
CROSS-BORDER LEARNING, LIVING AND WORKING

THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN OFFICE/ VIENNA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the consequences, outcomes and changes in Europe will be examined in the light of socio-political circumstances in Austria and Central Europe. Particularly relevant here are certain opinions and reactions to change arising from the perspective of a central Europe still largely shaped by the nostalgic late 19th century view of Vienna as a potential fulcrum for the Europe of the future. The political and strategic tensions peculiar to the mid-1990s arose out of various upheavals in the extended central European region, some of them highly contradictory—the entry of Austria to the European Union, the launching of the former communist countries towards a democratic and united Europe, and the intractable Balkan conflict emerging in the formation of new borders and states in ex-Yugoslavia.

Austria has endeavoured to establish a new self-image. The change in orientation more and more towards the east, the opening up of new “old” neighbour countries, an aggravation of the problems surrounding migration through the increasing influx of immigrants from the Ex-Soviet Union, Ex-Yugoslavia and Africa, were followed by a gradual adjustment of socio-political positions, not least in the Austrian educational landscape.

The starting-point was the intensification of intercultural learning, tentatively initiated cross-border cooperation and projects in the Centrope-Region¹ largely on the level of school policy and teaching practice. The European Office of the Vienna Board of Education—already in existence at that time as a contact point for European affairs—was now in a position to expand its field of work.

¹ Centrope-Region includes the regions Eastern Austria and Vienna, Southern Moravia (Brno), Bratislava and the County of Győr/Moson/Sopron in the neighbouring countries Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

The development of a network in the neighbouring regions was followed by cooperation in the form of school partnerships, student exchanges and encounters for young people and teachers, practitioners and educational managers, all of which received an increasing amount of support from the EU. This signified a sustained wave of pedagogical innovation both in methodology and content. The neighbouring languages became particularly important to the process, leading to the development of a wide choice of services and resources for all school types. Of no little importance are the large number of projects and cooperation initiatives with partners all over Europe for EdQ School Quality, ERC-The European Regional College and the European Language Portfolio, in which the European Office was involved as the lead partner.

In response to the modern demands of our society today, the European Office cooperated with other institutions to develop the so-called Basic Competence Model for activities across borders, carried out a whole series of innovative activities and initiated an INTERREG project on the theme of competences in school and business. Key activities are currently being presented in the following areas: European Citizenship, Holocaust in Education and Civil Society.

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES IN RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTROPE COUNTRIES: “GO WHERE YOUR MARKET IS”

EdQ – Education Quality was created as an INTERREG IIIA, EU-sponsored project in order to support and secure the quality of educational opportunities in the Centrope Region by means of cross-border cooperation and initiatives. The goal was to achieve sustained innovative cooperation among the regions involved, addressing students, teachers and educational experts of the partner regions Bratislava, Brno, Győr-Moson/Sopron and Vienna as target groups. The European Office was the organisation executing this project from 2004 to 2007, in cooperation with its project partners—The Brno Educational Authority and the Pedagogic Institute of the region Győr-Moson-Sopron. The EdQ Educational Partnership initiative supported cross-border cooperation and intensified communication between Viennese schools and schools of the neighbouring regions. Students of two partner regions worked together on one chosen topic for the duration of a year. Thus the willingness of the future citizens to engage in cross-border work in Europe was stimulated, an awareness of

joint elements in our cultures was established, and tolerance and acceptance of other regions was encouraged.

The ELP—European Language Portfolio—is a tool created by the Council of Europe to enable language learners themselves to assess and document their knowledge.

One of its main aims is to promote awareness of a European cultural identity and to develop mutual understanding among people of different cultures. The Vienna Board of Education was involved in creating a European Language Portfolio for the Central European Region. Thus, it overlaps in regions and levels and it is intended to identify and document language ability as well as social and cross-cultural experiences of learners in the Centrope-Region. Included in this project are primary level (6 to 10 years old), secondary level I (10–15 years), secondary level II (16–19) and adult education. In cooperation with various schools and educational institutions it was possible to incorporate the ELP into the curriculum, and to date all three ELPs for 10–18 year-olds studying within the Centrope-Region have been accredited by the European Council (accredited model 94/2008) and can be downloaded www.edtwin.eu

The regions in an enlarged Europe are confronted with similar economic and social challenges: particularly those posed by rapidly evolving technologies, the need for sustainable development, progress and its consequences for an information society, and the globalisation of trade. Education must likewise meet these challenges, and fulfils a vital role in this context, in that it can act as an icebreaker to overcome barriers and prejudices as well as support and promote regional development.

EdGate (Education Gate) was established as a network to foster educational exchange among institutions and their representatives from all over Europe with the aim of strengthening economic and social cohesion. The EdGATE Vision – Mobility for Europe – was the motor for the European Regional College (ERC), where regional experts were developing a concept for a new type of European school for 6 – 18 year-old children. 12 partners from 10 regions were involved.²

This new educational concept enables European students to become mobile in a united Europe of tomorrow:

- “ Mobility of Communication: ERC students will be perfect European ambassadors with outstanding competence in their mother tongue, as well as English, plus another language.

² Countries: AT, UK, PL BiH, HR, RS, RO, UA and DE

- Mobility of Thinking: ERC students will learn to be mobile in thinking, studying according to a European curriculum and focusing on European themes in a new study field called “European Studies”
- Mobility of Interaction: will enable ERC students to work and cooperate with other students; they will learn to face challenges, solve problems and look for common solutions with colleagues.”

Another important aim of EdGATE was to bring together regional educational institutions, their experts and decision-makers in a lasting Europe-wide network. Vocation in Education should provide an important input for the concept of ERC by defining goals for entrepreneurship and civic education.

BASELINE COMPETENCES REQUIRED FOR WORKING AND LIVING IN A BORDERLESS CENTROPE-REGION

As discussed in the introduction with reference to the complex situation in the CE at the end of the 1980s, it has become necessary to change the old view of the world with Vienna at its centre, and to be prepared for the challenges posed by industrial development and the economy in the cross border regions, as well as the mentality and emotionalizing behaviours of its people and, of course, its political institutions.

“What kind of basic assumptions, values, norms and behaviour regulation characteristics should an individual possess within a multicultural company if the company is made up of individual employees who were socialised in a number of different cultures?”¹⁾ Agnes Borgulya: Diversity in value Europe: The future of Europe 3rd SS.

In spite of the differences between the former regions, there are boundless concrete activities to be managed every day. Thus the EdQ-Partners from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Austria have developed baselines for skills and competences, the so-called Grundkompetenzmodell, as a commitment for any successful cooperation in this region. This “baseline model” includes five competences—communicative, social, knowledge, strategic and intercultural—and most of the expert reports focus on one specific item. Any one competence is an approach which should cover as an umbrella all aspects related to all the other competences. The model of competences was developed together with students, experts in the field of education, representatives of the economy and the general public. The outcomes have

been evaluated by experts from different countries and areas and finally combined in a structured catalogue and published.

It would be very interesting to explain the themes and objectives of this guideline on the basis of two examples:

The first will illustrate in a very practical context how working in the field of intercultural competences can provoke personal and practical difficulties:

“The development of intercultural competence is thus not without its problems, but the richness of experience it offers can rather facilitate understanding of different histories, politics, religious values and behaviours in those situations where different cultures encounter one another.”

“Lastly the educational systems within any one culture may not support a destabilising approach to intercultural competence, so that any development of intercultural competence will need to be tailored to what is feasible in any one context.”

This guideline should serve as a valuable base and reference to any cross border educational project in the Central and EEC countries. Another good example of the deep and well-founded research is the Areas of Personal Development and Fields of Competence in Interregional Cooperation:

The competences are reflected in three basic areas of the personality:

- Knowledge, which is shown above
- Affective development of personal development
- Interpersonal skills (e.g. conflict-management)

Table 1:

Areas of Personal Development	Communicative Competence	Social Competence	Strategic Competence	Knowledge Competence	Intercultural Competence
Knowledge	<p>Knowing how to work with people from the partner region in a communicative and constructive way</p> <p>This includes the following general communicative abilities in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the capacity for verbal self-expression and interaction • Presenting and explaining one's own ideas • Managing situations in which language is without or only with a limited command of this language • Recognizing different kinds of obstacles to verbal and non-verbal cross-border communication 	<p>Knowing how to participate in a cross-border environment</p> <p>Negotiating in a cross-border context that is characterised by plurality and divergence</p> <p>Having the capacity to create shared commitment and visions</p> <p>Knowing how to delegate and co-operate while working in an interregional team (sharing tasks and responsibilities)</p>	<p>Identifying an inter-regional challenge and formulating adequate strategies which will allow problems to be solved</p> <p>Knowing how to react by applying appropriate procedures to assigned tasks and to any irregularities that may occur</p> <p>Identifying a problem situation which can be solved by using certain strategies</p> <p>Transferring any strategic experience acquired to other challenges in cross-border cooperation</p> <p>Knowing how to evaluate and self-evaluate cross-border initiatives</p>	<p>Mastering the tasks and content in a specific field of work</p> <p>This includes the following in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding processes and systems of the partner region • Being able to interpret the symbols and formulae of the partner region • Utilising different technical unit systems <p>Discovering what channels of communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and support systems already exist between countries and using these to the full 	<p>Developing the awareness, knowledge and skills needed to understand 'between the lines' messages across cultures, avoiding miscommunications, and building strong relationships when working in a cross-border environment.</p> <p>Knowing about specific forms of culture in one's own and in the partner country, as well as [their] recognising similarities. This includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge about the partner's language • Country specific knowledge, e.g. of its history, geography, politics, and economy

AN AMBITIOUS PLAN TO MANAGE THE FUTURE

ET-struct: A common initiative as a response to the crisis: At the interface of training and the economy

“At this time, as the EU is seeking to minimise the impact of the current economic downturn and set the course for renewed growth, it is vital that the momentum is maintained in favour of educational investment that is both efficient and equitable. Good policies will simultaneously aid recovery from recent shocks and build the basis for meeting future challenges with confidence.”

In order to find a strategy which can exert a calming effect on the social and economic consequences of the downturn, a partner consortium has been formed with 17 active, capable relevant and compatible partners from 10 NUTS3 CE regions in six of the eight CE countries (Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and a region on the western border area of Ukraine). Its purpose is to launch a project, to develop, pilot, evaluate and implement “efficient and equitable...good policies.” In concrete terms, the partnership plans to set up permanent territorial management and organisational structures to overcome the general lack of coherence in “the connections of the educational system to the leading edge of technology and business practices. These structures will connect the relevant policy, economic and educational partners/stakeholders to match and optimise work force qualifications with the needs of regional economies.” An extensive network of over 40 associated institutions will support active partnership and ensure the implementation of the project outcomes.

For a better understanding of the intention of this Central Europewide project it is useful to take a look at the concrete background in four different regions involved in this structure:

- 1) In a recent representative study almost 70% of the 148 companies in Austria stated that workforce qualifications did not sufficiently match the needs of regional economies. This hinders economic growth, competitiveness and employment and is hence in contradiction to the renewed Lisbon agenda.
- 2) Another representation of several major problems commonly faced by countries and regions is the “brain drain” of young and well-educated people in some regions. A lot of qualified young people are leaving the area to work in more financially potent regions in Germany. This is due to various factors. New

industries are reluctant to come to the area because of the lack of a qualified workforce. A sinking birth-rate and gradual depopulation of the region could be seen as a further challenge—not only in Germany.

- 3) Especially among the migrant population, the increasing size of an unqualified or poorly qualified workforce is a notable phenomenon. Their lack of linguistic and professional skills (e.g. among adult Roma in Novo mesto/Slovenia) means that they cannot adequately contribute to economic growth. A knock-on effect is a high percentage of long-term unemployed, particularly unskilled women. In this context the contrary effect on a qualified migrant workforce with higher levels of qualification should be underlined (e.g. Veneto/Italia).
- 4) In Hranice (Czech Republic) and the surrounding region there is a need for a stronger link between the secondary education offered and the ever-changing demands of the labour market. Though there is interest in dynamic industries operating in the area, there is not enough qualified labour to meet the demand, particularly in the technical fields.

As already mentioned, the issues the project will address are not only regional problems: they also have a translational dimension. The project therefore offers a platform where regions can learn from each other and exchange models of best practice. They can jointly address common issues of interest such as innovative approaches to aging in regions...the establishment of effective links between public administration, research and the private sector and new approaches to improving human capital.

This is indeed a very professional approach to the “red hot” problems in the spiralling dynamics with which we are confronted, and to finding solutions for “easier mobility from one country to another—in order to continue studying or finding employment.”

EDTWIN—EDUCATION TWINNING FOR EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP: HEADING FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE CENTROPE REGION

EdTWIN represents a particularly ambitious project of the European Office. It signifies a new generation of cross-border projects at the Vienna Board of Education. As these initiatives progress and expand, students, apprentices and teachers from Vienna, Southern Moravia, the Bratislava region and the County of Győr/Moson/Sopron

will extend their competences and skills. The European Office is the lead partner for EDTWIN, carrying the main responsibility for handling and documentation.

Getting to know how to identify oneself with Europe requires interaction with people from differing regions, a willingness to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, and the consequent development of tolerance and understanding. In order to support the cultural, social and economic development of Centrope, the European Office has developed three bilateral twin projects with partners from the neighbouring Centrope-regions, under the umbrella of EdTWIN.

The various initiatives are aimed at pupils, teachers and education experts in the regions and offer a variety of opportunities for interaction and cooperation. Special emphasis is placed on the opportunity to learn the neighbouring languages. In recent years Czech, Slovak and Hungarian have rapidly gained in importance in Vienna, and are building the basis for sustainable interaction in the future.

School, vocation, language: these three core areas are the main fields of project activity, and aim at extending the competence of all participants involved. The goal is to be culturally and linguistically prepared for closer contact and to be equipped for cross-border access to the labour market.

The focus is on the development of communication and knowledge skills, as well as an increase in social, strategic and intercultural understanding. The activities include: financing of school partnerships, lesson observation, activities which lead to understanding of the neighbouring educational systems, joint art and culture activities, development of joint teaching material, specialist workshops for teachers, vocational internships for students attending vocational schools, as well as language workshops in Czech, Slovak and Hungarian. It is, in other words, a wide, exciting initiative which is above all practical and workable in everyday life.

One example of an innovative and demand-oriented educational activity is the project "Cross Border Occupational Orientation" by which students about to choose a career can be offered a compact opportunity for exchange of experience. In 7-day blocks, young people are introduced to the course and then given the task of independently planning, organising and carrying out a visit to one of the neighbouring border regions. Trainers, who may also act in some phases as advisors, are responsible for an appropriate follow-up and, if necessary, further advice. The intention is particularly to get to know the neighbouring regions, make personal

contacts, make at least rudimentary use of the language, and complete a short traineeship in a vocational institution.

The educational centre created this year is intended, as already indicated, to provide the opportunity for students (from aged 15), teachers and educational experts to receive language instruction and information but also to acquaint themselves with the neighbouring regions. In the course of five intensive days students will begin the workshop by receiving language instruction from native speakers and finish with an excursion into the corresponding language region. The fact that the seminar centre is booked for the entire school year shows the dynamic effect of this activity, and the same applies to the special evening courses for educational personnel and teachers, where Slovakian, Czech and Hungarian is offered at different levels.

Education in the European Dimension is a further basic element in the working conception of EdTWIN and in the “spirit” of European office alike: EU citizenship education should aim to

- impart knowledge on the key elements and the main institutions involved in EU policy-making and legislation
- inform about the role of the media in the European context and qualify pupils/students to interpret its messages
- instil students with a lasting sense of European integration as an ongoing process affecting all spheres of social, legal and political life, and the understanding that it is far from being complete
- increase students’ general awareness of the potential scope for action and opportunities
- encourage students to collect additional information about the EU on their own initiative

These objectives will be achieved through an engagement with topical issues and through close cooperation with NGOs and EU institutions. Young people especially expect to learn in the framework of the community, to discover how to increase their access and achieve full participation in society (e.g. civic participation, prevention of social exclusion) and how to foster solidarity between youth and society (e.g. mobilisation of youth in global policy-making). Ultimately all must work together to find an answer to the question of whether Europeans do indeed share a homogeneous and lasting set of values.

The following two concrete examples will show ways in which aspects of a European education may enable political participation to be achieved:

In 2007 a symposium for educational leaders of the Centropo region took place in Vienna, during which the significance, basis and practical aspects of the Holocaust in Education was discussed. Historiological contributions from high-ranking experts were compared with significant findings and experiences of teachers and discussed in the context of best practice examples. The differentiation between individual and collective memory, the very different approaches to history in teaching and research, and also the cultural differences in approach to the past in the different regions were identified, alongside modern history teaching methodology. Thematic points were covered by a presentation from the International Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust and the Jewish Museum in Vienna. The highly interesting contributions can be downloaded (www.edq.eu.com) and will shortly be published with a wider spectrum of themes in print form.

Approaches to history – not only that of former centuries – current trends and the challenges posed by a European society which is by no means free of social and political tensions, and the demand for basic competences to enable a European citizen to take an active part in the civil society, are the issues at the centre of an international symposium planned for Autumn 2010. Internationally renowned experts (political scientists, historians, sociologists and teachers) will here propose a profile for a European Citizen, who thinks, lives and acts as a member of the civil society.

The current challenges for relevant socio-political managers and the question of an adequate policy for Citizenship Education will be addressed primarily with emphasis on the situation in central and southern Europe.

DIFFICULTIES ?! A CHALLENGE TO THE FUTURE

Twenty years after the largely “Velvet Revolution”, it must be clear to us all that Europe has not yet achieved its goals.

The British-German scholar Ralf Dahrendorf once said that the development of Europe after changes would happen in major phases: six years to achieve international acceptance, six years for the adaptation of the new economic systems, but another sixty years for the formation of a coherent civic society. Seen thus, the merging of Europe—and this not even within the EU—is far from being completed, and we will all need to invest much effort on the long road ahead.

Thus future priorities must on the one hand be changes in the social structure and their effects, and on the other the post-communist development of civil society and everyday cultural change. Major themes such as urbanisation and secularisation, change in social and family structures and gender roles, mobility and migration and the relationships between pan-European developments at the interface between “West” and “East” will keep us occupied for several decades. There are a whole series of questions which must very soon be addressed:

How have social inequality and regional disparity changed?

Which groups are now threatened by “social” exclusion?

What is the status of ethnic and social minorities?

What changes have taken place in the educational landscape, the media and everyday culture?

And finally: which are the new elite groups and civil structures, and which new and efficient forms of democratic participation have developed?

What will happen after the “Crisis”? In what situation will our society find itself?

What developments will be taken within the EU and how will the environs of the EU react?

It matters little what the answers are. They will only achieve real constancy if they are made together by all of us, democratically and responsibly. Centrope—the centre of Europe—will play a decisive role here. An important contribution will certainly be made by Austria, Vienna, and of course the European Office too.

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