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INTERCULTURAL TRACKING
Pupils do research into migration history/ies

LEADING INSTITUTION

Democracy Centre Vienna
Coordinator: Gertraud Diendorfer, M.A.
Contact: office@demokratiezentrum.org

SCIENTIFIC CO-OPERATION PARTNERS

University of Vienna, Department of Geography and
Regional Research
Minorities Initiative, Vienna

SCHOOLS INVOLVED

HTBL 10, Vienna
School Centre Ungargasse, Vienna
BG/BRG, Gmünd, Upper Austria



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Science and Research

Intercultural Tracking

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Migration shapes our society in a variety of ways. People migrate to find new work, to seek new training, because they want to start a family or because they are forced into it by the political and economic situation in their own country. In Austria you need only go into the schools to know you are in an immigration country. In culturally heterogeneous classroom communities, students of entirely different backgrounds are learning together. Whether their parents have moved inside Austria or come from another country, whether they were born here or only came to Austria later: in the family histories of school-age students we can follow the tracks of a whole variety of migration histories.

The project conducted by the Democracy Centre Vienna, "Intercultural Tracking", seeks to work with school-age students to bring these migration histories to light. Together with their teachers and with scholars in the field they set out on this tracking expedition. They themselves take on the role of researchers. Six school classes from Vienna and Gmünd, with 70 students between the ages of 15 and 22, are participating in the project that started in the autumn of 2008. In this way, they can research and narrate their own family histories but also those of their fellow students.

Tracking down biography and history

In order to learn more about the history of migration in their own families, the students turned to their parents with a questionnaire. In interviews they asked their parents about their origins and migration, where they felt they belonged, and how they viewed history. The students did not only conduct the questioning but they also worked themselves on drawing up the questionnaire. All the students involved in the project got together in a workshop which took place in January 2009 in the School Centre Ungargasse. Here they had the chance to get to know each other, to discuss their ideas for the project and to draw up the questionnaire. Scholars in attendance provided insights into sociological aspects and initiated them into ways of conducting interviews. Together they developed certain questions and central themes and rejected others. A questionnaire emerged on which all participants in the project had worked.

Invited to the get-together-workshop were guests who talked to the students about their own migration stories: The viola player Lena Fankhauser, the author Goran Novakovic and the editor of the Viennese paper *biber* Amar Rajkovic, all reported on their own experiences of migration and their career paths. The students enthusiastically seized the opportunity of talking to the guests and asking them questions. "One can learn a lot and also work more actively", said the student Harun Keles, describing how the project enhanced normal school instruction.

The project "Intercultural Tracking" led for one thing to the conclusion that the phenomenon of migration is omnipresent. The project researcher, Elisabeth Röhrlich commented that "only about 15% of those questioned have had no experience of migration – if one also counts moving within Austria."



The predominant majority of those questioned consider the changing of their centre of living as a positive experience. Nevertheless, a strong identification with the country of origin continues to exist. "Migration does not mean not to feel connected to the home country or region anymore", underlines project leader Gertraud Diendorfer, "but also links with the new country are established and this entails multiple identities."

"Intercultural Tracking" did not only raise questions about migration history but also about images of Europe and images of history. The diverse migration stories have an influence on orientations and attitudes: These are shaped not only by individual experiences but also by stories told in the family as well as by national narratives. Project researcher Alena Pfoser summarizes the results of the interviews as follows: "Those questioned who were born abroad and later migrated to Austria have a broader idea about Europe than those born in Austria." In order to learn more about the connections between migration, feelings of belonging and images of history, interested students were questioned on these topics. "When I gave an interview I learned how social scientists proceed and what has to be taken into consideration. It is time-consuming to get a precise and clear response to a question", says Konstantin Zierhut from HTL Ettenreichgasse.


The students are also to be involved into the further dissemination stages of the project: In the Winter Semester 2009/2010, they will present the project and its results in a course of Professor Dr. Heinz Fassmann, Department of Geography, at the University of Vienna.

Strengthening intercultural competences

An exhibition will place the results of the project in a wider context. Conceived as a touring exhibition it will open up to other people the opportunity to participate in "Intercultural Tracking" and it will also be a working tool for inclusive school instruction. Together with a teaching aid that will also be drawn up, this allows for a wider dissemination of the topics of migration and integration in school curricula. The point here is not only to pass on knowledge but also to increase competence in judgement and action in intercultural togetherness. The students are participating in the conception and implementation of the exhibition. They are collecting objects for the exhibition, developing ideas for the accompanying program, and working on the construction of a website. The first ideas were assembled in workshops that took place in the summer of 2009; for example, the student Clemens Frank designed a map that showed the moves made by his family, while his fellow-students in Gmünd researched and documented the history of Turkish guest workers in a Schrems quarry. Cornelia Kogoj, General Secretary of the Minorities Initiative, contributed practical suggestions from her own work on the exhibition "Gastarbajteri."

The many-sided project "Intercultural Tracking," enables the students to come to terms in a new way with things that are really important to them: the migration stories in their families and those of their fellow students. For Herbert Pichler, teacher in the Schulzentrum Ungargasse, the project is pure gain: "I can see that it does not bypass the heads and the hearts of the students."





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