

PhD-topic Matthias Müller

Consumer Behavior in Borderlands: Stralsund and Reval (Tallinn) during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century

In my project I am searching for the “accurate” (socially and culturally accepted) consumer behavior in four territories of the South-Eastern Baltic Sea Region – Swedish Pomerania, the Prussian part of Vorpommern, Livonia and Estonia – during the second half of the eighteenth century.

There are many labels one could ascribe to the eighteenth century. The “consumer revolution” is one of them and describes the idea that a diverse and relatively large group of people started to purchase certain goods, that in previous centuries had been available only for a small minority. Another label for the eighteenth century could be the emergence of the “public sphere”. This concept rests on the notion that a group of private individuals – partly nobles and partly *Bürger* – emerged to form something that may be referred to as “the public”. That is to say, a relatively large group of individuals could now discuss topics of public interest. Journals and other (print)media supported the previously unprecedented dissemination of ideas and the creation of a “public opinion”. Among the wide range of topics discussed were matters of consumption. What could be considered an accepted necessity and what should be branded as immoral or somehow mischievous consumption? Was it appropriate to go to theaters? How was one supposed to dress in order to be perceived the way one desired to be?

Having a closer look at these debates in journals, reveals a great deal about a society because language is a very important medium that shapes one’s social reality. The question my work is addressing is whether the debates about certain issues of consumption and consumer behavior were different in the four above-mentioned regions as the existence of political borders would suggest. How, if at all, did these borders influence the regional debates?