

Weber's 'Ackerbürgerstadt' in the Nineteenth Century

Zwettl as a Rural Case Study of Small-Town Economics in the Habsburg Empire

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Abstract. In his treatise "The City", Max Weber introduced the concept of the *Ackerbürgerstadt* (agrarian city), a type of city whose economic system is primarily rooted in agricultural production. Since then, Weber's concept has been frequently applied to historical studies on urban economies, especially in the Middle Ages and early modern history. However, by taking a closer look at the socioeconomic fabric of small towns in the prelude to industrialization, many characteristics of Weber's *Ackerbürgerstadt* still seem to be applicable. The paper investigates the development of the economic system of the rural small town of Zwettl, situated in the northwestern part of Lower Austria. Zwettl and its surrounding region were left mostly untouched by economic progress. The city had one of the lowest growth rates in Lower Austria and was excluded from the infrastructural expansions of the industrial period. However, Zwettl did not dwindle into a remnant of pre-industrial times. Changes in the social and economic fabric happened on a more subtle level. Structural changes, for example in the agricultural sector, impacted long-term business opportunities, household management, and market development in Zwettl—for better or worse.

The paper offers a case study-based examination of Weber's *Ackerbürgerstadt*. It questions the rigid separation between urban and household economy, as well as the functional distinction between the city and its hinterland. Thus, the paper provides a contribution to the historical exploration of the socioeconomic development of small towns in the rural periphery.

Keywords: Ackerbürgerstadt, Max Weber, rural small towns, economic periphery, agricultural history

At the beginning of the twentieth century, German economists and sociologists were very active in the field of urban history. They developed typologies and classifications of settlements based on their political, social, and economic functions and stages of development. One of these scholars engaged in urban history was Max Weber. Even though Weber was not an urban historian, and never developed a comprehensive typology of cities, his ideas are still the matter of academic discussions. Essentially,

Weber's accomplishments in the field are limited to his posthumously published treatise "The City".¹ In it, he concentrates on economic and political aspects of the city, drawing inspiration from contemporary colleagues in economic research like Werner Sombart and Karl Bücher. Weber's "The City" was first published in 1921 in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik* journal, which he edited for many years alongside Werner Sombart. Only later was the treatise integrated into his seminal *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society).²

In "The City", Weber introduced the concept of the *Ackerbürgerstadt* (agrarian city), a type of city whose economic system is primarily rooted in agricultural production. The term *Ackerbürgerstadt* is ubiquitous in economic studies on the urban history of the Middle Ages and early modern times.³ However, it rarely occurs in studies on nineteenth century Europe. Why is that? Is the *Ackerbürgerstadt* a pre-modern type of settlement that simply vanished in the fairway of industrialization?

Historical research into the economic development of small towns in the period of industrialization and urbanization is surprisingly sparse, especially if we look beyond studies that portray the spectacular transformations of small towns into sprawling, smoke-spitting industrial powerhouses. For a better understanding of the diversity of economic as well as social shifts, we also have to pay attention to rural towns, which were left behind and became part of the so-called periphery. As a matter of fact, these rural small towns did not remain untouched by socio-economic change: they often represent fascinating showcases of compromise between tradition and modernity.⁴ The *Ackerbürgerstadt* is an interesting concept because it conveys a sense of backwardness while also implying a high degree of economic coordination and integration. It also negates the rigid separation between urban and household economy.⁵

The paper seeks to revisit and reevaluate Weber's *Ackerbürgerstadt* by examining a case study from the rural periphery of the nineteenth century Habsburg Empire: the small town of Zwettl.

1 Bruhns, "Stadt," 170; Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1217.

2 Weber, "Die Stadt".

3 Jäschke and Schrenk, *Ackerbürgertum und Stadtwirtschaft*.

4 Zimmermann, ed., *Kleinstadt in der Moderne*; Steinführer, Vaishar, and Zapletalová, "The Small Town in Rural Areas," 322; Graef, "Small Towns, Large Implications?," 155; Hannemann, "Die Herausbildung räumlicher Differenzierungen," 265; Clark, *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*.

5 It also reflects the strong link between urban farming and rural farming, which was often underestimated by urban historians regarding the nineteenth century. Recent studies convincingly combine approaches from urban and agricultural histories to question this hypothesis. See for example: Graef and Ronsijn, "From Home Food Production to Professional Farming," 3.

The case study is divided into two parts. The first focuses on matters of land use and agricultural subsistence, which are both central aspects of Weber's *Ackerbürgerstadt*. The second part will touch on shifts in occupational structure and their ties to the development of the urban commercial sector and overall economic system. Before examining the case study, I will briefly discuss the main points of Weber's concept of the city and its applicability.

Max Weber and the city

Weber's typology rests on a set of economic and political characteristics. Cities fundamentally differentiate themselves from villages in ways of economic organization, diversity, representation, and governance. Initially, Weber presents a rather indistinct definition of the city, following merely economic parameters: "If we were to attempt a definition in purely economic terms, the city would be a settlement whose inhabitants live primarily from commerce and the trades rather than from agriculture."⁶ In a later paragraph, he specifies that the market plays a central role in the life of cities. The majority of the population satisfy their daily needs through the market, which is supplied by local traders, craftsmen, and farmers, who produce goods for sale. A "city is always a market center", in Weber's summary.⁷

For Weber, the scale and scope of commercial activity separate the urban from the rural economy. In his typology, there are three main types of cities: the "consumer city", the "merchant city", and the "producer city". In addition, there is a fourth type, basically a hybrid of the village and the city: the *Ackerbürgerstadt* (agrarian city). In the entire treatise, Weber provides only one brief paragraph that outlines the *Ackerbürgerstadt*:

"Historically, the relation of the city to agriculture has in no way been unambiguous and simple. There were and are 'agrarian cities' (*Ackerbürgerstädte*), which as market centers and seats of the typically urban trades are sharply differentiated from the average village, but in which a broad spectrum of the burghers produces food for their own consumption and even for the market."⁸

Weber's concept of the agrarian city is often interpreted as an early stage of urban settlement. In many ways, it resembles a village with a certain degree of market integration, crafts, and trade. Regarding agriculture, the city is still self-sufficient like a village. This position is very much in line with the popular narrative of urban evolution,

6 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1213.

7 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1213.

8 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2017.

supported by other influential German scholars interested in urban history like Karl Bücher and Gustav Schmoller. The evolutionary model of urban development and the comparison of cities in Antiquity and the Middle Ages was well suited to convey the genesis of modern capitalism, central for Weber's academic work, from consumer city, through merchant city, to producer city.⁹ For Weber, the consumer city and the producer city represent "ideal types" (*Idealtypen*) of settlements, whereas the historical reality offers a myriad of mixed forms.¹⁰ In this sense, the *Ackerbürgerstadt* appears to represent one of the mixed forms: a type of city that in a way eludes the distinct characteristics of ideal types, yet exists side by side with them.

Economically, the *Ackerbürgerstadt* had an underdeveloped commercial sector and a low level of market integration. Weber emphasizes subsistence as a main characteristic of the agrarian city whose primary economic outputs were agricultural products, and most of whose inhabitants were in some form engaged in agriculture. Self-sufficiency was more important than surplus production. Historians are still discussing whether the low level of commercial specialization and market reach completely qualify these settlements as cities. Added to this discussion is the fact that most cities historically referred to as *Ackerbürgerstädte* had a population of less than five thousand inhabitants.¹¹

It is noteworthy that the English translation "agrarian city" neglects the political connotation of the German term; it merely stresses the importance of agricultural activity. However, the combination of the German words *Acker* (field) and *Bürger* (burgher) emphasizes both the role of the agricultural sector and the political status of urban citizens. The inhabitants of the *Ackerbürgerstadt* were farmers and burghers at the same time. This is important because the legal status of urban citizenship and governance constitutes the pivotal distinctions between the *Ackerbürgerstadt* and the village.

The "politico-administrative" concept of the city, as Weber calls it in his treatise, entails the administration of a defined urban territory and the implementation of specific policies. The city constituted a demarcated political and administrative entity, which imposed its own economic policy and set of regulations. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this territorial border was still visibly marked by the city's fortifications. Whereas the household economy was fundamentally structured by the coordination of actors and resources, the urban economy was governed by legal regulations. The urban administration imposed laws to organize economic production and exchange, levied taxes as a source of municipal income, and policed

9 Lenger, "Der Begriff der Stadt und das Wesen der Städtebildung," 33.

10 Lenger, "Der Begriff der Stadt und das Wesen der Städtebildung," 35.

11 Landsteiner, "Urban Viticulture in Late Medieval and Early Modern Central Europe," 169.

market and commercial activities to ensure compliance with urban policies. The territorial and political integrity of the urban administration was a key element of the pre-industrial city.¹²

However, there are some reasons why the concept of *Ackerbürgerstadt* is rarely adopted for studies in modern urban history. For a start, urban citizenship mostly lost its sociopolitical status in the nineteenth century. The communal reforms implemented in the Habsburg lands after the 1848 Revolution brought about the legal approximation of rural and urban populations. Town dwellers no longer occupied a privileged position over their suburban and rural counterparts in terms of political representation, taxation, and economic privileges. The communal reforms established the municipality as the lowest form of territorial administration. Only a small number of *Statutarstädte* (chartered towns) retained their rights of self-administration. The concept of urban citizenship consequently gave way to the concept of state citizenship.¹³

A second important development was the abolition of the manorial system in 1850–1853, which put an end to obligatory contributions to the seignior in labor, in coin, or in kind. The abolition of the manorial system caused a restructuring of labor relations, since landowners could no longer rely on unpaid labor for field work. Furthermore, the peasant population was no longer subjected to the rulings of their seignior, turning serfs into citizens.

The separation between different levels of economic activities and the demarcation of urban territory became less and less distinct in the course of the nineteenth century. This was associated with the change in legal status, as well as the close connection between household economy and urban economy regarding rural small towns. Most agricultural and economic systems in rural small towns such as Zwettl and their respective hinterland were aligned with local demand. Because there was no efficient infrastructure, possibilities to compete with other suppliers of agricultural products on larger regional and trans-regional markets were limited. In addition, as in the case of Zwettl, unfavorable climate conditions and low soil fertility impaired the cultivation of high-yield food crops and cash crops.

Rural small towns in the Habsburg Monarchy

As a case study, the city of Zwettl represents a single example of the diverse types of settlements commonly classified as small towns. In statistical terms, a small town

12 Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1220.

13 Eigner and Martsch, “Ungleiche Geschwister,” 430; Deák, “Die städtische Entwicklung in der franzisko-josephinischen Epoche,” 85; Ganzenmüller and Tönsmeier, “Einleitung: Vom Vorrücken des Staates in die Fläche,” 14.

is often simply defined by size and population, disregarding special types of urban functionality and specialization. Yet, small towns can hardly be subsumed under one uniform typology. Christine Hannemann rightly emphasizes the manifold appearances of small towns: "They [small towns] differ in size, population, economic basis, landscape, history, structural development, architecture as well as in their location, be it in a rural area or industrial agglomeration."¹⁴ More contextual approaches to urban development can accommodate case-specific peculiarities and facilitate the study of small towns focused on functionality.¹⁵ The uneven progress of industrialization in the nineteenth century caused divergent paths of urban development, which ultimately led to a structural overhaul of the urban system. The small town, however, remained the everyday environment and living space for a large portion of the population, even though the degree of urbanization was sharply increasing over the century.

Table 1 Population by settlement size 1910 (in percent)

Crownland	under 500 inhabitants	500–2,000 inhabitants	2,001–5,000 inhabitants	5,001–10,000 inhabitants	10,001–20,000 inhabitants	over 20,000 inhabitants
Lower Austria (excl. Vienna)	35.6	33.2	16.4	4.8	6.3	3.6
Upper Austria	61.4	18.7	5.3	1.5	5.1	8.0
Styria	50.4	26.2	5.0	4.3	1.6	12.4
Bohemia	29.8	29.1	14.0	7.7	6.7	12.7
Moravia	19.5	39.9	17.4	5.9	6.4	10.9
Galicia	8.0	50.8	23.6	5.3	3.2	9.2
Tyrol	33.4	37.5	9.7	5.6	2.4	11.3
Dalmatia	17.9	56.8	14.6	3.2	4.1	3.3

Source: K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Berufsstatistik nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1910 im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern*.

The 1910 population census supports this assessment. Most of the population in the Cisleithanian part of the Habsburg Empire lived in cities of less than five thousand inhabitants. Even in a relatively urbanized crownland such as Bohemia, at the end of the century around 74 percent of the population were still living in small towns and rural settlements. The figures in the Habsburg lands were considerably higher than in other, more industrialized countries: in 1900, only nine percent of Britain's population and 20 percent of France's population were living in

14 Hannemann, "Die Herausbildung räumlicher Differenzierungen," 270.

15 Stekl and Heiss, "Klein- und mittelstädtische Lebenswelten," 561.

small towns.¹⁶ In Germany, the share of people living in cities with more than five thousand inhabitants increased from 23.7 percent in 1871 to 48.8 percent in 1910.¹⁷

Most rural small towns featured a broad spectrum of urban functions and a low degree of specialization. They combined administration, commercial production, trades, and services without losing their agrarian structure.¹⁸ In this respect, Zwettl can be compared to other small towns in the Habsburg lands or in Europe that experienced a similar phase of demographic stagnation and economic peripheralization in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the *Ackerbürgerstadt* is closely related to the typology of rural market towns and *Marktflecken*. Many of them had a long history as regional market outlets, but were set back by the decline of traditional crafts and the lack of industrial infrastructure.¹⁹

The 1910 census data noted above do not account for the territories of the Hungarian crown—the breadbasket of the dual Monarchy. Hungary had a highly commercialized agrarian sector, and the economic systems of many cities were closely connected to agricultural production. The market town (*mezőváros*) was a common settlement type similar to the *Ackerbürgerstadt*. It was especially prevalent in the distinct urban landscape of the Great Hungarian Plain, characterized by numerous widely spread out villages and rural market towns. Even around 1900, citizens working in agriculture exceeded 70 percent of the total population in a number of rural market towns in the Great Hungarian Plain, such as Mezőkövesd, Kunhegyes, and Jászapáti.²⁰ Even the more densely populated market towns like Békés and Csongrád (both with around 25,000 inhabitants) did not lose their agrarian character.²¹ These rural cities had no large hinterland, and mostly produced goods to meet the local demand. Their administrative functions and diversity of institutions were relatively limited; even though their population might classify them as medium size towns, their urban functions resembled those of a larger village.²² Other market towns retained their agricultural character but developed a more integrated urban economy. In Kecskemét, for example, in 1900, 58 percent of the 58,000 inhabitants were still employed in agriculture. However, the city had a diverse commercial sector and sold agricultural goods to distant markets via the railway.²³

16 Clark, *European Cities and Towns*, 244.

17 Boelcke, “Städtewachstum und Eisenbahnentwicklung in deutschen Bundesstaaten,” 25.

18 Eigner and Martsch, “Ungleiche Geschwister,” 435.

19 For early nineteenth-century Germany, Brakensiek and Keller offer some insightful case studies: Brakensiek, “Stagnation?”; Keller, *Kleinstädte in Kursachsen*.

20 Beluszky and Györi, *The Hungarian Urban Network*, 124.

21 Beluszky and Györi, *The Hungarian Urban Network*, 49.

22 Beluszky and Györi, *The Hungarian Urban Network*, 72, 76.

23 Beluszky, *The Spatial Differences of Modernisation in Hungary*, 23; Sárosi, *Kecskemét*, 59.

Although the socioeconomic structure and development of these cities bear resemblance to the city of Zwettl, each of them displays a specific set of geographic, political, and historical features. More in-depth case studies of rural small towns are needed in order to deliver a comprehensive comparison of settlement types sensitive to the plurality of urban functions and to different chronologies and effects of the urbanization process.

The city of Zwettl

The city of Zwettl is situated in the *Waldviertel* region in the northwestern part of the district of Lower Austria, roughly 130 kilometers west of the capital Vienna. During the period of industrialization, Zwettl and its surrounding region were left mostly untouched by economic progress. Even though the city was a regional center for centuries and the municipal reforms after 1848 strengthened its administrative position, development throughout the nineteenth century was slow. The city's population increased marginally from two thousand inhabitants at the beginning of the century to no more than 2,500 at the end of the century. Zwettl's population growth was considerably lower than that of most cities in Lower Austria, whose urban landscape was drastically reshaped by industrialization and urbanization.²⁴ Lower Austria had one of the highest levels of urbanization, but it also exhibited a growing divergence between regions benefitting from economic growth and those that did not. Especially the small towns located in the Vienna Basin experienced an impressive population growth due to the establishment of numerous factories. In contrast, the *Waldviertel* did not profit from the economic boom; instead it recorded a growing population outflux. The region thus turned into an economic periphery, specializing in the production and export of agricultural raw materials.²⁵

Urban commercial activity in Zwettl remained largely concentrated on regional demand and everyday consumables. Sanitation projects, such as the construction of modern fresh water and sewer systems, were not implemented before the last decades of the century.²⁶ In addition, the city was connected to major railway lines as late as 1896.²⁷

24 Eigner and Martsch, "Ungleiche Geschwister," 431.

25 Komlosy, "Vom Kleinraum zur Peripherie," 237.

26 Moll and Fröhlich, *Zwettler Stadtgeschichte(n)*, 62.

27 The city of Zwettl even commissioned a commemorative publication in celebration of the opening of the regional railway line: Stadt Zwettl, *Zwettl 1896*.

Land use and agriculture

The historical literature considers Zwettl a prime example of an *Ackerbürgerstadt*. Regional historian Hans Hakala picks up the concept, although without reference to Max Weber: “Nearly every household in the city was not only engaged in commerce, trade or craft, but also in agriculture on a small or large scale.”²⁸ Walter Pongratz argues more clearly: “From the foundation in the second half of the twelfth century to our times, the city of Zwettl can be called a real *Ackerbürgerstadt*. This means that besides engagement in common crafts, agriculture played a substantial role.”²⁹

Many of Zwettl’s inhabitants were farmers and smallholders. The occupational statistics of 1890 reveal that, at the end of the century, 79 percent of the district’s population were working in agriculture—at least seasonally. However, only about a third were independent farmers, making a living by selling crops and cattle on regional markets.³⁰ Commercial agriculture was underdeveloped, and for the most part, leasehold properties and gardens were used to grow food for local households. Only a limited amount of food, i.e., items that could not be produced in their fields, was purchased on the market. Typically, these were processed and perishable goods, such as flour, meat, and dairy products.

Self-sufficiency was facilitated through the lease of fields, pastures, and woodlots. The city of Zwettl had considerable landholdings in the three primordial plots (*Urfelder*) “Galgenfeld/Rudmannser Feld”, “Weißenberger Feld”, and “Oberes Feld”. These plots were listed by name in the city’s urbarium (*Urbar*) from as early as 1561.³¹ The city also owned holdings in smaller plots, such as the “Hammerfeld” and “Oberfeld”, as well as an additional 40 acres on the northern slope of the Moidramser Hill, the so-called “Brühläcker”.³² These land plots were ceded to citizens for low rents as hereditary leases. Rents were contractually fixed and not adjusted for centuries. As a result of the gradual devaluation of money in the early modern period, these land rents slowly but surely dwindled to a rather symbolic value.³³ For example, city records from the 1860s listed a pasture located just below the “Brühl” on the banks of the River Zwettl that was leased in alternating years to ten citizens ever since 1560.³⁴

28 Pongratz and Hakala, *Die Kuenringerstadt*, 89.

29 Pongratz and Hakala, *Die Kuenringerstadt*, 355.

30 K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Berufsstatistik nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1890*, 5.

31 StAZ K 13, Sign. 6/2.

32 Pongratz and Hakala, *Die Kuenringerstadt*, 356.

33 Löffler, “Grundherrschaft, Gerichtsbarkeit.”

34 Pongratz and Hakala, *Die Kuenringerstadt*, 357.

Not all land leases were heritable. At the end of the eighteenth century, the city switched to leasing single plots for six years, and the neighboring Stift Zwettl Abbey for twenty years. On expiry, the lease was reevaluated and adjusted to current market prices and wage levels.³⁵ Whether cultivated for self-reliance or wage labor, landholdings primarily served civil self-sufficiency, and surpluses would be sold on the city's market.

In the manorial system, seigniorial land was divided into the demesne and peasant holdings. The demesne was directly controlled and managed by the seigniorial lord. Peasants were obliged to provide a certain amount of fieldwork on the demesne, commonly referred to in the Habsburg lands as *Robot*. Several edicts passed under the reign of Maria Theresia modified the *Robot*. According to the Lower Austrian *Robotpatent* (edict) of 1772, the amount of obligatory labor varied between 12 and 104 days a year.³⁶ Furthermore, there were considerable differences between seignories in the extent of labor. The seignory of Rosenau, located a few kilometers west of Zwettl, demanded from its peasant no more than a few days of obligatory services, while the rest of the fieldwork was done by servants. In the neighboring seignory of Engelstein, on the other hand, the *Robot* was paid entirely in kind.³⁷

By the mid-nineteenth century, many seignories had started to replace labor obligations with payments in coin or in kind.³⁸ The extent of this obligation varied from region to region. Some seignories, such as Rosenau, continued to demand compulsory labor for a few days a year. The work was conducted partly without payment, and partly for a low wage.³⁹

The abolition of the manorial system, the so-called *Grundentlastung* between 1850 and 1853 set a final end to the *Robot* and also released peasants from the authority of the seignior. They became subjects of the new municipal administration, which acted as the regional authority of the imperial government, thus legally transforming serfs into citizens.

In addition to the differentiation between demesne and enfeoffed peasant land, there was a difference between *Hausgründe* (house plots) and *Überlandgründe* (land plots). House plots had fields, pastures or woodlots tied to the property. These landholdings could not be sold separately detached from the real estate. Land plots, on the other hand, could be purchased, sold, and leased with the approval of the seignior or municipality. The right of use (*dominium utile*) belonged to the tenant,

35 K.k. Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft, *Verhandlungen der kaiserlich-königlichen*, 99.

36 Löffler, "Grundherrschaft, Gerichtsbarkeit".

37 K.k. Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft, *Verhandlungen der kaiserlich-königlichen*, 94.

38 Löffler, "Grundherrschaft, Gerichtsbarkeit".

39 K.k. Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft, *Verhandlungen der kaiserlich-königlichen*, 98.

whereas property rights (*dominium directum*) to the rightful owner or authority. The owner of the property had the right to seize the land and lease it to another person in the event of failed payment of rents (in coin, in kind, or in labor) or unauthorized alterations of the land.

In contrast to the Stift Zwettl Abbey, the territorial city had no self-managed farm estates. In 1814, the territorial holdings accounted for a total of 482 acres of fields and 39 acres of pastures, including house plots as well as land plots. In comparison, the Stift Zwettl Abbey managed nine manorial estates at the time, of which six were administered as hereditary lease. The total of the abbey's landed property came to 7,390 acres of fields and 3,162 acres of pastures.⁴⁰ The seignory of Rosenau also controlled a considerable area of land. The area of Rosenau's landed property was significantly larger than that belonging to the city of Zwettl.

The abolition of the manorial system resulted in a change of lease modalities and a decrease of land ownership of the municipal treasury. The records of the most comprehensive map series of nineteenth century Austria, the *Franzische Kataster*, show that at the beginning of the century Zwettl's treasury managed a property of 166 land plots. According to the auction listings of the mayor's office between 1879 and 1885, no more than 46 land plots were offered for lease by the municipal treasury.⁴¹ It can be assumed that in the course of the abolition of the manorial system some land plots changed hands and that the municipality acquired funds by selling land plots in times of financial stress. Furthermore, the manorial estates now had to be maintained by wage laborers, which put pressure on large landowners to either modernize their holdings in order to produce a surplus and cover increased wages, or to sell a part of their property. The municipality and the church also released new building land through the sale of land plots to citizens and investors. In 1882, the priory sold their landholdings of 740 hectares, of which a considerable part was forest area, to the city of Zwettl's savings bank.⁴²

In the nineteenth century, the municipality still leased farmland from the *Brühlacker* to citizens. However, after the abolition of the manorial system, the duration of the lease was limited to six years. After this period, the landholdings were re-allotted by auction. In this way, the municipality could potentially obtain a higher rent after the expiry of the lease and exert some control over field management. The city records provide an example from May 1867: the mayor's office requested the ropemaker and citizen Leopold Ruthner to restore the *Brühlacker* he had been

40 K.k. Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft, *Verhandlungen der kaiserlich-königlichen*, 94.

41 StAZ K 183.

42 Pongratz and Hakala, *Die Kuenringerstadt*, 358.

leasing to its original state, so that it could be auctioned off to the next tenant.⁴³ The same year, the council minutes record the request of house owner and shoemaker Peter Wrba, who wanted to lease one of the city's *Brühlacker*.⁴⁴ The contract meticulously describes the location and size of the land plot as well as the rent. The kind of usage, however, was completely left to the tenant. The *Bürgerspital* (public hospital), the second biggest landowner after the urban treasury, also leased part of its holdings, applying the same principle. These cases exemplify that the lease of landholdings was a crucial source of income for large landowners like the urban treasury, the church, and public institutions such as the *Bürgerspital*.

For most of nineteenth century, agricultural productivity increased through the employment of more labor. The enhancement of the established three-field system by incorporating fallow fields in the crop rotation improved yields but was also more labor-intensive. In many rural regions in the *Waldviertel*, the amount of labor required was simply not available. Shortage of rural laborers was a prevailing phenomenon that obstructed agricultural commercialization.⁴⁵ One reason for the scarcity of manpower was seasonal labor migration to Vienna, which had started already at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most notably in the summer months, rural laborers would seek temporary employment in the numerous gardens and brickyards of the capital. During the *Vormärz* period, signs of agricultural commercialization were relatively weak in the Zwettl district. Two general indicators of agricultural intensification, stable feeding and clover cultivation, which both required the year-round employment of labor, were hardly adopted in the district.⁴⁶

The records of the *Franzsiszeische Steuerfassion*, a comprehensive tax survey accompanying the eponymous map series, support the thesis of the *Ackerbürgerstadt* Zwettl. They show that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, 73 of 174 the houses listed in the city center had attached farm buildings, and 42 of them had a barn in the outskirts. Fifty-three houses came with landed property, most commonly in the size of two or three plots of fields or pastures. A small number of wealthy citizens possessed substantial landholdings of over 30 plots.⁴⁷ The arable land of these citizens was more

43 StAZ K 68, Reg. 204. Auftrag des Bürgermeisteramtes an den Bürger und Seilermeister Leopold Ruthner, den von ihm gepachteten Brühlacker wieder in den ursprünglichen Zustand zu versetzen, 11.5.1867.

44 StAZ K 68, Reg. 290. Ansuchen des Hausbesitzers Peter Wrba, Stadt Nr. 126 (Florianigasse 4) um Pachtung eines Brühlackers, 1.7.1867.

45 Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 209; Blumenbach, *Neueste Landeskunde von Österreich*, 19.

46 K.k. Landwirtschaftsgesellschaft, *Verhandlungen der kaiserlich-königlichen*, 96; Komlosy, "Vom Kleinraum zur Peripherie," 295.

47 Pongratz and Hakala, *Die Kuenringerstadt*, 357.

than sufficient to meet the demand for foodstuffs consumed by homes. Accruing surpluses could be sold at the weekly market or at other regional outlets. Not all of these large urban landowners were farmers as their main profession. Many were engaged in commerce, outsourcing the maintenance of their landed property to family members, domestic workers, and day laborers. Some integrated farming and processing, like the prosperous miller Joseph Weghuber, who was running a river mill in the *Syrnau* suburb. Weghuber cultivated grain on his fields, which he then processed into flour. Similarly, some urban butchers used their landholdings to raise cattle.

The records of the city archives provide ample examples of typical agrarian burghers in the nineteenth century. One of them was the carriage driver Silvester Zellhofer. He was the owner of a 250 square meter property with a house and a yard in the city, a garden, and slightly over an acre of arable land in the primordial field *Hammerleithen*.⁴⁸ In the electoral register of 1867, Zellhofer is listed as paying annual taxes of eleven gulden and 77 kreutzer—a significant but not excessive amount.⁴⁹ Another example of an *Ackerbürger* was the miller Anton Fürst, resident of the *Syrnau* suburb. Fürst had a property of 26 land plots according to the 1820 tax survey. Home ownership records from the year 1850 reveal that he passed on his property to his relative Theresia Fürst, who shared the living space with other family members, two domestic servants, a groom, and a journeyman. Additionally, the Fürst family rented a small, less than one-acre field plot, for which in 1855 they extended the lease with the municipal treasury. These two examples represent the numerous cases to be found in the documents of the city archives. These documents illustrate that a great number of Zwettl citizens owed or at least rented plots of land in the vicinity of the city. Many of these plots were too small to enable commercial farming; they merely helped self-sufficiency.

Urban commerce in Zwettl was deeply connected to agriculture. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 290 citizens possessed landholdings, accounting for around ten percent of the total urban population including the suburbs.⁵⁰ Not included in this number are small tenants with temporary lease contracts. Adding the residents who were at least seasonally or part-time employed in agriculture, the resulting number represents the majority of the population of the city and the surrounding region.

48 Franziszeischer Kataster, Plot Records, Zwettl City (1823).

49 StAZ K 68, Reg. 8. Gedruckte Kundmachung der Statthaltereı betreffend Pferdezücht-Prämien und -Medaillen, 11.12.1866. StAZ K 68, Reg. 9. Landtagwahl 1867, darinnen Liste der Wahlberechtigten (Wahlkörper) in der Gemeinde.

50 Franziszeischer Kataster, Plot Records, Zwettl City (1823).

Economic organization and occupational composition

Contemporary historical and topographic surveys are valuable sources to reconstruct the occupational composition of the district and city of Zwettl in the first half of the nineteenth century. More reliable quantitative data only become available for the second half of the century due to the increasing relevance of national statistics.

The transition from the manufacturing system to the factory system caused a decline in agricultural employment opportunities in some rural regions.⁵¹ From the late eighteenth century to far into the first half of the nineteenth, the decentral organization of proto-industrial manufacturing work allowed for a close relationship between agrarian and commercial activities.

This interconnection was typical of the occupational patterns in the *Waldviertel* region. The large number of smallholders and farmers working for the textile industry as a supplementary activity was reflected in the common occupational category of the "weaver-farmer".⁵²

Low wages and the endless source of unskilled labor to draw on attracted proto-industrial enterprises to the countryside. By the end of the eighteenth century, several textile manufactures had settled in the *Waldviertel*, offering numerous peasant households an additional source of income.⁵³ Around 1800, nearly a hundred thousand people—predominantly women and children—were working in their own homes as subcontractors for the textile industry. The introduction of machine-based spinning shifted production sites and thereby demand for labor to the factories in developing industrial agglomerations. Consequently, by 1807, the number of employees in the domestic system in Lower Austria declined to no more than 8,000, and 7,350 of those were based in the *Waldviertel*.⁵⁴ The disappearance of home spinning as a source of additional income resulted in the "agrarianization" of the rural population. Peasant and smallholder families, who had formerly been engaged in domestic work for additional income, became specialized farmers.⁵⁵

In the Zwettl region, sturdy flax fibers were most commonly handled in domestic spinning. Flax fibers were tough to process in comparison to softer cotton fibers, hence effective machine spinning did not supersede domestic processing before the end of the *Vormärz* period. A contemporary account of a clergyman from the village of Friendesbach near Zwettl in the year 1846 highlights the regional importance of flax:

51 Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 201.

52 Komlosy, "Vom Kleinraum zur Peripherie," 298.

53 Mühlberger, "Industrie und Gewerbebetriebe des Waldviertels," 244.

54 Blumenbach, *Neueste Landeskunde von Österreich*, 137; Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 212.

55 Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 202, 211.

“Hereabouts, flax flourishes and for a long time it constituted a rich source of income for local farmers and businessmen. The fibers were used for domestic spinning and weaving, the linen was then sold at reasonable prices, the flax seeds were processed into oil and flax cake, which were sold or used as animal fodder. However, in recent times income opportunities have been hampered by the introduction of the spinning machine [...]”⁵⁶

While non-agricultural employment opportunities dwindled in the countryside, commercial activity in the city of Zwettl stayed fairly lively in the *Vormärz* period. It had numerous small craft shops specialized in the processing of flax and hemp fibers. Aside from that, food production, leather making, iron and wood crafts were the city’s most important economic pillars. By then, the organization of economic life was strictly regulated by craft guilds, which had monitored economic procedures and access to traditional crafts before the Habsburg government issued the decree of free enterprise in 1859.

Professions supplying the local market, such as pharmacists, bakers, butchers, brewers, or carpenters were subjected to the municipal authority. Traditional crafts were characterized by tight personal networks; apprentices were carefully selected and usually lived in the master craftsman’s household. In contrast to traditional crafts, the sector of commercial trades was handled more liberally already in the eighteenth century. These trades produced goods primarily for trans-regional export.⁵⁷ In this regard, many branches of the textile industry gained a high degree of entrepreneurial freedom during the reign of Maria Theresia.⁵⁸ The spectrum of professional designations in the textile industry was diversified accordingly. In the *Vormärz* period, there were linen and cotton weavers, cloth manufacturers, cloth-shearers, blanket-makers, hosiers, dyers, trimming-makers, and tailors in the city of Zwettl.⁵⁹ The goods manufactured were sold not only in the city and the surrounding area, but also peddled to distant regions.⁶⁰ Alongside established master craftsmen and their apprentices, numerous domestic workers and wage laborers also found employment in the urban textile sector.

From the middle of the eighteenth century, the *Waldviertel* was divided between major textile subcontractors. The territory north of the River Kamp was affiliated to the calico manufactories of Schwechat and Šaštín (Sassin) (western Slovakia),

56 Translated and quoted from: Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 212.

57 Resch, “Industrialisierung und Gewerbe”.

58 Pšibram, *Geschichte der österreichischen Gewerbepolitik*, vol. 1; Blumenbach, *Neueste Landeskunde von Österreich*, 130.

59 Blumenbach, *Neueste Landeskunde von Österreich*, 406.

60 Mühlberger, “Industrie und Gewerbebetriebe des Waldviertels,” 242.

while the territory south of the river was affiliated to the manufactory of Friedau.⁶¹ Because Zwettl was located right on the banks of the River Kamp, parts of the city and the suburbs belonged to different subcontractors.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the influence of proto-industrial textile manufactures started to decline, and the city's priory emerged as the main subcontractor for domestic spinning. The most significant branch in Zwettl was linen spinning and weaving. Bleached, unbleached, and dyed linen fabrics and yarn were sold from the city by peddlers. The development of regional flax farming was driven by the constant demand of proto-industrial linen production. Especially local craft businesses and domestic workers benefited from this demand, but it also facilitated the establishment of large enterprises in the region historically known as *Bandelkrämerland* (ribbon peddler country), where a modern ribbon manufactory with eighteen looms was set up in the settlement of Groß-Siegharts at the end of the eighteenth century. In the 1830s, the manufactory had to cease all its operations, but production was shifted to small workshops in the vicinity.⁶²

From the last third of the nineteenth century, the Imperial Bureau of Statistics conducted regular population censuses, including systematic occupation surveys. These data allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the income structure of the Zwettl district, as well as for transregional comparisons. The population census of 1869 already includes a section on professions and occupations. Unlike later volumes, the records of the 1869 issue go down to the regional level of the judicial district, which roughly covers the city of Zwettl and the surrounding hinterland. In general, the district of Zwettl can be characterized as agrarian. More than 65 percent of the working population were employed in agriculture and forestry. In the neighboring judicial districts of Groß Gerungs and Ottenschlag, as many as eight out ten people were working in these two sectors.⁶³ Other employment opportunities in the commercial and service sectors were scarce, except for the regional small towns of Zwettl, Allentsteig, and Weitra. Weitra was one of the few remaining regional centers of textile industry, as reflected by the high occupational numbers in this sector. Zwettl was the seat of the *Bezirkshauptmannschaft* (district government), thus the administrative and political center of the region. Besides public and traditional services, trade and transport sectors were the most developed.

In the city, shops, craft businesses and inns offered various forms of employment. However, in comparison with the district of Weitra, there was no dominant line of occupation in Zwettl as an alternative to agriculture. In the judicial district

61 Blumenbach, *Neueste Landeskunde von Österreich*, 136.

62 Blumenbach, *Neueste Landeskunde von Österreich*, 143.

63 Own calculations based on: K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Summarische Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1869*.

of Weitra, around 1,100 people were employed in the textile industry in the second half of the nineteenth century as compared to only half of that number in the Zwettl district. One of the largest textile enterprises in the *Waldviertel*, the Hackl & Söhne weaving mill operated out of Weitra from 1864. No such counterpart existed in Zwettl.⁶⁴ Domestic labor in the textile industry still played a tangible role but did not have the same economic importance as it had for the rural regions of the upper *Waldviertel*. For example, in 1869 every fifth worker in the judicial district of Schrems was employed in the textile sector, but in the Zwettl district only one out of fifty.⁶⁵ The main employers were metal, stone, and wood working crafts, as well as food, leather, and paper producers. This illustrates the small-trade structure of the urban economic system. On average, every tradesman had one or two employees. Only the construction business showed a higher concentration, with nearly 30 laborers subordinated to one tradesman.⁶⁶

Up to the turn of the century, the occupational structure remained widely unchanged. In 1890, 73 percent of all 50,000 registered workers in the Zwettl district were engaged in agriculture and forestry—the highest number of all *Waldviertel* districts. Indeed, numbers were slowly decreasing in the first decades of the new century. However, in 1910 agriculture and forestry were still the strongest sectors, accounting for 68 percent of all employees in the district. This was considerably higher than the 45 percent average in the entire territory of the Habsburg lands at the turn of the century.⁶⁷ By then, the general progress of industrialization had lessened the share of agriculture in the gross national income. The process of industrial concentration and urbanization led to major regional inequalities. In the 1900s, especially the northeastern part of the Monarchy, Hungary, the coastal lands, and some alpine regions were still mainly agricultural in character.

In the agricultural sector, the share of independent smallholders increased, whereas the employment of foreign, seasonal, and day laborers decreased. In 1910, only 30 percent of the fieldwork in the Zwettl district was carried out by unskilled laborers.⁶⁸ Before the end of the century, there was no further expansion of the agricultural area in the district. Therefore, the rising number of independent farmers indicates a reduction in average farm sizes. Small and miniature farms, prevalent

64 Katzenschlager, “Gewerbe und Industrie der Stadt Weitra,” 68.

65 K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Summarische Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1869*, 12.

66 K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Summarische Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1869*, 11.

67 Bruckmüller, *Sozialgeschichte Österreichs*, 293.

68 Own calculations based on: K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Berufsstatistik nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1910*.

in the *Waldviertel*, were hardly capable of surviving without an additional source of income. In most peasant families, this responsibility fell to the men since the women had to take care of the household and the children's education, and would help on the fields. Small-scale agriculture was supported by the liberal legislation, according to which all peasant land could be freely divided and mortgaged. The financial liability of small farmers can be deduced from the large number of foreclosure auctions conducted during the agricultural crisis between 1868 and 1892. However, the direct repercussion of the crisis seems to have been less tangible in the Zwettl district.⁶⁹

The low level of agricultural and commercial competitiveness was reinforced by the lack of an efficient railway network. As a matter of fact, the city was connected to the railway system as late as 1896, and even then only to a local branch line. In the 1860s, the municipal administration was in negotiations with the planning committee of the *Kaiser-Franz-Josefs-Bahn*, a major railway line connecting Vienna with Bohemia, to have the routing revised in the city's favor, but ultimately the tracks were built 20 kilometers further north. Consequently, many regional small towns along the route, such as Gmünd and Eggenburg, benefitted from the railway connection and obtained a clear economic advantage over Zwettl.⁷⁰ When the local railway line between Zwettl and Schwarzenau finally linked the city to the main line of the *Franz-Josefs-Bahn* in 1896, the Monarchy was still recovering from the repercussions of the 1873 stock market crash and the ensuing agrarian crisis. Consequently, the late railway connection failed to have a profound impact on the city's urban economy. Although the railway had no importance for the export of local products, it facilitated the distribution of consumer goods from other regions, expanding the product line of local businesses.⁷¹

The importance of the commercial sector declined in the Zwettl district up to the end of the century—in the same way as in almost all districts of the *Waldviertel*. This general development of geographic relocation brought about a new phase of agrarianization. Furthermore, many small commercial businesses were not profitable enough to cover all household expenses. In 1890, nearly every fourth tradesman had an additional source of income, mostly in agriculture or the trade sector, and twenty years later the proportion increased to every third.⁷²

69 Bruckmüller, "Die ‚Macht‘ der Bauern?" 295; Bauer, "Die Agrarwirtschaft."

70 Eigner and Martsch, "Ungleiche Geschwister," 443; Ulsperger, "Horn, Eggenburg, Retz," 28.

71 Komlosy, "Vom Kleinraum zur Peripherie," 320.

72 Own calculations based on the occupational statistics 1890, 1910: K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Berufsstatistik nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1890*; K.k. Statistische Zentralkommission, *Berufsstatistik nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung vom 31. December 1910*.

This development demonstrates the limited competitiveness of small urban businesses in rural areas. The primary reasons are twofold: first, the improved transport infrastructure forced local craftsmen into price competition with major industrial producers in other regions of the Empire; second, the purchasing power of Zwettl's population was among the lowest in Lower Austria. A foothold in agriculture could reduce food costs and depending on the size of the landholdings potentially generate additional income. Because of the discontinuation of domestic wage work, women and children were able to help with maintaining fields and pastures. The result was that urban crafts and commercial activity mostly catered to local consumers, providing them with everyday goods and services.

The former strong interdependence between the weaver and the farmer became less evident by the end of the century.⁷³ Unskilled domestic labor for the textile industry was in low demand. However, another branch was emerging in rural cities, namely the garment industry. Fabrics and yarns were now delivered to local tailors and milliners from the new centers of the textile industry. The only true export articles of the Zwettl region continued to be flax and hemp fibers, as well as poppyseeds. The first two were also the only non-food cash crops cultivated in the area. The high degree of supplementary activities demonstrates that no clear sectoral division of labor had developed before the end of the nineteenth century. Instead, a multilayered or at least a dual occupational structure persisted. The close interconnection between commerce and agriculture was a distinct feature of Zwettl's economic system and the region in general.

Primarily linked to the development of public and state institutions, the expansion of the service sector was particularly noticeable. The growing civil service sector offered new professional opportunities for skilled employees from cities and the countryside, advancing the emergence of a rural bourgeoisie which incrementally populated the small towns.⁷⁴

The growing small-town bourgeoisie signifies that the city's social fabric had become more diverse by the end of the century. Whereas agriculture remained the backbone of urban economy, slowly but steadily, the city opened up in sociocultural terms. The small-town bourgeoisie was represented mostly by non-native, educated workers, finding employment in the expanding regional bureaucracy of state administration, as well as in the growing education sector. The 1869 educational reforms expanded access to education, increased compulsory schooling to eight years, and supported the dissemination of progressive and liberal principles in the countryside. Caused by the growing number of pupils, in 1870 the city of Zwettl constructed

73 Komlosy, "Vom Kleinraum zur Peripherie," 301.

74 Eigner and Martsch, "Ungleiche Geschwister."

a separate building for the new *Bürgerschule* (secondary school).⁷⁵ Many rural schoolteachers and civil servants seeking employment in rural small towns were educated in larger cities. They then introduced their conception of urban culture to the regional small towns and created a kind of “micro urbanity” by establishing numerous clubs and societies and reimagining urban space.⁷⁶ The formation of local clubs and societies was also stimulated by a more liberal association law in 1867. In the following years, the number of associations in Zwettl increased from four to 27, including a firemen’s society (1871), a gymnastics club (1886), a cyclist club (1885), and an agricultural casino (1890).⁷⁷ While propagating modern political and cultural ideals, civil organization in clubs and societies helped consolidate the small-town community. In general, they expressed the public desire for communal participation and leisure activities. The utilization of urban space encapsulated the small-town bourgeoisie’s self-conception and need for representation. Infrastructural projects and cultural events mitigated the feeling of rural backwardness.⁷⁸ In an effort to break with backwardness, the Zwettl beautification society encouraged the modification of the historical city structure. Segments of crumbling fortifications were replaced by a river promenade, and the last parts of the city wall had to make way for a representative railway station and the adjacent square. A municipal park was established at the junction of the River Zwettl and the River Kamp and was decorated with a music pavilion, which the local music society would use for giving concerts. Subsequently, the city opened another park in honor of Emperor Franz Josef’s fifteenth anniversary on the throne.⁷⁹

In addition, the bourgeoisie’s interest in fashion and leisure promoted the establishment of modern professions in Zwettl that had not existed a hundred years before. Among them, for example, there were two club soda producers and a bicycle dealer. The consumer needs of the new bourgeoisie were reflected in the expanding range of goods available. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the city already had confectioners, milliners, gold and silversmiths, watchmakers, gardeners, tobacco traders, umbrella producers, photographers, book binders, and paperhangers.⁸⁰ These businesses targeted wealthy customers who wanted to emulate the latest fashion trends of leading European cities, giving Zwettl a flair of urbanity in a rural setting. The growing range of consumer goods shows that, by the early 1900s,

75 Trischler, “Die Entwicklung des öffentlichen Pflichtschulwesens,” 233.

76 Stekl and Heiss, “Klein- und mittelstädtische Lebenswelten,” 563.

77 Hinterndorfer, “Wohltätigkeit, Selbsthilfe und organisierte Geselligkeit,” 373.

78 Stekl and Heiss, “Klein- und mittelstädtische Lebenswelten,” 578; Eigner and Martsch, “Ungleiche Geschwister,” 449.

79 Hinterndorfer, “Städtische Repräsentation.”

80 K.k. Handelsministerium, Österreichischer Zentralkataster, 621.

the rigid economic system that had characterized the city for most of the nineteenth century was slowly breaking up. The newly emerging businesses certainly diversified the city's commercial sector, albeit they only targeted a small number of customers. Most businesses such as general stores, which typically offered a wide variety of services and goods, still catered for customers from all walks of life.

Conclusion

The socioeconomic history of Zwettl in the nineteenth century is characterized by growing ambivalence between tradition and modernity. The city remained deeply entrenched in the region, but a clear functional and territorial distinction between the city and its hinterland became increasingly difficult to identify. In general, the urban economic structure largely remained small-scale until the end of the century. Urban craft businesses mainly produced goods for everyday use, targeting local consumers. Around the turn of the century, however, the growing small-town bourgeoisie initiated the establishment of new lines of businesses. The expansion of the communication and transport infrastructure, which gradually started to penetrate the rural periphery, facilitated the diffusion of the latest trends and consumer goods in the *Waldviertel* region. Nevertheless, although to varying degrees, most people in the city and the surrounding region were still involved in agriculture. Many citizens owned or rented plots of arable land in the vicinity of the city in order to cultivate food for self-sufficiency. That is why, the common classification of Zwettl as a prime example of an *Ackerbürgerstadt* still holds for the nineteenth century.

Weber defined cities according to their economic and political organization. The case study of Zwettl shows that the political reforms of the post-1848 era had a significant impact on the development of urban economy. The growing responsibility and economic independence of urban citizens led to a coalescence of urban and household economy. This interconnection is central for the nineteenth century. The number of citizens engaged in agriculture remained consistently high throughout the century, however, large-scale commercial farming was less viable than earlier. Small land plots were used for subsistence agriculture in order to reduce household expenses. The high significance of small-scale agriculture was an essential reason why the multilayered or dual occupational structure, characteristic of pre-industrial cities, continued to exist throughout the century.

Even though the *Ackerbürgerstadt* seems to be a marginal note in Max Weber's work, it may be a useful heuristic framework for the analysis of modern cities in rural regions. However, the original concept needs to be extended. The *Ackerbürgerstadt* exhibited a deep interconnection between urban and household economy, which

was consolidated rather than re-structured by the political reforms and economic development of the post-1848 era. In this sense, the *Ackerbürgerstadt* mostly eludes the historic narrative of modernization. Instead, its development throughout the nineteenth century was characterized by persistence and adaptability. The urban economic system was completely adjusted to local conditions and demand. The case study illustrates that the 'agrarian city' is an alternative model of urban development in times of far-reaching socioeconomic change. However, changes as glimpses of "modernity" became more tangible on a sociocultural level driven by the growing small-town bourgeoisie. The *Ackerbürgerstadt* of the nineteenth century cannot be fully understood in purely economic terms; we also have pay attention to the socio-cultural shifts that profoundly changed the perception of the rural small town and the living environment of its population.

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