

Nazi Visions of Mass Tourism

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Within the ideology of the Nazi movement there were two central issues. The first was racism with the murderous consequences of the Holocaust. The second was to conquer territories in Eastern Europe (*Lebensraum*) for the settlement of the German people. In order to prepare the German nation for war, from the beginning the Nazis concentrated their economic resources on armament and autarchy.

As a consequence, consumption suffered from those priorities. For instance, tourism in foreign countries was restricted because of the lack of currency. At the same time, the Nazis regarded consumption as a legitimate goal which should be supported by the state and the party. Hitler considered the striving for welfare and comfort as a biological urge of human beings. The best life would be appropriate for what was postulated to be the most valuable race. The leaders of the Nazi Party were aware that consumption was a means to win the support and respect of the German people. Only a contented *‘Volk’* would be willing to perform the tasks, which the Nazis had in store for the Germans.

Obviously, there was a dilemma between the recognition of consumption and the limited resources. One strategy to escape this dilemma was the creation of ‘people’s products’,¹ like the *‘Volkswagen’*,² the *‘Volksempfänger’*,³ which was a radio receiver, the *‘Volkskühlschrank’*,⁴ a refrigerator, and others. The common technological idea behind these was to make consumer durables cheaper through extreme rationalization and mass production. Ultimately the concept failed because technological rationalization could not compensate the German population’s low spending power. However, it fulfilled propaganda purposes by demonstrating the Nazi leadership’s presumed care for their people and pointed towards a golden future of welfare.

One element of this particular Nazi strategy of consumption, not concerning products but services, was the leisure and tourist activities of the *‘Kraft durch Freude’* (KdF)-movement⁵ (literally: strength through joyfulness). The KdF was a department within the *‘Deutsche Arbeitsfront’* (DAF)⁶ (German Labour Front), which itself was a suborganization of the Nazi Party. The DAF under the leadership of Robert Ley (1890-1945)⁷ replaced the old socialist and liberal trade unions. Membership became obligatory for all workers and employees as well as for employers in trade and industry. In the end it organized about 14 million members which was around 75% of all employed. Their contributions made the DAF one of the richest Nazi organizations. Additionally, it profited by the 300 million marks assets of the old unions. According to the Nazi ideology, under the new regime there was no more a struggle of interests between capital and labour. Instead, employers and employed people would jointly fulfil their tasks within the *‘Volksgemeinschaft’*. In reality, it was the goal of Robert Ley’s DAF to win the German population for the Nazi movement. To this end, the DAF became involved in all aspects of a workers’ life, in his working conditions, wages, dwellings, and leisure activities. As a consequence, the DAF’s activities aimed toward a totalitarian welfare state of dependent people.

The KdF, which was founded in November 1933, extended the DAF activities to the time after work. Leisure and recreation were interpreted as work compensation. They should enable people to go back to work revived. And they should enable the Germans to perform the ‘great tasks’, which their leaders ordered them. The KdF’s services were open to the 14 million members and their families, altogether 40 to 50 million people. The KdF worked as a non-profit organization, the administration cost was met by the DAF. Because of its large clientele, the KdF had a strong position when negotiating with business partners. The result was that the KdF could offer its services at extraordinarily low prices which were not within reach of any competitor. The most important of the KdF-departments was the *‘Amt für Reisen, Wandern und Urlaub’*, that is the tourist department. This tourist department was the most significant in number of participants. It

contributed in about 80% to the KdF's turnover rate⁸. The KdF offered a broad range of tourist services like hiking tours, one or two day-excursions, holiday- and sea-travels. The short excursions ranked first with some million participants each year, altogether between 1934 and 1939 in about 30 millions⁹. The holiday-travels counted 6.3 million vacationists. On the short-time hikes and excursions the participants were accompanied by voluntary DAF-members. With the holiday-travels the KdF functioned like a travel agency, booking the trains and accommodations. At the holiday-sites the travellers were free to do as they pleased. There were common meetings but it was not obligatory to participate. Very often, the KdF celebrated the departures and the arrivals as public events with speeches and music. This contributed very much to the good image of the KdF-activities in the German population.

Most prominent were the sea-travels. Concerning the number of participants, however, they ranked far behind the other KdF-journeys. Since 1935 the annual passengers were about 130000, altogether 760000. The KdF boasted that this doubled the passenger numbers of the German private shipping companies¹⁰. The KdF's pride was two new-built ships in 1938 and 1939. The maximum number, the KdF-fleet consisted of was 11 ships¹¹.

The Nazi-ideology of the '*Volksgemeinschaft*' required a regional and social mixture of the travellers. They were to come from the various parts ('*Gaue*') and should represent the social structure of the '*Reich*'. However, sometimes, the politically desired meetings of the German 'tribes' ('*Stämme*') resulted in differences and quarrels. The KdF always proclaimed that the majority of the travellers consisted of workers¹². Even the poorest DAF-members would be able to join the KdF-travels. This was propaganda and completely false. The proportion of workers among the sea-travellers was 17%, among the land-travellers it was approximately 30%. This means that the majority among the KdF-travellers came from the middle classes and the workers were those with higher income.

With their middle-class clientele the KdF competed with the existing tourist business, in particular with the travel agencies. The KdF-business, however, surpassed the agencies' packaged tours by far. The agencies had to concentrate on voyages to foreign countries and on business-travellers. Tourism in Nazi Germany was organized in the '*Reichsausschuß für Fremdenverkehr*' which was controlled by Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda¹³. In particular, in 1936 the tourist business mobilized against the KdF, which was blamed for unfair competition. In a public speech Hermann Esser, an old member of the Nazi Party and President of the '*Reichsausschuß*' complained that people with a monthly income above 400 RM would partake in the KdF-travels¹⁴. The influential Nazi-leader threatened that they would get them out of the trains. In the following period this subject did not disappear from the journal '*Der Fremdenverkehr*'. Contributions came from the hotel association and the organization of the travel agencies whose leader Carl Degener made the most marked contributions. The tourism functionaries demanded that the KdF should provide income limits for its travellers¹⁵. The KdF refused this and conceded only that the travellers should sign a personal declaration that they were dependent on the KdF-travel-package and could not afford more expensive ones¹⁶. It was clear that this would not solve the tourist business' problems. However, it seems that the tourism officials resigned to the fact by recognizing that they could not prevail against the mighty DAF.

The KdF was successful with its middle-class tourism, however would not be satisfied with its social composition. This was not only in contradiction to the ideology of the '*Volksgemeinschaft*'. Furthermore, it was opposed to the goals to prepare the German population and particularly the workers for the political plans of National Socialism. Another problem was that KdF-tourism was not in accordance with the NS population policy. National Socialism propagated the 'full family', that was a couple with at least four children. Most of the KdF-tourists, however, were singles, couples came second, and families with children very rarely could afford a KdF-journey.

The KdF was aware of these problems¹⁷. To solve them meant to extend tourism and to make it cheaper. For Robert Ley's KdF the most promising measure was to enlarge its own tourist facilities. Regarding the KdF-publications, it is not easy to differentiate between exaggerated visions and realistic planning. The vision was that each DAF-member and his family could spend holidays,

lasting from one to two weeks, in a KdF-facility every second year¹⁸. Each member should partake in a sea-cruise one time in his life.¹⁹ This resulted in millions of tourists and 10000s of KdF-beds. Robert Ley and other DAF-officials proclaimed at various opportunities what the KdF intended to build up in the future. Notwithstanding, that the numbers indicated were propaganda and often contradictory, they give an impression of what the KdF-leaders thought to be necessary and desirable. For the building of 30 big sea-ships and 20 smaller ones for river-cruises, the KdF designated to erect its own shipyard in Stettin. It planned five huge seaside-resorts, each with up to 20000 beds. Additionally, four land-resorts with equal capacity should enlarge KdF's tourist empire. For working families with many children KdF started erecting holiday-villages with lodges for eight persons.

The best example for the KdF's visions and planning was the seaside-resort in Prora on the Rügen Island²⁰. The resort's building was announced by Robert Ley in 1935, who performed the cornerstone ceremony in 1936. At the beginning of the war in September 1939, when work was stopped, the skeleton of the guesthouses was finished. This meant that the resort-area was never opened but served during the war as provisional accommodation for bombed-out Hamburg residents. After the war, the finished buildings were used by the '*Nationale Volksarmee*' of the GDR. The structure is still at its place and can be inspected by visitors.

The Prora resort consisted of eight 6-floor guesthouses which were arranged on the seashore. Between them communal buildings for dining were to be located. Altogether, the resort extended over 4.5 km along the coast. Because of the great distances, the KdF planned its own narrow-gauge railway. The resort was considered to accommodate 20000 tourists and, additionally 2000 employed people with all the necessary infrastructure, including a school and a hospital. Most of the guests should arrive by a new-built railway in the resort's own station. To combine sea-cruises at the Baltic Sea with sojourns in Prora, the resort received a harbour. An underground garage held a bus station and parking places at the guests' disposal coming with their '*Volkswagen*'. All in all, Prora was planned as an extremely rationalized facility for a maximum of tourist throughput.

Not only for entertainment but also for political influence, Prora did provide a lot of installations. One of them was a central place to be used for meetings and music. Cinema, theatres, restaurants, and cafés offered a variety of further entertainment. Radio loudspeakers were to reach each area of the resort. Two big halls were for resting, two seawater-pools, 100 by 40 meters long, for swimming.

The guesthouses held 10000 2-bed-rooms of 12.5 square metres, each room possessed view to the sea. A couple of rooms was linked by doors, so that they were suited for families. The KdF planned a long season and therefore equipped the guestrooms with central heating, the rest-halls with radiators, and the pools with warm-water supply. Providing one-week holidays and depending on the length of the season, the resort's yearly capacity was half a million tourists or more. The price of the journey was not clear. KdF-officials spoke of 20 marks and less for one week and per person, including the travel by train²¹. Considering the average family income of 160 marks, this would have been an attractive offer which also working class families could have afforded.

So much about KdF's tourist planning. It is doubtful whether the DAF was able to finance these and other plans. For instance, also the financing of the DAF's Volkswagen-works and the subsidies for the produced cars were not guaranteed before the outbreak of the war²². Because of the priorities for rearmament, Robert Ley's DAF was not in the position to dispose of the necessary resources for its ship- and resort-building program. Also Prora suffered from the shortage of capital, labour, and materials. Progress was slow and only was maintained with the help of Italian workers. In 1938 and 1939, KdF had to cancel a considerable number of travels because the railways could not provide the required capacity²³.

Beyond the question of infrastructure, it became clear that KdF-tourism could only reach the German population's majority with prices not cost-covering. The DAF would have been obliged to subsidize most of the holiday-travels. The same problem arose with other 'people's products' planned by the DAF. Also the '*Volkswagen*', the '*Volkskühlschrank*' (a refrigerator) and the '*Führerwohnungen*' (dwellings for large families) designed under Adolf Hitler's personal

tutelage,²⁴ could not reach the masses without DAF-subsidies. In the end, the German national economy would have been compelled to finance the benefits of the Nazi-organization. In any case, the economy was not in the position to do this, while at the same time preparing for war. During the war, Nazi-leaders hoped to realize their plans after the victory by exploiting the conquered lands. Indeed, Nazi politics destroyed the most important basis of tourist development, namely peace and freedom.

To summarise this article: As an element of a particular Nazi consumer society, the ‘*Kraft durch Freude*’-organization initiated its own tourism program. It is not possible to give figures for KdF’s share of German tourism²⁵. What can be said is, that KdF-travels remained a minority of all holiday-travels but surpassed the agencies’ packaged tours by far. KdF succeeded in extending tourism within the middle-classes, but in contradiction to propaganda and ideology, it did not reach the workers’ families. To compensate this, DAF and KdF planned to build gigantic holiday resorts of a new type. Whereas the official Nazi tourist-organization proclaimed that tourism was not intended to become an industry,²⁶ the built and planned KdF-resorts were representations of rationalized mass tourism which have no parallel in history until today.

¹ The author of this article is carrying out a research project on consumption in Nazi Germany which, in particular, describes people’s products’ of the Nazi-period, as representing the Nazi visions of consumption.

² Hans MOMMSEN and Manfred GRIEGER, *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf, 1996.

³ Ansgar DILLER, „Der Volksempfänger. Propaganda- und Wirtschaftsfaktor“ in *Mitteilungen des Studienkreises für Rundfunk und Geschichte* 9, 1983, pp. 140-57.

⁴ Ullrich HELLMANN, *Künstliche Kälte. Die Geschichte der Kühlung im Haushalt* (Werkbund-Archiv 21), Gießen, 1990, pp. 109-17.

⁵ Historiography of the KdF-movement suffers from the fact that the central organization’s records are lost. This is why it has to rely mostly on printed matter. This article summarizes the broad secondary literature and adds two aspects: It places Nazi tourism in the context of the regime’s consumption policy. And it gives an outline of the conflict between the KdF and the traditional tourist business by examining the journal “*Der Fremdenverkehr*”. The most important literature is: Wolfhard BUCHHOLZ, *Die Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft „Kraft durch Freude“. Freizeitgestaltung und Arbeiterschaft im Dritten Reich*. Diss. München, 1976; Hasso SPODE, „*Der deutsche Arbeiter reist*“: *Massentourismus im Dritten Reich*, in Gerhard HUCK (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit. Untersuchungen zum Wandel der Alltagskultur in Deutschland*, Wuppertal, 1982, pp. 281-306; Hasso SPODE, *Arbeiterurlaub im Dritten Reich*, in Carola SACHSE, Tilla SIEGEL, Hasso SPODE and Wolfgang SPOHN, *Herrschaftsmechanismen im Nationalsozialismus* (Schriften des Zentralinstituts für sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung der Freien Universität Berlin 41), Opladen, 1982, pp. 275-328; Laurence VAN ZANDT MOYER, *The Kraft Durch Freude Movement in Nazi Germany: 1933-1939*, Diss. Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., 1967; Michael A. MERRITT „Strenght Through Joy: Regimented Leisure in Nazi Germany,“ in Otis C. MITCHELL (ed.), *Nazism and the Common Man: Essays in German History (1929-1939)*, Washington, D.C. 1981, pp. 67-90; Bruno FROMMANN, *Reisen im Dienste politischer Zielsetzungen. Arbeiter-Reisen und „Kraft-durch-Freude“-Fahrten*, Diss. Stuttgart, 1993; Hermann WEISS, „Ideologie der Freizeit im Dritten Reich. Die NS-Gemeinschaft ‚Kraft durch Freude‘,“ *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 33 (1993), pp. 289-303; Christine KEITZ, *Reisen als Leitbild. Die Entstehung des modernen Massentourismus in Deutschland*, München, 1997, here: pp. 209-57.

⁶ Timothy W. MASON, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936-1939* (Schriften des Zentralinstituts für sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung der Freien Universität Berlin 22), Opladen, 1975; Marie-Louise RECKER, *Nationalsozialistische Sozialpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, München, 1985; Michael SCHNEIDER,

Unterm Hakenkreuz. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung 1933 bis 1939 (Geschichte der Arbeiter und der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts 12), Bonn, 1999.

⁷ Ronald SMELSER, *Robert Ley. Hitler's Labor Front Leader*, Oxford et. al., 1988.

⁸ Wolfhard BUCHHOLZ, *op.cit.*, p. 216.

⁹ The figures on KdF-travels are given by Wolfhard BUCHHOLZ, *op.cit.*, pp. 286-87; Bruno FROMMANN, *op.cit.*, pp. 241-42; Hasso SPODE, *Arbeiterurlaub*, *op.cit.*, p. 298.

¹⁰ Bundesarchiv (BArch) NS 5 VI/19474: N.S.K. Nr. 55/ March 6, 1938.

¹¹ Bruno FROMMANN, *op.cit.*, p. 238.

¹² Hasso SPODE, *Der deutsche Arbeiter*, *op.cit.*, pp. 299-300; Bruno FROMMANN, *op.cit.*, pp. 266-70; Michael SCHNEIDER, *op.cit.*, p. 674.

¹³ BArch R 43/770.

¹⁴ *Der Fremdenverkehr 1*, May 4, 1936, p. 3.

¹⁵ For instance, *Der Fremdenverkehr 1*, October 3, 1936, p. 7; *Der Fremdenverkehr 2*, December 11, 1937, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Der Fremdenverkehr 3*, April 16, 1938, p. 10.

¹⁷ BArch R 3901/ alt R 41/ 644, pp. 140-50.

¹⁸ Robert LEY, *Deutschland ist schöner geworden*, ed. by Hans DANER and Walter KIEHL, Berlin, 1936, pp. 45-79.

¹⁹ Bruno FROMMANN, *op.cit.*, p. 291.

²⁰ Jürgen ROSTOCK and Franz ZADNICEK, *Paradiesruinen. Das KdF-Seebad der Zwanzigtausend auf Rügen*, Berlin, 1992, offer a preliminary insight in the resort's history; Hasso SPODE, *Ein Seebad für zwanzigtausend Volksgenossen. Zur Grammatik und Geschichte des fordistischen Urlaubs*, in Peter J. BRENNER (ed.), *Reisekultur in Deutschland: Von der Weimarer Republik zum „Dritten Reich“*, Tübingen, 1997, pp. 7-47.

²¹ For instance, BArch NS 22/781, 53.5.1, LEY'S record, November 26, 1935, pp. 9-10.

²² Hans MOMMSEN and Manfred GRIEGER, *op. cit.*

²³ BArch R 26I/28, pp. 1-2.

²⁴ Tilman HARLANDER, *Zwischen Heimstätte und Wohnmaschine. Wohnungsbau und Wohnungspolitik in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Stadt – Planung – Geschichte 18), Basel et al., 1995.

²⁵ Figures given by Hasso SPODE, *Der deutsche Arbeiter*, *op.cit.*, p. 300 and Michael SCHNEIDER, *op.cit.*, p. 672 are misleading because they also include business-travel. My judgement is based on singular figures in the journal „*Der Fremdenverkehr*“.

²⁶ *Der Fremdenverkehr 1*, May 23, 1936, p. 11.