

Tobacco, smoking, spaces in early modern Hamburg

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Tobacco first reached Europe towards the end of the sixteenth century, in relatively modest and irregular quantities, however, it very quickly gained currency in everyday life. During the second half of the seventeenth century, tobacco was used medicinally, nutritionally and recreationally across the social spectrum. Smoking – largely of pipes but also of cigars – was a mode of tobacco consumption that very early on provoked contestations over public space. These contestations revolved on the one hand around concepts of moderation and ‘appropriate’ forms and levels of tobacco consumption. The motif of ‘drinking tobacco’ associated the practice with drunkenness and critiques of tobacco – in particular the practice of smoking – focused upon how immoderate tobacco consumption could wreak havoc with social order (gender relations, social status, economic propriety, rituals, etc.).

During the eighteenth century, however, smoking in the urban space became increasingly subject to legislation that focused upon public safety and fire hazards. (In fact this is the main reason the Hamburg authorities regulate tobacco consumption at all.) Certain spaces in the city – the building yard, dry docks – became spaces in which tobacco consumption was restricted, and these spaces demanded modification of behavior of the city’s inhabitants by inculcating practices considered ‘safe’, for example pipes with lids or chew-tobacco and snuff, and restricting or banning ‘dangerous’ practices. This spatial demarcation was linked to the social, in that these spaces were typically inhabited by labourers and craftsmen, also sailors. Thus the production of ‘dangerous’ spaces associated with ‘dangerous’ and ‘safe’ practices of tobacco consumption could generate enduring social distinctions between social and occupational groups within the city.

Moral journalistic discourses suggest that public smoking (e.g. on the street, in the theatre) was considered unseemly until the late eighteenth century, but became more commonplace thereafter. Critiques of public smoking in these media centred largely around ideas of civility and morality, rather than physical dangers. There is possibly some correlation with the way that the city was now being used for leisure (promenading, walking, viewing). Not until the early nineteenth century is smoking regulated as a nuisance (rather than simply a fire hazard): in 1821 smoking upon

leaving the theatres was banned, partly as a fire hazard but also because it was considered unpleasant for the audience and a hinderance to people leaving the theatre.

Considering tobacco consumption from the perspective of regulation and its relationship to (public space) means that we are only getting one 'side' of the story – transgression, although ever-present (potentially as the reason for legislation) needs to be gauged from other sources (e.g., court records, or even ego documents such as diaries). But legislation can reveal overarching trends – here, for example, to a type of regulation concerned increasingly with etiquette and civility in the public space – and public modes of behaviour. In Hamburg only smoking (not coffee, tea, chocolate or sugar) provoked this kind of legislative response from the urban authorities, but the motivations behind this response changed over time, hand-in-hand with the demands of inhabitants on the public spaces of the city. The historical perspective is particularly useful for understanding these kind of *longue durée* developments and understanding how certain constellations between public space, intoxicants, social practices and policy/politics emerge, change over time, wax and wane. Historicising intoxicant use and space reveals how differently past societies dealt with intoxicant use, its sociabilities and the spaces in which these took place, and how subject to change these constellations were – providing us perhaps with a more open (and hopefully more inclusive) and nuanced perspective on intoxicants, their place in our history, our present and our future.