NATIONAL OVERVIEW ON NEW MEDIA AND ICT IN ULLL

Country: Austria
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Preamble: University Lifelong Learning in the national context

Austrian universities are required by **law** to include Continuing Education in their performance objectives: "continuing education, particularly post-graduate training" and "education through science and humanities" (Austrian Universities Act 2002 – UG 2002, fully implemented on 1 January 2004) allowing explicitly – in order to provide financial and organisational support – cooperation with other legal entities. There is a clear legislative distinction between "regular" degree programmes (Bachelor, Master programmes, and PhD studies) and university continuing education (UCE). Both strands have their own institutional regulations based on the UG 2002.

The **provision of University Continuing Education** encompasses a wide range of activities such as workshops, seminars, summer schools, courses, degree courses and other programmes (legal designation: "Universitätslehrgänge"). These activities are flexible, innovative, and in many cases interdisciplinary; some are credit-bearing, some are non-credited. They are generally offered on a part-time basis. The UG 2002, which gave the Austrian universities full autonomy, allows each institution to define in its statutes the basic conditions under which UCE is offered. (Previously, all credited formats of UCE had to be submitted to the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture for approval.) In general, UCE in Austria has to be self-financed and/or externally sponsored. Some activities, such as open public lectures or programmes particularly designed for socially disadvantaged groups, are financed by the universities themselves (including participants' fees) and through public funds/sponsoring.

Consequently, making use of the autonomy, Austrian Universities have established **different models of management structures** for UCE, ranging from central administrative departments mandated to support UCE across the university to decentralised departments/centres focusing on UCE. There is a close link to the management level of the universities, mostly through the vice-rectors. In 1996, a network of universities represented by professionals involved in developing UCE at universities was established – the **Austrian University Continuing Education and Staff Development Network (AUCEN)** offering its own definition of UCE. More recently, UCE has been replaced by the term "University Lifelong Learning" when using English.

The "**European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning**" is widely known in Austria and is also a reference document for further development. The Charter was used in the negotiations of performance agreements between the Ministry of Science and Research and the individual universities (for the funding period 2010-2012), clearly communicating that it

is up to the universities as autonomous institutions to develop their own profile in ULLL, last but not least, acknowledging the budgetary restrictions the universities are currently facing. In general, the universities used the Charter to reflect upon their own strategy, provision and further development in that area.

In 2011, the **National Strategy for Lifelong Learning** was officially launched. It includes explicitly University Lifelong Learning and Learning in Later Life at university level. Moreover, the universities are required to provide additional occupational Master's Programmes and to engage in Community Education projects.

Regarding the scope of development of provision, no **data** is available regarding the number of public lectures, non-credit bearing short courses, etc. which can also be seen as "Lifelong Learning" activities provided by universities. The final version of the OECD Report on Adult Learning in Austria stated in the year 2004 that the activities of Austrian Universities in the field of adult education and continuing education respectively are "so far very small" and that "it seems unlikely that, given the preoccupation with the Bologna changes, they will substantially increase their participation in traditional adult education"(OECD 2004). This statement does not seem to be in line with the appraisal of the authors of the underlying background report who expected, according to "the 2002 University Act, which harmonises the organisation and study legislation, the study system (Bologna Process) and the autonomy of the universities concerning study organisation, increasing activities" of the Austrian universities in Continuing Education and Training (Schlögl / Schneeberger 2003, p. 42). The pilot projects organised at Austrian universities to improve access particularly for employed people and people with care obligations (through e-learning, evening and/or weekend classes) are explicitly mentioned. In fact, the number of enrolments in university courses (Universitätslehrgänge) at public Universities in Austria rose from 6,946 in the year 2000 to 15,299 in the year 2010 (AQA 2012, p. 17). In the winter term 2010, the university courses in Austria numbered 877 (BMWF 2011, p. 22).

Short history of distance education and use of ICT in ULLL in Austria

The **Austrian Association for Distance Education** (Der Österreichische Fernschulverband – ÖFV) was founded in 1970 and defines as its goal the best possible promotion of distance education. Members are mainly schools for vocational education and training, which with their distance education programmes prepare learners for formal exams or offer continuing professional development.

As for university studies, apart from some provision by the universities themselves, the "**Zentrum für Fernstudien Österreich**" [Centre for Distance Education Austria] with its six branches offers study programmes at university level in cooperation with the FernUniversität Hagen (Germany) and the University of Linz. Of course, those interested in pursuing university studies can also study at the Open University (UK) or at other institutes of distance learning.

Research on new media in ULLL

Since 2010, the Forum New Media, which is the platform for dialogue between research and practice in Austria for this area, has been focusing on three themes: "quality", "didactics in university teaching and learning", and "technology", each in the context of teaching and learning related to New Media. Three working groups across HEI have been established. The R&D Call 2012 of the Forum New Media shows which themes are considered relevant in this year:

- High quality eLearning in university teaching
- Exchange of models for didactics in university teaching
- Technology supported innovation in teaching.

Recent publications / events show what is considered to be relevant for discussion in the field: quality assurance and quality development in teaching using New Media (quality management models); lifetime podcasting; organisational development in HEI needed to implement the use of New Media; pedagogical concepts needed for e-learning; development of a new learning culture (models of media-based learning settings for the promotion of self-directed learning); open education resources.

Practices of new media in ULLL

No survey at national level has yet been done. From our own experience in the field, it must be stated that it is difficult to give a general overview of the use of ICT in ULLL, as each

institution is independent and it is assumed that mostly all learning platforms are used to offering some kind of blended learning.

Current means of Dialogue

At national level

In 2000, the former Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (now two separate Ministries) started the **initiative "New Media in Teaching"** (Neue Medien in der Lehre – NML). From 2001 - 2006, 49 individual projects implemented to improve the quality of teaching through the use of new media were financed by the Ministry (Neue Medien 2008). Two examples of projects developed at the University of Vienna are: "mathe online" and "geschichte online". The goal of the former is to contribute to the development of adequate standards for up to date maths education in (secondary) schools, teacher training colleges, universities and adult education (second chance courses) by providing a variety of learning materials and tools such as dynamical diagrams, interactive tests, links, online tools (calculators, function graphs), etc. ("mathe online 2009").

The latter provides online modules for internet-based teaching in the historical sciences, historical didactics and in historical/cultural study courses ("geschichte online", year not specified). Through the implicit train-the-trainer concept, university teachers are also introduced to gradually using new media and e-learning.

In 2003, the Association "**Forum neue Medien in der Lehre Austria (fnm-austria)**" (Forum Neue Medien 2012) was founded. The Universities (including representatives of University Lifelong Learning) and the Universities of Applied Sciences were represented in the governing boards. Since then, several projects have been implemented. In 2009, federal public funding stopped and a strategy development process was initiated; the following year, a new governing board was elected. In 2011 the statutes were revised (in particular the membership categories) and the fnm-austria-portal was restructured.

Today, the Association "Forum neue Medien in der Lehre Austria" is an established body and an active network, which offers the development and dissemination of programmes and models in the areas of IT-supported educational programmes across institutions. In its structure and provision (operating nation-wide and across HEI), it is unique in the German-speaking countries as an eLearning network actively promoting the widespread use of New Media in HE Teaching and Learning. Members include Austrian HEI as well as individuals and companies.

Initiatives include:
- an eLearning certificate for staff of HEI and other educational providers;
- an eScience website of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, providing information and resources in the field of New Media in research and teaching in Austrian HEI;
- an initiative for New Media in Graz (iUNIg), providing a platform for continuous exchange between eLearning actors in the field and joint events.

This forum is actively stimulating the dialogue between research and practice in the field of learning and teaching in HE using New Media. It publishes its own R&D calls.

As a result of the initiatives outlined above, many Austrian universities have implemented "blended learning" as a concept in their regular degree programmes: to improve the quality of teaching, a broad range of digital media and materials are being used, such as streaming of lectures (live via video, audio or download) (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung 2011, p. 134-135). In 2010 over 50% of Austrian universities also provided e-learning supported classes. Furthermore, Web 2.0 applications are currently being tested for example to be used as instruments for student counselling and guidance.

The Academy for New Media at the University of Graz – an example at institutional level

The **Academy for New Media and Knowledge Transfer** is the responsibility of the Vice-Rector for Studies and Teaching. The Academy is a service centre:
- operating across all faculties for the support of instructors and students in the use of educational concepts and technologies to motivate them to use the New Media in teaching and learning;
- supporting the university management in strategy development in the area of educational technology;
- creating networks and developing partnerships within the University of Graz and beyond

The Academy has four sections:
- *Content management*: working on topics in the area of digital knowledge transfer; for example further development of "iTunes U" and the Podcast-Portal at the University; recording of lectures as well as other events; and train-the-trainer programmes. Furthermore, this department was responsible for supporting the introduction of Moodle at the University of Graz in 2010/11.
- *Competence portfolio*: this section developed a portfolio model mainly for students; students are being offered special workshops and/or have the possibility to use this portfolio online.
- *Teaching with the New Media*: focusing on didactical approaches for the use of New Media in teaching and learning including peer-to-peer support, for example E-Tutors and train-the-trainer-workshops for instructors.
- *Quality management and innovation*: further development of IT-supported teaching and learning based on a holistic quality model and understanding. Models and instruments for quality assurance are developed and piloted. Concrete initiatives are: the "knowledge landscape", offering a description of a wide range of activities pertaining to and resources for using New Media in teaching and learning at the University of Graz (http://wissenslandkarte.uni-graz.at). A special initiative is "Der ELCH" (E-Learning Champion), an award for best practice projects in eLearning at the University of Graz, demonstrating the innovative use of Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Videos. The goal is to promote interactive learning settings, informal and co-operative learning processes to best prepare students for a future career in the

academic world. This initiative is sponsored by the Vice-Rector for Studies and Teaching.

Members of staff of the Academy offer courses in theory and practice in New Media for teaching staff and degree students.

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