

## A Public Park on Top of a Cold Storage Facility

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If there is an antithesis to the gemütlich (cozy) Vienna in Austria, it is surely “Hitler’s favorite city,” Linz. According to legend (or reality?), Göring decided to build the Reich Steel Works while sailing from Linz to Vienna a few days after the Anschluss.

The exact location is the village of Sankt Peter near Linz, from which the residents had to move out within a few days. There is a photograph showing both the church awaiting demolition and, behind it, the monumental steelworks, on whose construction hundreds of prisoners worked. An industrial port with six docks and a commercial port with four docks were also planned next to the steelworks. After the Allied bombings, only dust and ashes remained of this inhumane dictatorship’s wartime investment. Local history monographs on Linz rarely provide significantly more detailed information than this.

This is why Herbert Kaar’s 2015 memoir about the Linz port is so valuable. Kaar is not a historian, and his style is neither literary nor journalistic. Yet it is a unique source that

*presents history from a bottom-up perspective, as seen by a child in May 1945, and later by a dockworker who worked as a crane operator during the years of the Austrian economic miracle.*

In 1945, American military garbage dumps grew among the ruined buildings. These were strictly guarded, but the guards were lenient with the children, so they could get their hands on cables and other usable junk that could be sold on the black market. The pools weren’t left unused either; they served as places for swimming and fishing.

Meanwhile, up above, the great powers were discussing the fate of Linz. At that time, Austria was not yet “Hitler’s first victim,” as it later portrayed itself, but a defeated enemy, and thus part of the German question. It was seriously proposed that peace in Europe be secured through the complete dismantling of German industry, the so-called re-agrarization. The logic of the Cold War ultimately wrote a different script, and Linz picked up where the American planes had left off, so that the port of Linz and the ironworks could become the much-photographed symbols of the Austrian economic miracle.

The young Herbert Kaar also found work here. In the grain warehouse, the life-giving wheat and flour were still present in their brutal, raw state.

*He mentions the two cleaning ladies, who were hired merely “for form’s sake,” since it was nearly impossible to protect oneself against the dust that covered everything.*

The dust not only began to damage the lungs but also made every work process more difficult. Repairs had to be done by hand, because any flame or spark would have posed an explosion hazard. Workplace accidents were not uncommon. There were those who fell from heights of ten to twelve stories. Turnover among the loaders was high. Refugees from the East—including many Hungarians from 1956—received their first Austrian paychecks here. The author makes special mention of Kathi, the quiet, reserved young woman. It would have served the story well if he had married her, but one fine day Kathi left the port just as suddenly as everyone else who managed to find a better place. For those who stayed, the almost daily binge drinking posed a greater danger than the porn and the slippery scaffolding. Kathi earned the author’s respect precisely because she did not take part in these drinking binges.

Of course, the port wasn’t a hopeless place. After loading, the repair shop offered a steady income, but the path to upward mobility—in both the social and physical senses of the word—was secured by the job as a crane operator. A few years later, Herbert Kaar was already looking down on the ships from above. He describes the loading tasks at length, interspersed with a few professional adventures, such as when the unbalanced cargo had to be lifted “at an angle.” On the rails of today’s container ports, such rule-breaking creativity is no longer possible—nor is it necessary. A recurring theme in the book is that nothing is the way it used to be. This is as much a cliché as it is the truth.

In the early 2000s, a third of the docks were filled in, and a significant portion of the buildings were demolished. Today, the space is dominated mostly by steel box buildings, shipping containers, and trucks. The harbor’s redevelopment coincided with a shift in Linz’s identity. In 2009, the city became the European Capital of Culture, and with that, efforts were made to replace the image of an industrial city with a message more marketable to tourists. This new trend did not go unnoticed in the port either.

*Europe’s largest graffiti exhibition was held on the gray surfaces, naturally featuring artists from all over the world,*

including many female creators. Guided tours are available for those unfamiliar with the aesthetics of graffiti. And for those seeking a simpler form of relaxation in the port, a hanging garden has been created eighteen meters up on the roof of the cold storage facility. This, too, is of European significance, as—as the information board states—it was the first attempt to open

a functioning industrial facility to the city. I'll quietly add that a similar landscape architecture project also took place in the Csepel port, though with far less—or virtually no—media coverage. Linz is different, of course; this is Austria. An observation tower was built, from which (in theory) the snow-capped peaks of the Alps are visible from October through May. Directly below the observation tower, however, there is constant activity: trucks pull in, and containers float in the air. Perhaps it is only the smaller harbor basins that are strangely quiet. Aside from the maneuvers of a diving bird, nothing disturbs the water's surface.

(Translated using AI Deepl)