

27. TEN YEARS WITH IIASA IN AUSTRIA, VIENNA, 1983-93

I retired from Harvard and was open for other employment in late 1983. I started with three months at OSU as Lazarus Professor, and then by plan went to the Medical School of the University of Toronto. I was to take up a post of Rosenstadt Visiting Professor on a one-year appointment. But in the middle of the academic year I asked if I could be excused. They were quick to let me go, since the mathematics of population that I had been teaching turned out not to fit well with the Medical School's interests, and they had in mind another appointee who would serve them better.

The reason I wanted to be excused was because I had received a phone call inviting me to Austria to a research post with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). The Director, Professor Hollings specified a two-year stint. In the event that two-year appointment was renewed four times, so Austria was my base until 1993.

IIASA was and remains a research center of distinction. Founded in the late 1960s, in a lull in the Cold War, when Presidents Nikita Krushchev and Lyndon Johnson discussed ways in which American and Russian scientists could work together, and they agreed on such issues as population and environment. Academicians Jermen Gvishiani and Philip Handler worked on the details; Gvishiani (who died recently) became the first Chairman of the Council, and Howard Raiffa of Harvard was appointed founding Director (1972-5). The Austrian government offered the former palace of Maria Theresia, in Laxenburg, a suburb of Vienna, as the home of the new Institute.

In 1983 an eminent scholar in the field of population, Andrei Rogers, was leaving IIASA, and a successor to his post of leader of the population group was required. Offered the post, I accepted with alacrity. Toronto was hardly able to compete with Vienna as far as I was concerned.

I was thrilled by the thought of walking the pavements where Beethoven and Mozart had walked, and in the 20th century Mahler, the city of Strauss and Lehar, where psychoanalysis was brought into existence by Freud, and the scholars of the Vienna Circle led by Wittgenstein did their heavy thinking. I had learned German along with French years before,

Austrian culture is not to be confused with German--the latter is solemn and thorough, Austrian light-hearted and a little slap-happy. Germany produced the grim forecast of Oswald Spangler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* (Decline of the West), Austria the breezy history of art and social custom of Egon Friedell's *Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (Cultural History of the Modern Age). Germans are highly disciplined, Austrians too smart and individualistic for discipline, a contrast that appears in industry and in the military. In short Germans are thorough, Austrians at their best are imaginative.

The Summer Palace of Maria Theresia, a building of marble and gold made exceptional offices. The population group had two of the best among these, two commodious rooms, with a wall of glass at the back from where one could step into a large park with well-tended trees and flowers, and close to IIASA's center of action, the Director's office.

What was my surprise, then, when having seen all this I was told that it had been decided by Chester Cooper, a former CIA agent, one of two Assistant Directors, that on the change of leaders the population group would be moved to somewhat distant wooden quarters, no marble, no paintings. Nothing to remind one of the building's royal past and important present.

I told Chester that if that was an indication of the low value now set on population it was the wrong place for me, and I phoned Beatrice to stop packing. Chester quickly surrendered, and the quarters Andrei had occupied continued to house the population group for the next ten years and to this day.

For living quarters I camped down at Broschek's, an inexpensive inn about half a mile west of the Institute. I liked it. Herr and Frau Broschek, who ran it were a cheerful couple. Herr Broschek was a leading member of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, whose function was mostly ceremonial, the entertainment of its members. I remember only one fire, and that a minor one during our ten years at IIASA.

Between Broschek's and the Institute lived Herr Peter Schreiber, his wife Frau Stefanie, their little son Stefan and their two chows, large dogs of Chinese origin. Charming animals these. When you entered their house they came and sniffed you, as though to satisfy themselves that you were OK. I found it hard not to think of them as people.

Peter is an engineer, and Stefanie a high school teacher of biology. Their complete lack of English stimulated us to improve our German. Peter and Stefanie were entertaining in all senses - we were often invited to dinner by them, and they were more than passable conversationalists. Not only did they invite us but when we had a visitor, for instance Hertha Georg, mentioned in another connection, they included her in the party.

Since we left there has been a problem keeping in touch. My German was good enough (i.e. understandable, if only barely, at least to a sympathetic listener) for daily spoken use, but writing it was a) too embarrassing, knowing the mistakes I was surely making, and b) too much dull work with a dictionary. So despite my great desire to communicate with the parent Schreiber, I have not in fact been in touch over the nearly ten years since we returned to the U.S.

But help has now arrived--their son Stefan, too young to be noticed socially when I left, has now grown up, completed a curriculum in which he specialized in English, and writes beautiful letters, entirely without error. So much so that I have to watch my own expression, lest I make grammatical errors that he would pick up. At least in one respect the younger generation has taken the torch from the older so that I can now communicate with the parents through their son.

One final reason why we found our stay in Austria so pleasant. That is the absence of the class differences that seem to me so prominent in the United States. Consider taxi drivers in the two countries. The Austrian taxi driver dresses neatly in much the same garb as the business executive he drives, often owns his own house; one case I knew in Vienna took contracts to develop software in his time off duty. The income distribution is much more compressed in Austria; the State provides general access to medicine, to hospitals, with only nominal charges; education is furnished with very little or no payment; the sting of unemployment is lessened by a generous insurance arrangement; homelessness, common in the United States, is rarely found in Austria; children's allowances, unheard of in the United States, are taken for granted in Austria. (It is wrong to think that Austria is unique in these respects--they apply to most of the countries of Europe.)

During our ten years the government was what we would call liberal. It represented Vienna, rather than the more conservative countryside. Since we left there has been a shift to the right.

It was somewhat troublesome to get downtown to the Vienna Opera from where we lived, but Beatrice and I attended great performances of Mozart's Magic Flute, his Marriage of Figaro and Idomeneo, Puccini's Turandot, La Boheme, Countess Maritza Tosca and, Madame Butterfly, and the younger Strauss's Fledermaus, Verdi's La Forza del Destino, Rigoletto, La Traviata (twice) and Aida, Donizetti's Cenerentola and Lucia di Lammermoor, and Wagner's Die Meistersinger. And Lehar, of whom we were especially fond-- Das Land des Lachelns (The land of Smiles) and The Merry Widow.

While the Vienna State Opera was for us the most solid of Vienna's many cultural institutions, one could not but be interested in the Musikverein for its varied musical presentations, the Knstlerhaus, the Volkstheater, the Kunsthistorisches (Art) Museum, and the Naturhistorisches (Science) Museum.

When Vienna was quiet during the summer, the suburb of Baden where we lived much of our time in Austria, took advantage of the artists who were free in the off season to perform in lighter pieces like The Circus Princess and Wienerblut.

Beside these great musical performances on stage, we could listen to and tape a free broadcast of an opera every week-end during the season.

My brush with Austrian law, Baden, 1987

I have had only one automobile accident in my half century of driving, and it occurred in Baden, a suburb of Vienna. I was coming out of a side-street into a main thoroughfare, after having duly stopped as the sign instructed. It was raining and the streets were slippery. Proceeding very cautiously with the green light, I crossed in front of the halted line of traffic that included trucks and busses through which one could not see. As I passed these I was struck, lightly but enough to break a light and bend a fender on the right hand side on my car and on the left hand of that of the young lady driving the car that had struck. She had been going too fast to stop when the light turned.

With that very slight collision Austrian law was engaged. All traffic was halted while the police made chalk-marks on the road and measured distances. Then we (Beatrice and myself and the young lady) went to the police station and were separately interviewed. Everything was recorded and all this data was available to decide who was in the wrong.

The young lady found a lawyer who advised her to sue, and I found one to defend me. The two sets of lawyers conferred on the voluminous data by then available and declared that I was at fault. That puzzled me, but rather than argue I paid for repairs to my car and to those of the young lady, and went about my business thinking that was the end of the matter. The few hundred dollars in schillings did not seem worth worrying about for very long.

If you also wonder about the decision against me when I had the green light bear in mind that the lady was a charming young Viennese with the rich local speech, while I was a foreigner--speaking halting German with a heavy accent, just an ugly American.

Like the mills of God, the Austrian legal system grinds slowly but it grinds exceedingly small. Some months later I had a phone call from my lawyer, and was told the two sets of lawyers agreed that the initial decision was wrong, that the lady was responsible. At last, I thought, the movement of funds will be reversed, and I will be covered for the cost of the accident.

Not so, it was explained over the phone, the whole amount was expended on costs, and I even owed something, which they were generous enough to overlook. I would not be billed.

It is wonderful to live in a country where there is so little crime, so little serious work for lawyers that they have time for issues like this.

I experienced another example of the innocence and crimelessness of Austria in a second clash with the traffic laws. One night I was cycling down a semi-rural lane marked one-way, when I was stopped by an officer. After he had pronounced a charge of violating the traffic law to which

I pleaded guilty, he pronounced the sentence. "The punishment for this offense is 100 schillings (about \$5)." Then the execution of the sentence: "Hand it over," and I took my money out and peeled off a 100 schilling note.

The American might suspect corruption here. However the Austrian may be simple-minded or bureaucratic, dishonest he is not. I accepted the punishment by handing over a 100 schilling note, was given a receipt, was released from custody, and went my way.

Having the whole legal process of apprehension, charge, sentencing and execution of the penalty taking place on that dimly lighted lane where the crime took place cannot be beaten for efficiency.

Beatrice had a similar experience with the law while driving. She came to a corner where there was a policeman directing traffic and she wanted to turn right. She lit up her right signal light and dutifully waited for the officer of the law to give her the sign to turn. He paid no attention. So after a considerable period of waiting, with no traffic coming from any direction she slowly turned right. To that he did pay attention, and was down on her like a flash. The same legal process in situ as with me on my bicycle, except that the fine was larger.