

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann. *Geselligkeit und Demokratie: Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750-1914.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003. 144 S. EUR 19.90 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-525-36800-8.



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Civil society, transnational history, and transfer history have become key concepts for European historians in the last two decades. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann's book on sociability and democracy is a valuable new addition to these trends. Although not grounded in archival research, this book offers an important summary of existing literature on the topic from different fields. Within a hundred pages, Hoffmann provides a brief survey of associational life in the United States, France, Germany, the Habsburg monarchy and Russia from 1750 to the outbreak of World War I. Following Philip Nord, Hoffmann structures his book around four phases in the emergence and growth of associations: the first chapter focuses on the emergence of associations during the Enlightenment (1750-1789); the second, on the "golden age" of associations in the *Vormärz* (1820-1848/49); the third, on the period of the 1860s to the 1870s when associations became part of the "national awakening" and underwent a democratization process; and the fourth, on the peak of associational life between the 1890s and 1914.

Throughout all four chapters, Hoffmann succeeds in offering a trans-European and even transatlantic overview of associations and associational life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By including the United States and Eastern Europe, Hoffmann is able to correct several misconceptions. In contrast to standard

works on German history (such as Thomas Nipperdey and Hans-Ulrich Wehler), in which associations do not seem to have existed during the Wilhelmine era, Hoffmann is able to show that Germany, together with other countries, experienced a tremendous growth of associational life during this era. Hoffmann concludes that it would be wrong to speak of a decline of associational life in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, associations in North America and Europe multiplied up until World War I. Furthermore, the increase in associations and the expanding civil society represent an important characteristic of the transatlantic community that connected Europe and North America to a much higher degree than has been assumed. At the same time, associations played a part in the construction of national identities and communities. The Habsburg monarchy is a point in case since associations followed the ethnic/national lines between Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, and Slovenians. This "national" differentiation even survived transatlantic migrations. When about half a million Slovaks immigrated to the United States in the 1880s, they established a tightly knit network of ethnic associations that enhanced their national self-awareness and, as Hoffmann seems to imply, also supported re-migration to their "homeland." The inclusion of studies about Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire benefits his survey very much. With regards to

civil society and associational life, Western European historians tended to see Eastern Europe as a wasteland. Using the studies of Adele Lindenmeyr, Hoffmann points out, that more than 2,200 charitable associations were founded in Russia after 1890. He further refers to the observation of the English traveler Edith Sellers, who stated in 1905 that she had never been in a country with so many private charitable associations.

Although a little bit too heavily focused on the Freemasons, the book is a valuable overview of associational life in Europe and the United States. The exclusion of women from associational life, however, was

not as complete as Hoffmann contends. They were not only limited to charitable associations but were involved (in large numbers) in museum and art associations. The absence of a thorough discussion of *Arbeiterkulturvereine* is somehow surprising. One could certainly argue that these associations were not the focus of this study, since Hoffmann claimed that he would focus only on the intellectual/moral associations and exclude all political/industrial associations. However, throughout the book, Hoffmann concedes that in the end all associations have had political meaning and influenced the political structure of their surrounding society.

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