

Pressemitteilung

Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft

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"Lebensborn" maternity home in Austria: a call for testimonies

About 1,300 children were born at the Nazi maternity home in Feichtenbach in Austria. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Consequences of War is looking for testimonies and records to document the history of the Austrian maternity home.

The Nazi racial policy included, apart from the killing of "unworthy" life, also the promotion of "racially pure" offspring. A central role played the so called "Lebensborn" maternity homes, which were built to increase the number of births of "Aryan" children. The largest "Lebensborn" maternity home was "Heim Wienerwald" in Feichtenbach in Lower Austria. About 1,300 children were born here until 1945. However, relatively little is known about the mothers and children to this day. It is assumed, that women who gave birth at "Heim Wienerwald" did not only come from the Austrian area, many were from present-day Germany, Belgium and Norway and returned there afterwards. Also the history of the "Lebensborn" maternity home itself has almost not been touched upon until today. Therefore, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Consequences of War in Graz is devoting a current research project to the history of "Heim Wienerwald". The project is funded by the Austrian National Banks Anniversary Fund and the State of Lower Austria.

The aim of the project is to shed light on the history of the maternity home and how it was handled after the war. Furthermore, the researchers are also interested in the mothers' social structures, the biographical backgrounds of fathers, the everyday life at the home and the lives of the children born at "Heim Wienerwald". Therefore, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Consequences of War is looking for testimonies who can provide information on the history of "Heim Wienerwald" in Austria between 1938 and 1945 or people who were born at this maternity home. The institute is also interested in photography, objects and documents that are connected to the history of "Heim Wienerwald". For further information, please contact Lukas Schretter by phone (+43 (0) 316 380 8272) or via e-mail (lukas.schretter@bik.ac.at).

Nazi racial ideology: increase births of "Aryan" children

The "Lebensborn" association was founded by the SS in 1935 with the aim to increase the number of births of children with "Aryan" origin. Therefore, the association built and maintained nine maternity homes in the area of present-day Germany and 15 other homes in Austria, Luxembourg, Belgium, France and Norway. It is estimated that thousands of children were born in "Lebensborn" maternity homes from 1936 to 1945. It was possible for unmarried women to give birth to children who were classified as "racially pure and valuable" but also children of married couples were born here. The maternity homes also took care of adoptions. Furthermore, the "Lebensborn" association was involved in the "Germanization" of hundreds of children, especially from present-day Poland, after 1943. It is, however, false rumor that SS-officers were brought together with blonde blue-eyed women from the "Bund Deutscher Mädel" for the purpose of procreation.

After 1945, the "Lebensborn" children were confronted with the consequences of their origin: Many tried to find out more about the circumstances of their conception, birth and the first years of their lives later on in life.

The "Lebensborn" maternity home "Wienerwald"

The former “Heim Wienerwald” was originally built as sanatorium by two Jewish doctors in 1904. After the Aryanization in 1938, a “Lebensborn” maternity home was located in the building. After World War II, it was used as children sanatorium, vacation home, rehabilitation center and hotel. Today, the building is abandoned and is in a state of repair.

About Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft

The Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft (LBG) is a research institution with a thematic focus on medicine, life sciences and the humanities, social sciences and cultural sciences, and is specifically targeting new research topics in Austria. Together with academic and implementing partners, LBG is currently running 19 Ludwig Boltzmann Institutes and developing and testing new forms of collaboration between science and non-scientific actors, such as commercial companies, the public sector and civil society. It aims to identify socially relevant challenges, to which research can contribute, at an early stage and to address them. LBG also incorporates the LBG Open Innovation in Science Center, which explores the scientific potential of open innovation, and the LBG Career Center, which supports 250 PhD students and postdocs in the LBG. <https://www.lbg.ac.at>

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