

# **NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education “EYCE 2005: National Experiences – European Challenges”**

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## **Country Profiles V. Austria**

### **Austria has not been established to generate active citizens.**

When Joseph II (1782-1790) introduced the Era of Enlightenment and Modernization in Austria, the motto he was inspired by was “Everything for the people but nothing through the people”. This slogan attributed to the Austrian emperor can not be publicly used nowadays because it is politically not correct, however, it is still valuable today. The Austrian (emperor’s) policy is a vote of no confidence in the citizens.

### **Civic education is of no value.**

The public funds spent on forming political competence by way of political education are next to nothing. In Austria only 0.1 % of the budget of the Federal Ministry of Education is spent on adult education (in Finland it is 13 %), of which only a minimal fraction provides for political education.

### **The political parties and their State are of major importance.**

Austrian law provides clearly and relatively generous funding only for the political parties’ education whereas there is a complete lack of equivalent legal provisions for adult education, for libraries, and for free educational initiatives. Free educational work is therefore inadequately provided for, if at all, and funds are mainly allocated from arbitrary subsidies.

The political parties’ awkward power embraces all areas of education (and society), and then causes vexation due to the political categorization people are forced into. As a consequence of this penetration, political apathy and lack of interest ensue while the political elites are both flattered and despised.

### **Even civil society is a State event.**

Both the parties and the State have incorporated society, and thus it has become very difficult to identify and define “civil society”. An attempt to track it down is made by an inventory of the associations’ social life, or a manoeuvre within the ministerial sector while both the so called “social partners” and new social movements claim equally to represent civil society.

### **EYCE 2005 in Austria – a State affair**

The Department for Citizenship and Environmental Education of Austria’s Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has developed and coordinated the EYCE programme for 2005. The big events of this year, national and international conferences, were organized by the Ministry in coordination with agencies established by it. Within the Ministry a council was established which consisted of civil servants recruited from related ministerial areas, along with NGOs, the media,

etc. (This Council is to continue even next year) All schools, museums, adult education institutions, NGOs, communities, and associations were invited by the Ministry to contribute actively to EYCE; the Ministry's duty was to collect the various measures, and to present them both on a special website and in printed brochures.

With the research programme „node (new orientations for the democracy in Europe)“ the ministry is inviting scientists to redefine democracy, to analyse political developments and processes as well as the mechanisms that guide and control them, and to come up with options and alternatives for the further development of democratic politics.

### **EYCE 2005 in Austria – A question of being or pretending?**

During the Action Days, held annually around May 5<sup>th</sup>, more than 100 events took place in all of Austria, and with respect to ten monthly topics many more activities have been prepared. The programme including valuable information beyond the Action Days and some documents providing a theoretical background to EDC was available for all those interested.

However, neither the research programme “node”, which started in 2002, nor the numerous educational initiatives have been developed for the EYCE in particular; on the contrary, they have simply been allocated whether they were appropriate or not.

The Ministry that coordinated it all succeeded in informing the public about the EYCE, offering professional information services, and collecting many more or less related activities. These were then added to the topic of the year and documented.

The adult education agents (I interviewed) knew about the EYCE, considered this initiative very important, and were willing to identify themselves with it; they acknowledge the professional efforts made by the coordination group and the service agencies involved. They assume that the activity is likely to peter out in the propagandistic dimension, and that before it is even reflected, if it is reflected at all, another core issue will be put up.

Therefore the business is not really taken seriously, however people regret that a brilliant idea as such cannot grow without new fund allocations and sustainable structures (in adult education). Often, a remark directed against the supposedly exuberant production of posters, brochures, advertising material, etc, is added.

### **EYCE 2005 and civic education's misery in Austria**

As a logical consequence, the above-mentioned problems that turned up in civic education and democracy have not become a central issue discussed in public in Austria. However, they were addressed in a kick-up conference held in April 2005 by the Centre of Democracy that organized the conference for the Ministry of Education - namely the danger of the instrumentalization in favour of the political parties' interests, political apathy, insufficient resources and structures - all characteristics of a developing country in civic education<sup>6</sup>.

### **Austria's civic education – a challenge of European dimensions.**

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<sup>6</sup> Filzmaier, Peter, „Civic Education and Democracy in Austria, a brief survey of trends, problems and perspectives. Thesis paper for “Democracy education in Europe. Challenges for Austria”, a conference held on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2005 in Vienna.

There are no signs that the political parties will back out of the areas that are no business of theirs, nor are there signs that new spaces, resources or furthering structures for free civic education will develop.

Neither can governmental-controlled forms of civil society be expected to make up for it, nor can free but marginalized initiatives do this. Rather can be expected, that the state or state-like agents will be able to position sufficiently for European programs while small initiatives need much more support to be able to act on European level.

Therefore recommendations for the organization of European programmes include:

- The priority for centralization instead of decentralization. Decision-making powers and administrative competences possibly exerted in Brussels.
- European programmes should become directly accessible for smaller NGOs /initiatives and include them
- Extend European Cooperation beyond State or State-like centres.
- and include especially civil society's multifarious initiatives.