered.

Translated by Katarzyna Hussar

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<sup>54</sup> Gaulke, *op. cit.*, p. 10: 'Man läßt die Prostitution gewähren, sofern sie nicht ein öffentliches Ärgernis erregt und die Passanten auf der Straße belästigt.' See: Jenders, Müller, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–47; Krafft, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–81.

<sup>55</sup> See: Rechenschafts-Bericht des Vereins zur sittlicher Hebung weiblicher Dienstboten für das Jahr 1857 and similar subsequent reports; see: Erster Bericht über die evangelische Herberge für Dienstmädchen zu Breslau, 1864 (and subsequent reports from the following years), Jahresbericht des Männerbundes zur Beförderung der öffentlichen Sittlichkeit für das Jahr 1898, and Bericht 1892–1906.