My paper presents some of the aspects and intermediate results of a larger project on the practices, categories and discourses of mobility and sedentariness. The project focuses on the geographic area of Austria in the period from 1918-1938, but also considers relevant developments since the end of 19th century. The project’s aim is to reconstruct and compare a variety of possibilities for sedentariness and mobility and to analyse how differences and hierarchies within this variety are produced. Starting with forms of mobility related to work, the project has to deal not only with the question of what mobility is, but also with the question: what actually is work?

Mobility may be a means to find livelihood in many ways. There is a variety of possibilities ranging from officially acknowledged professions (like commercial agents, travelling salesmen, itinerant craft and trades), to rather illicit activities to find income without officially acknowledged work like vagrancy and begging. The more legitimate practices are regulated and organized by trade regulation. The other extreme of this spectrum is dealt with by the laws against begging, vagrancy and work-shyness. There are trade licences to allow the identification of persons and their purpose of travel, which are provided with a photo from the 1920s on. Identification and jurisdiction are however not clear in every case, which is an old and persistent problem. Generally, but to a different extent, professions which are defined through mobility, professions which take place outside of a stable shop or clearly defined market place, appear to prone to illegal practices: to illicit trade, fraud, or handling stolen goods. They appear to be less controllable and reliable. Even basically legal trades are suspected of belonging to a sphere of anti-economy rather than economy. They are not work;

1 Hertha-Firnberg-programme of the bm:bwk/FWF, project T242-G08.
they are not even non-work, but instead considered “negative work.” Negative work is, as the political scientist Rotering puts it in 1898, “the opposite of a positive promotion of the singular economy. Legal persecution is based on the fact that negative work affects the community’s proprietary existence, or at least appears as a public nuisance. Another effect of negative work is being without subsistence, which can even become total homelessness. Being a pathological symptom within sedentariness, it is the characteristic of the fluctuating element of population.” Rotering finds this anti-economic behaviour primarily in “habitual and professional begging and vagrancy”. He assumes that ambulant trade, travelling booksellers, travelling teachers, and travelling commercial agents are also just making excuses for an existence without proper business and work. This is a common and persistent idea within criminology, an idea that frequently appears also in discourses on begging, the work-shy, and the anti-social in the 1920s and 30s.

Certainly, there is no clear and lasting consensus on the question about the “greater public good”, at least not in detail. There is also no clear consensus about the distinction between work and negative work, which does not simply line up with the borders of official professions. In my paper I will try to discuss this problem while starting from the example of peddling (Hausieren), its disputed meanings and its contexts. Focusing on material from Vienna I will sketch out a field of forces of different and competing strategies and interests: those of authorities and economic competitors as well as the individual or collective activities of peddlers. All this acts together to make peddling a border phenomenon, which means an activity at the verge of begging, social welfare, economy and work.

**An Occupation for Those Incapable of Other Professions**

Peddling – at least from the perspective of its critics – was regarded as a historically obsolete and dying profession already in the 19th century. The numbers of licences in fact show a steady decline during the second half of the nineteenth century. Peddling was also politically and legally “sentenced to death” several times. However, reports of its death were fairly exaggerated and peddling became apparently a mass-phenomenon and a topic of political debates again after World War I.

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In 1921 the Austrian government tried to reform the regulations for peddling. The explanatory statement of the law commented on the different opinions about the economic relevance and meaning of peddling: “Whereas some regard peddling as totally unnecessary and demand its complete abolition (step by step though), others still acknowledge some relevance for supplying regions with insufficient transport networks; furthermore regarding the marketing of industrial products and the possibility to preserve employment for those who are incapable of other professions, most of all war invalids.” With regard to the fact that the numbers of peddlers had again reached 2000 since the end of the war the complaints of the stable trades were considered legitimate. Some chambers of labour added the argument that peddling drew away a large number of people from professions more valuable for the national economy. Therefore the government acknowledged a restriction on peddling to be necessary but a complete abolition to be impossible, in regard of the interests of industry. Under these circumstances it appeared also necessary that “as many ways as possible have to stay open to free the commonality from the duty of caring for people unable to produce.” Those who did not take advantage of the economic situation, changed by war, to turn to this “alluring” form of earning but had already been peddling before should be allowed to continue. The statement also requests explicitly that the Viennese municipality restricts allowances, since peddling was forbidden within Vienna, and Viennese peddlers therefore had to find their income in other federal provinces. (Or, as complaints would usually express it: flood the other provinces with worthless goods)

Following the new regulations, the allowances for peddling were reserved primarily for war invalids and war dependents. It was an occupation which did not require professional training or competence but a proof to be permanently unable to any other occupation and to be without any means (which included the whole family). Like for any other trade, the applicant had to have a (mostly) clear record and a good reputation. Furthermore he/she had to be over the age of 30 and free from disgusting or contagious diseases. To gain an allowance required a rather elaborate review. The allowance had to be renewed once a year.

All these extraordinarily tough controls, reviews and restrictions did not establish a good reputation for peddling. Additionally it seemed rather ineffective in restricting peddling. Complaints about the “plague” of peddlers did not end at all. The estimations of actual peddlers differ from official numbers: There were about 2500 peddling allowances all over

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5 Protokoll des Nationalrates 1921, Beilage 716: Bundesgesetz vom ... betreffend die Ergänzung und Abänderung einiger Bestimmungen des hausierpatentes und der Vorschriften über andere Wandergewerbe. Begründung, 3ff.
Austria in the mid-20s, but estimations of 30,000 peddlers alone for Vienna. The province of Salzburg had about 100 licences; complaints said that there were about 3 times as many. There are several reasons for these differences in numbers. These are numbers of licenses according to place of residence, which was mostly not the place where the peddlers attended their business. There was apparently a lot of trade going on without any permission. The astonishing numbers, however, served as arguments in political debates, and mostly came from those who felt threatened by peddling. As a result, they might be far exaggerated. Furthermore, there is the question about what actually was defined and estimated as peddling. Peddling worked as a keyword for quite different things.

A Cover, a Symbol, a Survival Strategy?
One common approach was to simply add peddlers to the masses of beggars in the streets, which became a more and more prominent problem from 1926 on and especially during the World Economic Crisis. Legal regulations for peddling actually seemed to confirm and reinforce the proximity between begging and peddling. Already before World War I the peddlers’ organisation often emphasised that peddling was a hard and not very fruitful business, not attractive at all, but still a chance to build up an existence if you had no job, no money, and no professional training. Now peddling was officially restricted to the poor and invalids, who very likely could not afford a greater quantity of goods, especially goods of value and high quality. Peddling was restricted in many practical aspects too, both in terms of the kind of goods, and the geographic areas. Usage of transportation or an employee was allowed only in extraordinary exceptions. This altogether made peddling rather the very end of a career, a substitute to a pension or public welfare for those with little hope to do better. Many applications for an allowance referred to this. They are describing desperate situations and the perspective in which the applicants may be forced to starve, or be driven to begging or to theft (which was a less appropriate and less successful argument). These differences seem irrelevant, anyway, according to contemporary perceptions like newspaper articles or publications by the police. A report by the Viennese police department says: “[…] unscrupulous and work-shy elements take advantage of the pauperization of broad social classes, in order to practice begging as a profession and abuse the good heart of their fellow human beings; often through pretending physical afflictions. Especially the beggars in taverns and cafes pretending to sell matches or other small items belong to this category.”

A conference on beggars in Vienna states: “The once sharp borderlines between street musicians

\footnote{Jahrbuch der Polizeidirektion Wien. Mit statistischen Daten aus dem Jahre 1926. Wien 1928, S. 150f.}
and beggars and between peddlers and beggars are blurred. Making music and singing in the streets or offering shoe laces, stationary, pocket-calendars, band aids, etc. are mostly fictions, the costumes of begging.” Money given to a street musician (there are licences for that too) or a peddler was regarded as alms rather than an equivalent for goods without value.

Exchange seemed motivated just by pity or pushing. It was no sale of economic importance, but it was still related to the national economy in another way. There was a large amount of unemployed work-force in the streets, and alms were – in comparison to the limited money available for systematic public welfare – discussed as an irrational and un-economic expense and waste of national income. People apparently gave money for reasons hard to reconstruct and there was obviously no way to control and stop that.

It is hard to tell if offering goods or music granted a better income than offering nothing but wretched poverty. Work however – even in this precarious form – has always had a symbolic dimension and a moral purpose, too. An anarchist paper of the 1930s commented: “The unemployed proletarian doesn’t demand anything, he doesn’t take anything, he pleads, he goes to the streets to demonstrate, he sings to demonstrate his willingness to work.” This kind of demonstration was not enough – even in times of mass unemployment up to 26% (1933) and in times when the percentage of supported unemployed fell to 50%. Illegal peddling and acting as a begging musician did not work out as a way to reintegrate oneself into the sphere of work-process. During the economic crisis the efforts to stop these illegal activities and also to reduce legal peddling were intensified. It became more difficult to renew a peddling licence and almost impossible to legally start peddling from 1934 on.

Social politics at that time aimed to reintegrate those unemployed but willing to work into work force and to intensify the fight against the work-shy beggars and vagrants. Laws relevant for social welfare commonly (and already before that time) included paragraphs which asked about the willingness to work of all welfare applicants still able to work. A more virulent and unsolved problem, however, was how to organize these efforts and how to distinguish the real unemployed from the work-shy. Jobs were rare and of high value at that time, to be distributed carefully. In that context, illicit forms of self-employment did not work

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out as a proof of your willingness to work but could rather lead to further exclusion. According to a highly controversial decision of the Supreme Court, peddling and street-music without a licence was forbidden, but it was still an honest way to find livelihood. Legally speaking, peddlers and begging musicians gave some reciprocation for payment. It therefore theoretically did not fall under the laws of vagrancy. Records show, however, that an accusation of illegal peddling like the verdict of being work-shy or of being a habitual beggar similarly served as arguments not to grant an allowance for peddling. When the Austro-fascist regime implemented tougher actions against beggars and vagrants, it was intended to finally clear all these legal obscurities concerning illegal peddling and begging musicians. If work means just to earn your daily bread somehow, then it is just the idlers who do not work. If work means to have a stable profession and to really earn a living from it, it is something completely different. Besides employment-creation-programmes, vocation/profession (Beruf) as a general concept gained a lot of political importance during the interwar period, as well as within the period of Social Democrat government in Vienna and also within the period of Austro-Fascism. Austro-fascist politics emphasised the importance of profession as the basis of a new political order (“berufsständische Ordnung”). Within this context, vocation seems an ideal, partly even dissociated from occupation and mere income. In that time even the peddlers got their long-demanded official association, a “guild” in 1936, although peddling did not really become a vocation. To understand this, we also have to look at its position within the other sales professions.

**The Peddler as a Competitor**

Peddling was a way to survive, it was a problem for social welfare and police, and yet it was still an economic activity. Peddling was advantaged with respect to taxes, and despite everything, it could be practiced as a trade in dimensions which made its competitors feel threatened: the original intention of still accepting peddling was, as an organisation of general dealers points out, to allow a very small income. A trader who was equipped with a licence was expected to buy a small basket of fruits, which he could easily carry around. But: they sold in great quantities, “10 resident shops do not have the amount of fruits in stock as one itinerant trader carries around peddling.”

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grotesqueness. The mayor’s orders forbade peddling, but hives of peddlers of all kinds are roaming the streets, the taverns, and they besiege the inns. There are peddlers with horses and carts, peddlers who transport their goods from house to house. […] The prohibition exists on paper only. The unstable competition sneaks through 1000 chinks against native trade.”

For small resident traders this kind of peddling appeared to be dangerous under every aspect: „How many peddlers are there who have a loaded gun in their pockets instead of a licence“.

Although peddling seemed a bigger problem in the countryside it appeared more superfluous within the city. The associations argued: there are enough shops and sufficient supply. Shop-owners are paying more taxes; they have to maintain the shop and their stock. They are subject to control and restricted shop hours. Peddlers do not have all these restrictions and are therefore an unfair and illegitimate competition. The authorities should rather give pensions to the peddlers instead of the liberty to ruin the sedentary trade. It was, however, not sufficient to point out one’s own interests. Thus, the argument that peddling damaged resident trade was usually accompanied by arguments of consumer protection: the customers are bothered by peddlers, they are defrauded by high prices and low quality. Peddler’s goods are generally worthless and do not meet hygienic standards.

To understand this threat it is necessary to consider that the number of small enterprises in Vienna (and even more in the countryside) was extremely high. (To which peddlers replied with the question: maybe there are not too many peddlers but too many small shops?) Some associations of small stable traders had doubled their membership from 1919 to 1927. Many of them were in a precarious economic situation. In 1937, 45% of all business enterprises had an income lower than subsistence level. These shops had to compete with each other and all kinds of big and small competitors, with big stores, consumer associations, mail-order selling and last but not least, the peddlers. They had to deal with the effects of economic crisis, with price control (Preistreibereigesetz), social insurance contribution, reduction of working hours, etc. We may assume that peddling was not only an additional competitor but for these traders it also represented the spectre of a possible career in the event of insolvency.

Small shops seem to have been the biggest enemies of peddling and they successfully unified all (but not every) kind of sedentary trade and crafts, affected or not by peddlers, for their fight. They wrote petitions and organized mass protest. Their fight against peddling included

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sales practices of all kinds of traders, and not only the literal peddlers (Hausierer). Peddling was legally defined as “offering goods from door to door and from house to house.” Other categories of sale, legal or illegal, did not wait for customers either but went to find them. There were, for example, “Wanderhändler” – itinerant traders, who were, as the Kaufmannschaft (official organisation of merchants) pointed out in 1936, not to be confused with peddlers (Hausierer) in any case. (Although they were commonly announced as peddlers.) Wanderhändler could be producers, their representatives or traders who were granted an allowance according to §60 of the trade regulations (Gewerbeordnung). They were allowed to sell products of the native agriculture and forestry. Stable trades during economic troubles could also get the permission to distribute their products in the streets. In Vienna, these were mostly bakeries, confectioners, producers of toys and balloons. There is also a larger difference between the actual allowances and other estimations; there were for example complaints about 2000 ice men in the streets.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore there was colportage of books and newspapers. Charitable societies sent out peddlers too. Finally, the activities of salesmen and sales-agents contributed to this picture of trade which took place outside shops and certain market-places. Neither was allowed to sell from door to door, but only to carry around examples and take orders. There were also restrictions on selling to private households. They did, however, sell to individuals and seem to have delivered the ordered goods quite fast.

All of these activities were partly legal, and partly in violation of the regulations. All these kinds of activities were rather uncontrollable, and not least because of all the regulations. There was a wide variety of categories of sales with a variety of slightly different competences. Additionally there was quite a lot of exceptions to the regulations. Once someone acquired an allowance, it remained valid, even when the law changed. These allowances could even be leased. For example: some Wanderhändler could still sell lemons, even when lemons became a foreign fruit with the end of the monarchy and were excluded from the list of allowed goods. In some federal provinces the native war invalids were allowed to peddle, even when peddling was generally forbidden.

In the long run, sedentary trades were rather successful in declaring their interests as identical with the general good. “Protection of the stable trade” was to a great extent an aim of local authorities too. This, however, did not lead to an effective and strict suppression of itinerate

trades. Punishment for violations of regulations did not seem generally reasonable. Authorities state that penalties had no effects, and illicit traders came right back to the streets anyway. Because this kind of street trader was often old and poor, punishment could not be too hard. There were also the welfare expenses to be considered. Sometimes authorities – at least in Red Vienna – also commented that the complaints had no point, were exaggerated and seemed to derive from mere grudge (Brotneid). Furthermore, illegal activities could sometimes even change regulations.

Unlike the peddlers, the Wanderhändler had their official association from 1903 on. After World War I they had about 2000 members, including several categories of allowances for selling certain products of agriculture and forestry by wandering around in the streets: eggs, honey, living poultry, mineral water, fruits, flowers, vegetables, Christmas trees, candied fruits, sausages, roasted sweet chestnuts, fancies, haberdasheries, candles at cemeteries, etc.

The association complained a lot about the problems their members had with the police. This mostly concerned illegal stalls. They were not allowed to stay still but instead had to walk around permanently. After WWI illegal stalls were opened in great numbers around the railway-stations and around regular markets, parks and in streets right in front of the shops. These illegal markets were organized by the association; it leased out stands for money and copied appeals for their members in case of prosecution. As an effect of the efforts of the association, stalls were legalized, in restricted numbers though. The association also fought for the legal use of carts and trucks without restrictions – referring to the constitutional liberty of occupation, but was not successful. They also tried to achieve the right to sell butter and eggs again, which was not allowed for itinerate trade. They argued that the prohibition was ineffective anyway and produced a booming illicit trade, which had gained the monopoly on these goods without paying any taxes.\(^\text{16}\) The authorities of several districts had no objections to this argument, although there were objections concerning hygiene.

Wanderhändler had to face similar problems like the peddlers, including anti-Semitism, problems with the police; concerns about the hygienic handling of goods, there were complaints about duplicates of licences. There were defamatory stories of theft or of women pretending to be farmers from the countryside but actually coming from the suburbs and selling industrial products etc. Wanderhändler still had a better position and were in some

respect able to defend their interests, not at least due to their official association. The same applies to all other categories of trade that were accused of illegal peddling too. Salesmen, commercial agents etc. all had official associations or unions to represent them. As a matter of fact, salesmen and commercial agents had not been clearly distinguished from peddlers at the end of the 19th century. In the interwar period they could be regarded as provisional occupations chosen of necessity. Their official associations, however, stressed the knowledge and training required for these professions and its necessity for national economy. From this perspective it appeared to be something completely different from peddling. Generally, the whole variety of professions seems more clearly differentiated now, in causing a disadvantage for the peddlers, which unwillingly represented and symbolized more or less the scandal of sales, and the very opposite of “Bodenständigkeit” (rootedness), a term which also meant non-Jewish.

Peddlers – even those with licences – however, were everything but a homogeneous group, a fact which added to their weak position within this struggle about competences, markets and legitimacy. However dominated their position was, they acted too, and by that they were an active part within this field of forces as well. Peddlers were represented by their organization for legal protection, the “Rechsschutzverein der Hausierer” which was founded in 1896 and only after 1936 by their official guild. This organization also tried to represent and protect their rights, and it published long articles to prove the necessity of peddling, and their substantial contribution to national economy. The organization also fought against the inactivity and indifference of its members. The problem was named: how can we form a strong organisation if our members are ashamed of being peddlers? Their national organisation also had to deal with several internal conflicts, regional competition and especially anti-Semitism. The peddlers’ organization of Salzburg and Upper-Austria temporarily split from the national organisation in the 1930s and formed a new Organization of “bodenständige und alpenländische Hausierer”. Despite these internal differences, the peddlers primarily fought against illicit peddling. Illicit peddlers, as they argued, damaged the image of legal peddlers. They were acting against any regulations, defrauding the customers, and by that they destroyed the trust in peddlers and the established clientele fostered by legal peddlers. This critique was aiming at the “unemployed who were peddling as they had the right to it,” and it included sedentary trades, and larger companies who sent out salesmen. Above all it aimed at peddlers and marketers from Yugoslavia, especially the Gottschee. Peddlers requested a strict official policy against illicit peddling, more control, and harder
punishment. They even published lists of illicit peddlers and asked their members to report any illicit peddler to the police. Although legal peddlers had an identification card with a photo, they additionally gave out badges to visibly distinguish themselves from illicit peddlers.

All these efforts did not prevent peddling from representing a legal but at the same time highly illegitimate trade in common perception. It was too miserable and paid too little taxes to be a proper business. If it prospered, it only aroused even greater suspicion.