

# Forgotten Fun: Recollecting the Working-Class Pleasurescape of Hamburg's East End, 1880s-1950s

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## Abstract

In the early twentieth century, St. Pauli was not the only place in Hamburg to go to have fun. In the city's East End, a wide range of pubs, clubs, and ballrooms turned working-class quarters into a vibrant pleasurescape. Based on historical-topographic and archival research, this paper explores eastern Hamburg's forgotten pleasurescape with the aim of drawing attention to pleasure culture as a social driving force and of redressing the balance in the city's one-sided history of pleasure culture. In the course of the study, the term "pleasurescape" is more clearly nuanced and geo-spatial historical mapping further explored as a tool for urban history.

## Keywords

entertainment, public pleasures, port city, East End, working class, pub culture, inland skippers, emigrants, civil associations

## Introduction

These days, heavy trucks rush down the street known as Veddeler Marktplatz in the east of Hamburg harbor. The street no longer resembles a marketplace. It is a highway interchange, dull, and deserted. Cheap warehouses, huge parking lots, and noisy factories dominate the area. It is one of the gateways to the container port of Hamburg, which stretches out further to the southeast of the city. Like every port, it is a center of industrial activity and a hub of high technology, but also a ghostly no man's land. For ordinary residents and passers-by, ports are distant, impassable, and dangerous. Yet, in these now hostile areas of East Hamburg harbor, people used to go dancing. From the late 1800s to the 1950s, Hamburg's "East End" was a vibrant working-class district and a bustling pleasurescape. Especially in the Veddel district, there were unique entertainment establishments and numerous busy pubs. The neighboring Rothenburgsort, Hammerbrook, and Billbrook quarters were densely populated areas with a lively cultural scene. Interspersed with grocery and bakery shops, restaurants, pubs, and dancehalls lined the main streets.

This paper seeks to unravel the history of Hamburg's forgotten pleasurescape in the east. It contributes to the fields of urban history, spatial history, and urban cultural studies by using geo-spatial historical mapping as an analytical tool and identifying pleasure culture as a significant force for social integration. The study follows a historical-topographic approach,

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taking a thematic map of entertainment places in Hamburg as a methodological departure point. Subsequently, deeper qualitative insight gleaned from records in the Hamburg State Archive, the Hamburg Architecture Archive, and private collections enable us to answer the following questions: (1) What did entertainment in Hamburg's East End look like and how did it relate to the port and its surrounding working-class areas? (2) Who was in charge of entertainment businesses in Hamburg's East and how did these stakeholders structure public space? (3) What entanglements with local, regional and international customers can we trace? (4) What does the pleasure-escape in Hamburg's East End tell us about the specialties of pleasure culture on the waterfront and in a port city? Lastly, this close look at Hamburg's East End reveals new perspectives on the history of Hamburg as a port city and on the societal importance of its popular culture. The legendary St. Pauli district was not the only place in Hamburg for going out and having fun. The port's driving forces lay in the East as well—in terms of industry as well as pleasure.

Throughout this article, urban public popular entertainment areas are seen as “pleasurescapes.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike the abundant literature on the port of Hamburg, research on pleasure culture in Hamburg is scarce.<sup>2</sup> Studies of Hamburg's pleasure culture *entangled* with the port<sup>3</sup> are even scarcer. Early studies were mostly about St. Pauli and of a teleological nature, reproducing and building on the disreputable image of the entertainment and red-light district around the Reeperbahn.<sup>4</sup> While more recent studies still focus on St. Pauli, they do reflect discursive dynamics substantially more critically.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of pleasure and entertainment in St. Pauli goes back to the district's role and heritage as a sailortown: “the place where the seafarer came on shore, where the maritime and urban worlds collided. It was shocking and thrilling, dangerous and liberating,”<sup>6</sup> as port historian Graeme J Milne puts it. “While sailortowns never spread over large areas, they became dense clusters of bars, brothels and boarding houses,”<sup>7</sup> and, in their international pattern and population, resembled each other around the globe. They reached a peak mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century due to the industrialization and initial globalization of maritime trade. According to Milne, “Hamburg's sailortown focused on St. Pauli, the built-up area just to the west of the old city walls, within easy reach of the Elbe waterfront and the growing network of docks. Key streets became famous internationally, such as the Reeperbahn and Grosse Freiheit.”<sup>8</sup> The most important research in this context is the work of Hamburg historian Lars Amenda, who has explored a number of St. Pauli's sailortown traits, such as migration and colonialism, but also pub culture and entertainment facilities.<sup>9</sup>

It was not only the ships that shaped Hamburg harbour. What made it so special was the people of varying origins. Already in the days of sail, a multitude of foreigners arrived in the port of Hamburg and the neighbourhood of St. Pauli. [ . . . ] St. Pauli seemed to be “the stamping ground of sailors from all over the world,” as one Hamburg guidebook put it in retrospect, and although this might be slightly exaggerated, it had its roots in the worldview of the German Empire. Given the possibilities offered by the entertainment district, the common prostitution and the abundance of bars and pubs, it is no surprise that St. Pauli was popular among sailors. The impact sailors had on this particular place was especially strong, since their ships were docked for several days at a time in those days [ . . . ].<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, sailortowns and pleasure culture are deeply entangled, and Hamburg's St. Pauli is a prime example of this. However, while St. Pauli is certainly key to any history of public pleasures in Hamburg, it was far from being the city's only entertainment district.

In order to escape the St. Pauli-centered narrative at the outset of the Pleasurescapes research project, it was necessary to start at ground level. To unveil the distribution and development of Hamburg's pleasurescapes over time and space more comprehensively, we carried out a historical geo-spatial mapping project based on statistical historical data.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, we fulfill the requirement that qualitative studies in urban culture should be more closely linked to quantitative research.<sup>12</sup> The mapping was performed by Laurenz Gottstein, who constructed three historical

maps for the years 1910,<sup>13</sup> 1925, and 1935. These suggested a new history of pleasure in Hamburg, and therefore served as material basis for the subsequent methodological decisions taken. According to Gottstein's maps, while St. Pauli has been a place of entertainment ever since that time, it was not always the only one. In addition, the areas of Neustadt, St. Georg, and finally the eastern neighborhoods also developed notable pleasuresapes, the last-named area, designated here as the East End, being the main focus of this article.

Named after the London working-class area, Hamburg's "East End" is a term invented for the purpose of this article. Despite striking similarities, it does not (yet) belong to the established vocabulary of Hamburg historians.<sup>14</sup> Cultural scientist Paul Newland remarks that London's East End has been "depicted as a *terra incognita*; as an ill-favoured, stigmatised social space; as the antithesis of order, civility and decorum—long associated with evil, darkness, the primitive and the uncivilised."<sup>15</sup> This was clearly not the case for the area that we have called Hamburg's East End; in fact a similar discourse related much more to the Gängeviertel,<sup>16</sup> which were mostly located in Neustadt. However, as in London, we observe an agglomeration of several smaller working-class neighborhoods to the East of Hamburg harbor on both banks of the River Elbe from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, whose inhabitants derived from port-related industries and successive waves of migration. Also as in London, this area "has never been clearly or adequately defined, delineated or drawn. It is not, and has never been, a village, town or borough."<sup>17</sup> Thus, seeing, as Newland does, the East End more "as a potent and enduring spatial idea,"<sup>18</sup> this article transfers the term to Hamburg. In the following, the neighborhoods of Rothenburgsort, Veddel, the South of Hammerbrook and those parts of today's Billwerder which made up the historic district of Billwärder Ausschlag until 1970, comprise Hamburg's East End. Its most thriving years, on which this paper focuses, spanned the 1880s to the 1950s, when industrialization and international maritime trade were at their peak but containerized global shipping had not yet arrived.

Hamburg's East End was a place of inland shipping, and as such attracted different types of workers, businesses and residents than the overseas port. Despite its being "only" an inland port, Veddel in the East End met all the criteria of a port city's waterfront zone, as identified by Paul van der Laar. There was "a mixture of facilities catering for a multitude of port-related economic, social and cultural functions," "cheap housing" and "specially designed quarters aimed to separate [. . .] transient migrants from the rest of the population,"<sup>19</sup> namely the Emigration Halls of the shipping entrepreneur Albert Ballin, where East European emigrants awaited their passage to the Americas. Still, Veddel was by no means a waterfront zone in the sense of being a notorious sailortown. It was not a "place of otherness," but of familiarity, not a place of ambiguity, but rather simplicity. Veddel was a small world of its own, which had its modest ways of living and also its modest but manifold ways of pleasure.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of pleasure culture in Hamburg's East, we drew on a range of qualitative sources, structured diachronically through the research questions. Written sources from the Hamburg State Archive and Hamburg Architecture Archive and photographic material served to construct major parts of the corpus. The private collection of and a research interview with Veddel expert Dieter Thal yielded important findings. Thal is a private archivist who collects historical photographs and written personal testimonies on Veddel's history and publishes on it. He grew up in the area himself and has since remained involved in local debates. As official archives rarely document personal stories or evidence of everyday culture and scholarly research has not yet turned to the cultural history of Hamburg's Eastern harbor areas, Thal's collection of local Veddel heritage is of special value. The interview with him served more as an information resource than a classic oral history source, as here we refer more to his expertise than his testimony. Later, evaluation by other sources proved the worth of his contributions. Michael Blümel is another elderly local, similarly passionate about the history of Veddel. His unpublished but diligently written memoirs afforded insight into everyday life in Hamburg's East End in the

mid-twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the hitherto uncharted legacy of the female balloon artist Elvira Wilson, courtesy of her grandson Joachim Wagner, also enhanced our research.

The article opens with a socio-spatial analysis of the East End, depicting its residents and infrastructural conditions. Subsequently, three main chapters discuss the East End pleasurescape within intrinsic diachronic categories, drawn inductively from the sources: pub culture, club life and weekend outings. Through in-depth qualitative analysis of written, oral and visual sources, we explore the variety of these practices, places and audiences. Lastly, a concluding chapter summarizes results and situates Hamburg's East End pleasurescape in relation to the port and the waterfront.

## Rise and Fall of a Working-Class Quarter

Hamburg's East End was home to dockers, factory workers and inland skippers.<sup>21</sup> The dockers and factory workers were permanent residents. According to a 1913 survey by a society of employers in the Hamburg port economy, 28% of workers polled lived in the areas comprising what we have called the East End.<sup>22</sup> Most of the dockers were casual laborers who commuted to the harbor every morning in hope of a new job for the day. They worked at the wharf or in the warehouses, they loaded and unloaded cargo, they cleaned decks and holds, they stowed coal, painted ships and repaired machines.<sup>23</sup> Not only the port itself, but also the industries located nearby were important employers in the East End. The copper manufacturer Norddeutsche Affinerie (Aurubis AG), pharmaceutical industries and a modern drinking water plant influenced the development of Rothenburgsort and Veddel from the early 1900s. The consumer cooperative Großeinkaufs-Gesellschaft Deutscher Consumvereine, based in Hamburg, built several large-scale food and chemistry plants on Peute Island in the mid-1920s. Rothenburgsort was also a hub for the distribution of goods by rail,<sup>24</sup> which generated further jobs.

Above all, inland skippers were a very important part of the East End's social structure. Even though they were not permanent residents, they did regularly spend several days in a row in Hamburg as part of their business trips up and down the river Elbe. Accordingly, local shop-owners adjusted their provisions to the special demands of this target group, and the skippers became entangled with community life in the quarter. They contributed immensely to the boom of Hamburg's port around 1900, as Hamburg was served by a rich hinterland of waterways.<sup>25</sup> The inland skippers made this hinterland profitable for trade. Their golden era spanned the late 1800s to the 1950s, when freedom of trade eased their business and industrial progress was improving the size, capacity, and engines of ships, while containerization and truck logistics had not yet taken over.<sup>26</sup> In Hamburg, the East End basins were where these skippers docked their boats.

Until the 1880s, Veddel and its neighboring island Peute were disconnected from the city center, apart from their waterway connections. The construction of the first road bridge for pedestrians and vehicles across the Northern Elbe River from 1884 to 1887 gave a significant boost to the area. A railway bridge had existed since 1872, but previously passengers and commuters had to take the ferry to cross the river. Now a road bridge opened up new forms of mobility in the East End. After 1888, the area grew once more, when 24,000 people, most of them dockers, were obliged to leave their homes in Wandrahminsel in the old town due to the construction of a new quarter of brick warehouses (known as Speicherstadt) and the free port.<sup>27</sup> Many of them moved to Hammerbrook, Hamm and Rothenburgsort, but also to Veddel, since the new road bridge allowed them to commute easily between the East End and the center, where the international harbor also lay. Around 1900, about 15,000 people from the East End crossed the bridge every day to reach their workplaces.<sup>28</sup> Thus, on the one hand the *construction* of the road bridge helped the East End to flourish and develop its vibrant working-class character, which included popular

entertainment culture, and it became an attractive residential area, central and accessible but with its own atmosphere of small-town familiarity. In contrast, as we shall see below, the bridge's further *extension* became one of the main reasons for the decline of the area and the eclipse of its pleasurescape.

The road bridge across the Elbe was first expanded in 1928, when a second crossing was built to double capacity for the growing number of vehicles. The following extension dates to the late 1930s, when the Nazi regime designed new motor highways. The government removed large parts of the Veddel residential quarter, and tenants in Tunnelstraße, Sieldeich and Veddeleer Brückenstraße were particularly seriously affected, as archived lists from 1938 document.<sup>29</sup> Not only do these lists tell a story of claims for reimbursement and repressed civil protest under the fascist regime,<sup>30</sup> but also of the dense retail structure in the neighborhood. For decades, a host of small businesses had shaped the lively quarter, in fact 7 pubs and 16 shops are listed in the documents certifying their demolition. The aerial bombardment of July 1943 also hit Hamburg's East End hard and contributed to its decline. The residential structure with its historic buildings was lost and replaced by large-scale industrial spaces with cheap tenements.<sup>31</sup> It was not, however, the bombings that ruined the traditional East End, but mainly post-war city and traffic planners who designed car-friendly, supposedly modern cityscapes.

The trend that had started in the late 1930s continued after the war. In order to keep the port of Hamburg growing, the city authorities reshaped it according to the changing infrastructural, logistic and economic environments. This meant more space on the waterfront for larger ships and new industries, and more space in the hinterland for transport connections via trains and trucks.<sup>32</sup> Containers appeared, easier to load onto rail cars and trucks. Also, with Germany now divided into two states, the banks of the River Elbe were in different countries on separate sides of the Iron Curtain, making the inland skippers' trade impossible. Despite the attempts of some Hamburg politicians and civil servants to build links with the GDR and Eastern Europe, the port of Hamburg suffered severely from the loss of its hinterland.<sup>33</sup> Inland shipping as serious economic factor disappeared.

For the increasing overseas traffic of the post war years, Veddel was a bottleneck, as it was the only central pathway to the southern hinterland.<sup>34</sup> To support business in the port and to make Hamburg more accessible by car, the city expanded the main road at Veddeleer Marktplatz and Norderelbbrücken between 1956 and 1960. Another road bridge was built and the historic city gate was demolished in favor of new more practical motorway gateways. In result, as of 1960, Veddel was bordered by a 43-meter-wide ten-lane highway complex,<sup>35</sup> which buried the historic residential quarter completely. The East End as a lively working-class area and as a pleasurescape fell into oblivion (Figures 1-4).

## Bars, Ballrooms, and Greenery

A brief quantitative frame may convey a more concrete picture of the now lost entertainment quarter. Depending on the focus and period, numbers for pubs and entertainment businesses in the East End were fluid but generally high. Gottstein's Pleasurescapes mapping identified 13 larger entertainment venues in the whole of the East End in the year 1910.<sup>36</sup> Chronicler Dieter Thal roughly lists sixty pubs for the 0.45 km<sup>2</sup> (0.17 mi<sup>2</sup>) Veddel district alone in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Historian Joachim Räth identifies 41 pubs in Veddel in 1928.<sup>38</sup> Chronicler Michael Blümel counts seven pubs specifically in the 1.5 km<sup>2</sup> (0.58 mi<sup>2</sup>) Peute Island in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the State Statistical Office counted thirty-six pubs in Veddel alone in the year 1925, and 277 for all the districts making up what we term the East End.<sup>40</sup> In comparison, in the same register St. Pauli counted 553 pubs, the working-class districts Barmbeck and Eimsbüttel hosted 294 and 272 respectively, and the upper-class neighborhood Harvestehude 37.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 1.** Veddeler Marktplatz, historic postcard, early 1900s, Hamburgisches Architekturarchiv.



**Figure 2.** Veddeler Brückenstraße, historic postcard, early 1900s, Hamburgisches Architekturarchiv.

### Pub Culture

Fulfilling multiple functions,<sup>42</sup> pubs were key to the East End's cultural scene and scattered all over the area: They were networking hubs, news agencies, political forums, suppliers of food, alcohol and other goods, and, finally, places of everyday leisure and escape. Research tells us that pubs serve processes of identity management, social orientation and stabilization among peers, while every action in the pub microcosm is strongly ritualized.<sup>43</sup> The unpublished memories of East End local Ernst Hartmann, who first came to the area as a young skipper in 1919 and stayed for good, exemplify this powerful pub atmosphere: "The pubs were usually small and packed on a Saturday. The air was filled with so much cigarette smoke it made your eyes water. Groups of friends and familiar faces sat down at tables. At the bar, people were standing so close that the barkeeper had trouble getting through. Through the buzz of voices and all kinds of different local dialects, you could hardly understand your own words."<sup>44</sup> Dockers and workers from the nearby



**Figure 3.** Highway through Veddel at the historic market place, 1960s, Hamburgisches Architekturarchiv HAA\_Bauten in Hamburg\_HF\_278.  
Source: Photo credits Günther Krüger.



**Figure 4.** Veddel from above, early 1960s, Hamburgisches Architekturarchiv HAA\_NeueHeimat\_FBA\_316.

factories and plants met at the bar after work for a beer or two. Since the workers lacked institutional space, local pubs soon turned into political meeting rooms. The German workers' movement and pub culture evolved as two sides of the same coin.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, pubs in Hamburg's East End and elsewhere were places of personal leisure, socializing and an escape from cramped homes with no space for privacy or independent recreation. Although working-class women were

likely to experience pressure at home as well, especially since most of them contributed to the household's income with waged work *on top of* housework and childcare,<sup>46</sup> leisure at the pub after the working day remained a privilege that men in German cities claimed for themselves.<sup>47</sup> This may well have differed internationally,<sup>48</sup> and a close empirical look at Hamburg's East End allows further nuancing, as women were indeed welcome at pubs for special occasions. However, regular after-work pub leisure in the East End was a male preserve.

*Familiar clientele.* What made pubs in the East End special in contrast to pubs in other working-class milieus was their local clientele of inland skippers.<sup>49</sup> The skippers anchored in Hamburg's East End at Spreehafen, Saalehafen or Moldauhafen at piers named Berliner Ufer, Hallesches Ufer and Dresdner Ufer, as well as on the left bank along Peute Island. After unloading their cargo, it usually took them a few days to gather together the new goods they needed to ship back upstream, which meant that they stayed temporarily in the area. Luckily, when the skippers came ashore they found themselves in an extremely convenient environment. The East End had all the amenities they needed for rest, refreshment, recreation and socializing, making it easy for them to get accustomed to the area and make themselves familiar.

All over the East End there was an abundance of shops, bakeries, cafés and pubs; it was a busy, lively and densely-populated workers' area. The most common pubs and ballrooms in Veddel were Ohlmeier's, Rabe's and Hinrichsen's, all located in Sieldeich; Wöhling's, Boll's and Ulrich's in Tunnelstraße; and Albers' at Veddeleer Marktplatz.<sup>50</sup> On Peute Island, there was Peuteschiff and Peuter Fahrhäus.<sup>51</sup> In Rothenburgsort and Billwärder Ausschlag, the Entenwerder pier and the main road along Billhorner Röhrendamm, Vierländer Straße and Ausschläger Elbdeich were full of places to go.<sup>52</sup> Depending on the period, the places and their owners varied, as we are looking at a span of roughly fifty years. Nevertheless, in general the busiest hubs in the East End centered around Veddeleer Marktplatz, on the left bank along Peute Island, on Entenwerder embankment and along Rothenburgort's Billhorner Röhrendamm toward Billwärder.

East End innkeepers specialized in catering for the skippers who were their major regular customers.<sup>53</sup> They provided all the particular goods and amenities they required, be it tools or technical equipment, food supplies, fresh water, favorite dishes, personal mail or a public telephone to make important calls.<sup>54</sup> Innkeepers served particular East German dishes or offered special baked goods like Bittkauer Brot or Oberländer Brot,<sup>55</sup> thereby providing for skippers coming from East German states and (after 1918) Czechoslovakia, further up the rivers Elbe, Saale, Spree, and Moldova. This entanglement was sustained over time. Although the skippers were generally mobile, they became semi-resident in Hamburg's East End, and on retirement many even settled there permanently. The former skipper Ernst Hartmann confirms: "Veddel has long since become a second home for many Elbe skippers. That's where they felt comfortable and at home, that's where they went shopping, and that's where many had their favourite pub, where their mail was sent to and whose keeper had turned into a good friend. Almost all the innkeepers were former skippers themselves. They originated from various central Elbe towns and had many regular customers from their home towns."<sup>56</sup>

It seems that it was precisely this familiarity of the East End that was its key distinguishing feature. Compared with large overseas cargo ships, inland boats were small. Consequently, inland skippers were very often independent entrepreneurs, running a family business and only hiring a small crew.<sup>57</sup> Inland routes were short, frequent, and predictable, which led to regular and stable contacts in ports. Finally, yet importantly, the geographical scale was narrow. The community of inland skippers was interregional rather than international. The rivers Saale, Spree and Oder (the latter until 1945) all ran through German territory. And while it was true that the Elbe crossed the border with Czechoslovakia, parts of the East End basins even belonged to Czechoslovakia as a consequence of the Treaty of Versailles,<sup>58</sup> and the Moldova was wholly in Czechoslovakian





**Figure 5.** Identity-building for skippers with maritime imagery at Krämer's pub, Tunnelstrasse 34. Around 1932, Veddel-Archive, D. Thal.

territory, the skippers still remained in German-speaking areas due to their German-Czech heritage.

Hence, inland shipping in Hamburg's East End was a small and therefore familiar, self-affirming and socially engaging microcosm of its own. As Ernst Hartmann explains, "As a skipper, you'd always meet someone familiar in Veddel, very often from the same origin";<sup>59</sup> and he goes on: "We young skippers, 17 years of age and already grown-up men, worked very hard for little money. [. . .] We couldn't afford great expense and couldn't explore the grandeur of the metropolis of Hamburg. Anyway, most of the time, we didn't even want that. Besides a few special trips, we young skippers stayed in the workers' neighbourhoods of Veddel and Rothenburgsort. We liked it there; we found companionship there, which had quite an effect on our general state of mind and way of living"<sup>60</sup> (Figures 5 and 6).

*Segregation of foreigners.* Strikingly, the only real international client group in East End was segregated: the emigrants at Auswandererhallen. Between 1906 and 1914 more than one million people emigrated to the United States via Hamburg harbor.<sup>61</sup> To take advantage of this trade, the director of HAPAG shipping company, Albert Ballin, had special halls built in the south of Veddel. The designated complex had enough space and all the necessary facilities to accommodate the migrants in a healthy, civilized and organized manner until they embarked on their overseas passage. These "Emigration Halls" opened in 1901, and already in 1902 57,892 passengers were accommodated there; four years later the number had almost doubled and they remained at the same level until 1913.<sup>62</sup> The effect on the local environment was low, however. Until 1909, Russian emigrants, who represented a majority of camp inhabitants at the time,<sup>63</sup> were strictly separated. The city authorities were worried about cholera infection, since an epidemic of the disease was raging across large parts of Russia in the early 1900s. Consequently, administrators and doctors at Ballin's Emigration Halls isolated Russians within the camp and forbade them access to the city in order to prevent outbreaks in Hamburg. Emigrants of other nationalities were allowed to leave the camp, but only under harsh restrictions and for special reasons.<sup>64</sup>

Veddel shop and pub owners, who had great hopes of the emigrants as potential customers, complained about the detention and suspected HAPAG of pursuing its own economic interests, since the Emigration Halls had shops of their own inside the camps. The Veddel Citizens' Association organized a petition to allow emigrants access to the city, but the Hamburg Senate turned it down twice for sanitary reasons. In return, local street merchants gathered in front of the



**Figure 6.** Coal dealer Joachim Frank (left) and skipper Franz Kuleszka (right) smiling cheerfully in front of Rabe's pub, Siedeich 39, Veddel, 1938, Veddel-Archive, D. Thal.

camp, trying to get through with their goods, which only resulted in further fencing and increased the camp's inaccessibility.<sup>65</sup> It was not until 1909 that the Hamburg State Office for Emigration suspended these decrees and granted all emigrants at Ballin's halls access to the city.<sup>66</sup>

While local businesspeople applauded the opening, other residents were less happy. In her historical study of Ballin's Emigration Halls, Styliani Tsaniou cites statements from contemporary newspaper articles and internal correspondence with the State Office for Emigration that show severely xenophobic and racist attitudes in the neighborhood: residents complained about the supposedly disturbing "Asian" behavior of the emigrants and called for "Veddel for the Veddelers."<sup>67</sup> While some members of the Veddel Citizens' Association were annoyed about emigrants littering and roaming public squares, others reminded them of the economic advantages.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, in a contemporary reportage, journalist Balder Olden notes: "[. . .] along the road towards Hamburg, small shops have opened that almost entirely rely on business with the passengers at the Emigration Halls. Since about 100,000 people travel through there every year, the emigrants have as much spending power as a small town."<sup>69</sup> However, apart from this commerce, no notable exchange between locals and emigrants took place. While it certainly should be borne in mind that the emigrants only stayed in the neighborhood for one or two weeks before boarding ship, it is nonetheless striking how little entanglement is traceable and how insignificant their impact on the local environment was, apart from some fast moneymaking from their passage.

Therefore, returning to the question of familiarity versus internationality in Hamburg's East End, we can affirm that even though international migration took place, particularly between 1901 and 1914, it was controlled and exploited by the HAPAG. Migrants were strictly segregated and stigmatized; they did not have any independent agency in the quarter. On the one hand HAPAG provided an "all-inclusive service" that eased the emigrants' passage; on the other the company's detention and regulation system prevented encounter and inclusion.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the East End remained a German-dominated, localized microcosm, looking inwards for self-confirmation and turning its back on foreigners.

### Local Club Life

Another typical working-class structure with major impact on local leisure culture developed in Hamburg's East End in the first half of the twentieth century: clubs and civil associations. In the late 1800s, an increasing number of people in Germany joined local clubs and societies, particularly in the field of leisure activities. Sports and gardening clubs, theater societies and choirs became popular ways of spending spare time: they promised diversion, entertainment and new social contacts. In times of accelerated mobilization and escape from traditional domestic settings, these bodies were key to the emancipation processes of the lower and middle classes. Political civil associations became important social forces.<sup>71</sup> During the boom years of German club life in the late 1800s, a strong local commitment was characteristic for most associations. Unlike their bourgeois predecessors, which limited membership to the higher classes, the new clubs were accessible across social boundaries. Their focus was residential in a more space- than class-related way; they developed from local neighborhood needs and subsequently contributed to shaping them.<sup>72</sup>

Prominent public performances were typical for the "schichtenübergreifende Lokalvereine,"<sup>73</sup> the "class-comprehensive local clubs," as historian Klaus Nathaus has called this modern type of voluntary organization.<sup>74</sup> Already by 1990 Lisa Kosok was drawing attention to the importance of civil associations in public entertainment provision. Associations arranged regular festivities and processions that not only included their members but also whole neighborhoods. Local clubs hosted large-scale dances, fancy-dress parties and folk festivals. They hired brass bands, organized food trucks and rented out large pubs. They were key agents in local entertainment culture.<sup>75</sup> Kosok has shown that in the Ruhr area, hall-like multipurpose pubs became the main facility for workers' leisure activity and generally represented the most common establishment, since strict Prussian licensing practices prevented the spread of smaller pubs.<sup>76</sup> While the Hamburg Office for Liquor Licenses dealt with the issue more liberally<sup>77</sup> and allowed a wider variety of pubs to open, the multipurpose pub and ballroom was indeed key.

Three of the most important multipurpose locations in the East End were Hinrichsen's ballroom at Sieldeich 2 (a venue whose vestiges remained until lately, only being demolished in 2009), Rabe's at Sieldeich 39, formerly known as Hiep's, and Veddeler Hof at Sieldeich 17. In the 1890s and early 1900s, a widow named Catharina Westphal owned and ran the latter,<sup>78</sup> before Heinrich Ohlmeier took over. Veddeler Hof was spacious enough to host large dances for up to 1,400 people,<sup>79</sup> meetings and community events, and thus became the typical location for civil associations to rent out. For example, the influential Bürger-Verein für die Veddel und Umgegend von 1888, the Veddel Citizens' Association, held its meetings at Veddeler Hof in its early years until 1891, before moving on to Rabe's.<sup>80</sup> Ohlmeier's establishment, however, was still an attractive venue for local clubs, for instance the Grundeigentümer-Verein Eiche der Colonie.<sup>81</sup> After Heinrich Ohlmeier died in 1937,<sup>82</sup> his son Carl inherited the business. The transition was troublesome, however: In 1938, the Ohlmeier family had to sell its premises at Sieldeich / Tunnelstraße to the city due to the planned construction of the new motorway.<sup>83</sup> Carl ran a pub in Hamburg-Mundsburg temporarily,<sup>84</sup> but after the war reopened the big ballroom in Veddel at Immanuelplatz 8.<sup>85</sup> Since all the former larger establishments had been demolished by the city or destroyed in the war, this was now the only venue with a large dancehall, which secured Ohlmeier's success.<sup>86</sup> The Turn- und Sportverein Veddel met at Ohlmeier's ballroom regularly in the early 1950s.<sup>87</sup>

In the time of the Veddeler Hof at Sieldeich, entrance was usually free and drinks were affordable; to dance one only needed a special ribbon costing 50 Pfennig.<sup>88</sup> Dancing was extremely popular in the area, or, as chronicler Thal puts it: "The great pleasure of the lower classes and the workers was dancing."<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Kosok has shown that many associations in the Ruhr area were founded solely for this purpose: to host parties and ball nights.<sup>90</sup> As the Prussian police

vigorously suppressed public dances, people founded clubs to organize their pleasures, since non-profit clubs with fixed membership enjoyed more freedom in this regard.<sup>91</sup> Available sources are not detailed enough to confirm the same phenomenon in Hamburg; nevertheless, it does become clear that clubs and societies were remarkably active in East End entertainment.

For instance, in January 1913 the Veddel Citizens' Association celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Ohlmeier's Veddeler Hof.<sup>92</sup> The occasion brought together important East End stakeholders, including not only members of the Citizens' Association itself, but also those of several other local societies, such as Veddeler Sangesbund, Männer-Gesangverein Hamburg-Veddel von 1878, Grundeigentümergeverein "Eiche der Colonie," Veddeler Turnverein von 1888, Sportklub Hermannia and Bürgerverein von Billwärder Ausschlag. It was a magnificent event, whose program included a feast, a concert, a play, numerous speeches and dancing as the final highlight, all dedicated to the Veddel Citizens' Association. The evening was a highly prominent social event with important representative functions—which is why women were invited and actively contributed to the program, although actual club life at the pub was usually reserved for men. One of the speakers "joked": "Our wives probably suffer a bit from all the meetings of us men, but, fortunately, the German woman is not yet a suffragette, and respects man's efforts for public welfare."<sup>93</sup> Despite the rise of the women's movement at the time, particularly in Hamburg, where many associations were founded solely for and by women,<sup>94</sup> every day politics in the East End before World War I was still clearly dominated by men, who severely curtailed women's rights. Ever more important, in terms of social integration, were special occasions such as anniversaries, when the life of both clubs and pubs was open to women and the general public.

Annual ball nights remained a classic activity of the local clubs in Hamburg's East End, only varying in their style. In the early 1950s, costume balls became particularly popular for these occasions. The Veddel sports club hosted such fancy-dress balls at Ohlmeier's every winter.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the local societies ran brass bands and organized processions. These took place during the day and traced a circuitous route through the whole neighborhood, as they were not only aimed at adults but also the under-aged and elderly people, thus increasing the overall social impact of the local clubs. As historian Nathaus puts it: "With public performances the associations positioned themselves in the centre of the urban community, making constant references to their hometown."<sup>96</sup> These representative functions, in fact, often even *exceeded* the original purposes of the club.<sup>97</sup> (Figures 7 and 8).

In addition to the organized ball nights, there were two pubs in the East End where people could go dancing: Boll's and Wöhling's, both in Tunnelstraße. These pubs also offered regular vaudeville shows. Boll's and Wöhling's were probably closer to the infamous "Animierkneipen" (hostess bars) of the time, since there were indeed girls working there to attract male customers, albeit relatively discreetly. These venues were mainly for young single men to go dancing,<sup>98</sup> which is why they also attracted visitors from other Hamburg neighborhoods. Most locals, however, especially married ones, did not frequent them, in order not to provoke gossip.<sup>99</sup> Boll's and Wöhling's were probably the "edgiest" locales to be found in the East End, while the main entertainment facilities remained regulated within the framework of local club life (Figures 9 and 10).

### Outdoor Pleasures

The most common and popular outdoor pleasure ground in the East End was Peute Island, since 1894 officially a part of Veddel. In this pre-industrial period, the island was a popular summer destination for day-trippers from all over Hamburg.<sup>100</sup> The area was easy to reach by boat shuttle from Rothenburgsort, and with its rural charm and abundance of greenery on the bank of the Elbe, it promised inexpensive natural recreation. At that time Schramm's Inn was the main leisure amenity in Peute, offering fresh drinks and rich food as well as dancing and relaxation with beautiful views of the river.



**Figure 7.** Costume ball at a Veddel pub around 1956, private photo, Veddel-Archive, D. Thal.



**Figure 8.** Brass band procession through Veddel, organized by the local sports club Turn- und Sportverein Veddel e.V., 1950s, Veddel-Archive, D. Thal.

The Peute garden inn was later taken over by August Schwaff, a bustling entrepreneur who ran various ventures, including the Rotenburg restaurant at the 16th Bundesschießen<sup>101</sup> (a major two-week public event on Hamburg's ramparts in 1909, staged by the German Federal Shooting Association) and a large ballroom in Neustädter Straße, Hamburg-Neustadt.<sup>102</sup> Today, Schwaff's Neustadt ballroom is famous for having hosted the founding meeting of the Hamburg consumers' cooperative Produktion on 24 January 1899.<sup>103</sup> In 1904, however, for unknown reasons Schwaff moved to the East End and opened an establishment known as Elbinsel Peute.<sup>104</sup> Historic



**Figure 9.** Invitation advert for a skippers' festivity at Heinrich Ohlmeier's Veddeler Hof, Sieldeich, Veddel, 1934, Veddel-Archive, D. Thal.



**Figure 10.** Boll's cabaret at Tunnelstraße 16, Veddel, Veddel-Archive, D. Thal.

postcards give an impression of the place's rustic hospitality. Typically, it was a destination for summer outings with the family. Additionally, Schwaff hosted parties for local sports clubs or organized grand dances, which were always major neighborhood events.<sup>105</sup> Public dances at garden restaurants, usually on Sunday afternoons, were very typical and extremely popular at the time, especially for young unmarried adults seeking a partner (Figures 11 and 12).

What made Peute Island even more appealing to a citywide clientele were the special shows of Elvira Wilson, a female balloon acrobat, who became very popular in the early 1900s.<sup>106</sup> Born Elvira Eberling in Altona in 1889, she grew up in Rothenburgsort in Hamburg's East End, where she trained regularly at a local gymnastics club. At the age of 17, Elvira married the entertainment entrepreneur Paul Unglaube. Paul was in the balloon business, and had managed the artistic shows of his first wife (coincidentally named Elvira as well), who had died in a balloon accident. Luckily, he then met Elvira Eberling from Rothenburgsort. The young gymnast became the new Mrs. Wilson, not merely at Paul's side, but also with the balloon.



**Figure 11.** Schramm's garden inn on Peute Island. Historic postcard, 1890s, Veddell-Archive, D. Thal.



**Figure 12.** Schramm's successor: August Schwaff's Elbinsel Peute restaurant. Historic postcard, after 1904, Veddell-Archive, D. Thal.

Dressed as a sailor, Elvira climbed a rope ladder beneath her balloon and accomplished exceptional feats of acrobatics in mid-air (Figures 13 and 14)). Hundreds of admirers came to see her and soon she was touring throughout Germany. In total, she made over 600 performances.<sup>107</sup> Hamburg's East End was where her career got under way. She gave frequent shows at Schwaff's Elbinsel Peute, later also performing at the Groß-Jüthorn amusement park in the Wandsbek woods and at the Victoria Gardens in Barmbeck.<sup>108</sup> Elvira was a sensation for all ages and classes; poorer families were also able to watch her, as they were allowed to order only hot water and bring their own coffee powder and sandwiches.<sup>109</sup>



**Figure 13.** Postcard of Elvira Wilson (right) with her husband Paul and sister Irma, Groß-Jüthorn, Wandsbek, May 1914. J. Wagner.



**Figure 14.** Elvira Wilson beneath her balloon. J. Wagner.

Meanwhile, the city of Hamburg was planning to expand its port and, in 1908, the copper manufacturer Norddeutsche Affinerie began production at Peute. The factory brought even more people to the area, since many found work there and settled nearby. Industrialization in general was a growth factor for entertainment culture; yet with the building of a new port basin at Peute, the island's days as a green pleasure ground were numbered.



The Veddel Citizens' Association fought for the preservation of the garden inn. They organized "a petition to preserve for as long as possible this restaurant with its spacious garden and green meadows, which offers recreation on Sundays for thousands of less-well-off people from Rothenburgsort or Hammerbrook, but which must give way to construction works sooner or later."<sup>110</sup> The Citizens' Association passionately advocated the inclusive and salutary functions of Schwaff's garden inn; it was affordable for all classes and therefore necessary as a public space for socializing and recreation. But Elbinsel Peute's leisure culture was doomed, and in 1910 August Schwaff was forced to close the restaurant.<sup>111</sup>

Later, however, from the 1930s to the 1960s several other smaller inns flourished nearby on both sides of the Elbe, among them Peuter Fährhaus, Peuteschiff and Entenwerder Fährhaus,<sup>112</sup> thus illustrating both the social need for outdoor pleasure venues in the East End and the ideal layout of the area for that purpose. In the first half of the twentieth century in Hamburg's East End, the combination of a dense local working-class population and a highly fragmented built environment led to the social need for entertainment and recreation places, while at the same time leaving building space for a rich pleasurescape to develop.

### Small-Town Pleasures in a Big Port City

Hamburg's historic East End was a genuine pleasurescape by the waterfront, and highly representative of Hamburg's development into a modern city. Located on the banks of the river and populated by a thriving working class, the area was certainly "on the edge" both topographically and socially. "Edgy" cultural practices, however, did not dominate the quarter, although it was home to a number of remarkable multi-functional entertainment establishments, two cabarets and numerous busy pubs.

The case of Hamburg's East End exemplifies how a port city could have a number of different pleasuresapes but only one sailortown, as the term *pleasurescape* defines urban landscapes of pleasure in a wider sense, while a sailortown is, of course, specifically focused on sailors. Port city pleasuresapes in other areas could make allusion to the sailortown without resembling it, and in fact might even affirm their own identity by stressing their differences from it. Such was the shape of the pleasurescape in Hamburg's East End.

East End entertainment was strongly localized. There were no international performances, no officially declared or institutionalized brothels, no curiosity shops or exotic shows, as we know from the sailortown at St. Pauli for instance, which—at least on its main streets<sup>113</sup>—combined classic sailortown traits with the grandeur of metropolitan entertainment in unique ways.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, the East End was regional and familiar, self-affirming and traditional. It was rich and dense, if we count the sheer number of locations of and occasions for entertainment, but not in terms of customers or practices. In the first half of the twentieth century, East Enders were a single large working-class peer group who mostly kept to themselves. They had a strong space- and class-related group identity, which bound their cultural habits and practices to the locality. Further, even though infrastructural progress enabled people to get around easily within the immediate environment, Hamburg city center was still relatively distant, too time-consuming to travel to for most people just for fun after a long workday.

For relaxation and entertainment after work, people in the East End went to their local pubs. Even though most women in the quarter had waged work, too, they were habitually marginalized there. Although widows, wives and daughters might *run* a pub, it would be mainly populated by men. Generally, pub life does not only refer here to drinking alcohol after working hours, but also to social life in a broader sense. Veddel pub owners catered for the inland skippers by serving their favorite regional dishes, organizing their mail and supplying the various goods and contacts they needed to conduct their shipping business. The inland skippers were a highly influential group in Hamburg's East End. They were mobile when working, but otherwise chose the East

End as their home base, forging social relationships and often settling there. Emigrants at Albert Ballin's Emigration Halls add a further nuance to the picture of social life in the East End. The foreigners meant profitable business, but xenophobia prevailed. Sources tell of repeated tensions and quarrels between emigrants and residents. Apart from this, and above all, the local clubs were central actors in East End entertainment. Ball nights hosted by sports clubs or civil associations at well-known local pubs were prominent social events for both genders, the highlights of the cultural calendar. Highly visible processions of marching bands catered for children, women and elderly people, as they took place during the day and wandered through the whole neighborhood. Another typical form of pleasure for all ages and genders took place outside, at spacious garden inns. The most common area was Peute Island and specifically August Schwaff's establishment there, attracting visitors from all over Hamburg. Schwaff offered special attractions at his venue, such as Sunday afternoon dances and shows by the balloon artist Elvira Wilson.

It was city infrastructure planning that brought an end to the pleasurescape in Hamburg's East End. After 1960 the area changed completely; the traditional small-scale working-class neighborhood with its variety of shops, pubs and ballrooms was buried under the new motorways. The city's construction plans followed fundamental changes in the globalized port industry: the shipping of commodities in small-scale casks, sacks, crates, etc. made way for containers, which drastically decreased docker numbers. The inland boat trade disappeared almost entirely, not least because of the post-war division of Germany. Eventually, along with shipping processes in the mid-twentieth century, urban entertainment structures were either merged and concentrated in specific areas, or, as in the case of Hamburg's East End, wholly eclipsed.

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### Notes

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