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“Civic Education and Human Rights Education in Austria”

GENERAL OVERVIEW

First of all it should be stated that civic education in Austrian schools is taught
1) in form of the educational principle and 2) as independent compulsory subjects.

As **compulsory subject**, civic education exists in the pre-vocational school, vocational school and in different combinations (e.g. economic education, history or law) in secondary professional and technical schools. In secondary academic schools (junior and senior high schools) for the 11th and 12th grade a subject called “History and Civic Education” was introduced in the beginning of the school year 2001/2002. This recent development was of central importance and can be seen as a result of a rising awareness about the necessity of civic education in school in the broader context of active citizenship.

In Austria the development of curricula in the area of civic education is centrally organized by the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, in particular by the department of civic education.

The so-called **educational principle of civic education** was established by the Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs in 1978. Within the framework of various curricula civic education and human rights education as its integral part should be included at all grades. The main principles can be understood as a sum of key competences

- to provide cognizant knowledge and understanding
- to support the development of political attitudes and opinions
- to develop intellectual and social skills and insights
- to inspire individuals to act responsibly and promote the ability for political participation

Other educational principles such as education towards gender equality, environmental education, movement and sport` should also be considered by teachers. Therefore in the framework of daily activities the successful implementation of civic education relies to a large extent on the initiative and resourcefulness of teachers.

Education of teachers. At Austrian universities there are no special regular studies which systematically prepare teaching for civic education at higher schools. The curricula don't foresee specific courses on civic education which qualify teachers for putting into action the educational principle of civic education. One exception is the compulsory course on civic education at the university institute for history which has been introduced into the curricula as a result of the newly established subject “History and Civic Education” in 2001/2002. Besides that, only the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research and Further Education in Austria offer a University Course/Master of Advanced Studies for Civic Education, which intends to qualify teachers to put into practice civic education as a principle as above mentioned. Moreover on the level of in-service teacher training teachers have the possibility to participate in courses, seminars and lectures on civic and human rights education at federal pedagogical institutes.

Conclusion. The introduction of civic education as a educational principle and as a subject was very important, but the implementation of the principle largely depends on the engagement and resources of the individual teacher and is therefore difficult to evaluate in relation to the outcome and general impact. For that reason an expansion of the subject besides the educational principle in the school area as well as strengthening civic education in the adult education area are absolutely necessary. Apart from regular studies at Austrian universities a module system of courses on society, politics, human rights, etc. should be generally introduced.

IMPORTANT ACTORS IN THE FIELD OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

FORMAL LEVEL – INITIATIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE

Service Centers of Civic Education and Human Rights Education

In order to realize and promote the status of civic education and human rights education broadly at Austrian schools, the Service Centre for civic education and the Service Centre for human rights education were established by the ministry for education, science and culture at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights in Vienna. The activities include consultancy and support of teachers, the providing of a comprehensive list of teaching materials for free, the distribution of information brochures focused on human rights education, which is called "Teaching Human Rights" and on civic education the so called "info-leaflet" being issued quarterly. The permanent updates of the two websites (www.politische-bildung.at / www.humanrights.at) with latest news, links, articles, etc. to keep teachers informed are also among the main tasks. Furthermore, the Service Centers are engaged in the education for teachers (e.g. in the implementation of a civic education course for history-teaching students at the University of Vienna) and in the in-service teacher trainings (especially in the field of didactics and methodology of civic education and anti-racism and human rights and children's rights).

The Service Centres are working on several projects e.g. the newly established initiative "**internet platform for teachers**" which aims to strengthen the exchange of experiences and ideas between teachers in order to facilitate the implementation of civic education and human rights education in the daily life. The participants, teachers from various disciplines, who are mainly educational multipliers, shall distribute the outcomes of the biannual meetings and promote the idea of the teacher's network in Austria. Another project worth mentioning is "**a world of difference**" a **peer group education** program based on the concept of ADL (Anti Defamation League) and EPTO (European Peer Training Organization) which started in 2002. About 25 pupils/students and 14 co-ordinating teachers took part in trainings focused on anti-racism education. Peers are educated to organize their school workshops and exchange their experiences in regular meetings with teachers and school co-ordinators. In the area of human rights education a rather successful project has been launched by the Service Center in 2001. A series of **workshops called "Recht hat jedeR?!/Everybody has rights/is right?!"** – Trainings for every day life together'. The modules were developed to facilitate the approach and access to several human rights issues. The workshops focus on peaceful conflict resolution, responsibility, respect, etc. and are facilitated by a team of two experts (one male, one female). Target groups are pupils from 7-15 years.

Moreover the Service Centers are working on various projects e.g. within the framework of the "**Civic Education Action Days**", which started in 2003 and will be one of the main activities within the European Year of "Citizenship through Education" in 2005 and the "**Human Rights Days**" (taking place between 20th of November and 10th of December 2004 and can be seen as a contribution to the UN Decade for Human Rights which will come to an end in 2004). During these project weeks the Service Centers are organizing, co-ordinating and taking charge of several events and give an overview about a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities on different issues related to democratic citizenship. The Civic Education and Human Rights Days in Austria are based on the idea that a lot of different actors in the formal and non-formal educational sector should contribute to the whole concept of "learning democracy" in order to strengthen the democratic stability in the community. In this context democracy refers not only to a governmental or political system, but rather to a peaceful form of living together in the society.

A further example of a successful initiative of the ministry of education, science and culture:

The project “**National Socialism and Holocaust: Past and Present**” is targeted at teachers and pupils at Austrian schools, trying to intensify and structure the discussion of issues in connection with National Socialism and the Holocaust. Not only is information given on the subject, but this information is to be applied to present-day events. This all-Austrian project aims at conveying the issues involved in a sustainable way, using the most recent methodical and didactic principles. It consists of four modules, the “central seminar”, seminars at Yad Vashem (Israel), decentralised networks, and the communication platform www.erinnern.at.

NON FORMAL LEVEL

Beside the public institutional level a great variety of non governmental organizations and institutions are working in the field of Education for Democratic Citizenship with particular emphasis on various areas e.g. on human rights education, intercultural learning, peace education and global education in Austria. Some of these educational players will be mentioned to give a short insight into the wide range of different actors.

The Democracy Center in Vienna is a virtual knowledge center. The focus of its attention is the development of democracy and it assembles knowledge and information about the political system of Austria with particular reference to the European context. Its mission is to provide information and generate debate. It operates on the web: www.demokratizentrum.org.

Interkulturelles Zentrum, an independent non profit organization promotes the development of relations between people of different cultural origins and trains people to carry out practical intercultural work (e.g. multipliers in youth work, educators). Beyond this, the Centre defines itself as a mediator between political decision-makers and culturally active institutions (e.g. youth organizations, basis initiatives) with the aim to generate additional high-quality opportunities for transnational meetings and cooperation. In particular, Interkulturelles Zentrum attempts to improve the social conditions for intercultural youth and school projects via target-oriented information and public relations work. It provides training and educational events that serve to develop intercultural competence and support. www.iz.or.at

European Training- and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy: its main aim is to conduct research and training programs in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in close co-operation with the University of Graz. Special emphasis is put on training programs for teachers, civil servants, the police, army, as well as for members of international organisations and NGOs in Austria and abroad. New innovative teaching methods are applied in "train the trainers programs". Simultaneously, basic research is conducted with a particular research focus on South Eastern Europe. www.etc-graz.at

ai.academy is the educational institution of Amnesty International Austria. The workshops are aimed to increase the knowledge and understanding of human rights, as well as providing participants with the skills necessary to take action defending their own human rights and the rights of others.

www.ai-academy.at

Baobab, initiated as non profit association in 1998, focuses on global education and its target groups are schools and educational institutions. Baobab provides teaching materials and publications as well as support and advice to teachers and plays an important role in the establishing of a network in the field of global education in Austria. www.baobab.at