

National report for Austria

By Ortner, Christina, Paus-Hasebrink, Ingrid

Contributors: Christian Dirninger, Ingrid Geretschlaeger, Bernhard Jungwirth, Jean-Luc Patry, Christian Swertz

Contribution to the European report:

Stald, G. and Haddon, L. (2008) *Cross-Cultural Contexts of Research: Factors Influencing the Study of Children and the Internet in Europe*. A report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

Universities and Disciplines

There are 22 public universities in 7 cities in Austria. There are 9 private universities and 12 universities of applied sciences. Universities of applied sciences lay a greater emphasis on teaching but some of them do some kind of research as well.

An Institute or Department of Communications exists at three universities in Austria (Vienna, Salzburg, Klagenfurt). They all treat communication science as a discipline within the social sciences and not the humanities. "Theatre-, Film- and Media Science" can be studied at the University of Vienna. The science community in the field of communication science in Austria is rather small. Some of the universities of applied sciences offer courses similar to Media or Communications but they all have an emphasis on teaching media production and journalism. One of the private universities (Webster University Vienna) teaches Media Communications (only Bachelors degrees). Neither IT& Society nor New Media are regular disciplines within universities in Austria. However, there is a centre on Information and Communication Technology and Society (ICT&S) at the University of Salzburg that conducts research on Human Computer Interaction as well as on the social use of ICTs. It also offers a Master's degree programme. Informatics is well established; there are 8 universities in Austria in 6 cities that offer different programmes for informatics. The graduates get the degree "Diplomingenieur", which is a degree of technical sciences. There are related courses at the universities of applied sciences, and the private universities. Webster University Vienna teaches Computer Science (only Bachelor).

National Data Collected

The Government does not collect any data on the internet and children. There are two surveys that collect data on the use of online media in Austria four times a year. Both studies are conducted and financed by market research institutions. One of them is the AIM (Austrian Internet Monitor) conducted by Integral und Fessel GfK since 1998; the second one is the GfK Online Monitor conducted by Fessel GfK since 1996. There is also a survey called Media-Analyses that collects overall data on the usage of different kinds of media. It is repeated every year and also includes data on internet usage since 1997. This survey is conducted by an association called "ARGE Media-Analyse". Members of this association are media companies (newspaper, radio, TV) and media and advertising agencies. Short summaries of all three surveys are available online; detailed results must be paid for. The sample of all three survey mentioned above (AIM, GfK Online Monitor and Media-Analyses) include adolescents of the age of 14 and older. In all summaries available there is no information on single ages (14 year-olds, 15 year-olds etc.) but only on the group of 14-19-year-olds.

There is one survey that regularly collects data on adolescent' usage of the internet but the results are only available for people who pay a certain amount of money (at least €800). This is an overall survey of lifestyle, interests, consumers behaviour and leisure time activities of young people between 12 and 24 years that includes questions on media usage and the use of the internet. The survey has been conducted for many years now. There are no regularly repeated studies.

Institutional processes in applying to conduct research

All research proposals are checked by a central research service within the respective university concerning formal and judicial aspects and the contribution of the university to EU

proposals. The research programme, the research questions, the methodology, etc. are not checked.

Pressures to conduct research

There is some pressure that is not directly articulated towards individual researchers but results from the way that the annual budget is set up. Every university has to document the research activities of every employed researcher in a data base (fofok). This database is regularly checked by the ministry and is the basis for arguments when negotiating the budget for the University with the ministry. There is a similar procedure at the departmental level: every department gets additional money for research projects with external funding, so there is a pressure to increase funded projects. Moreover every department has to sign an agreement on the objectives that they want to reach in the next two years. The departments themselves sign such agreements with different sections, and the leader/s of the sections sign agreements on objectives with every researcher working in their section. These agreements are the basis for internal evaluation of the departments. Up to now there have been no concrete consequences if a department has not reached the goals in the agreement. However, in future it shall have consequences for the budget.

Professors are evaluated after several years, which in very seldom cases may lead to cancelling their chair (though we do not know if this has ever happened). Universities are not under pressure to cooperate with industry. There is pressure to find external funding but this need not come from industry. However, the possibilities for governmental funding are rather limited and much of the research council money goes to the natural sciences and technical sciences. It is also easier for these disciplines to cooperate with industry. Conference do often find sponsors.

Factors influencing the orientation of research

The Austrian Ministry for Science and Research regularly announces special research programmes including the social sciences. Most of them focus on structural issues, mobility of scientists, scientific career models, publications, science communication etc. Only few have a specific *thematic* focus (e.g., on democracy in the EU). However, up to now thematic programmes have not addressed issues concerning ICTs. Collaborations with industry happens from time to time, but not very often. However researchers are selective with what they take on. There are two major research councils in Austria: the FWF and the FFG. The FWF which is responsible for funding of fundamental research does not ask researchers to bid for specific thematic programmes. However, the programmes of the FFG rarely have an emphasis on issues that are related to social sciences. There are some programmes for ICTs but they all ask for technological research (development of new technologies in this field).

National Research Traditions

We have a rather weak tradition of quantitative research in comparison to Germany. This is not true for other disciplines in the social sciences: for example in the historical sciences in Austria the tradition of quantitative research is rather strong especially in fields like historical demography, finance, economy or elections. This is also true for the political sciences and education (especially in Salzburg, to some extent in Vienna). In Austrian educational sciences there is a strong tradition of action research. Qualitative research also has a strong tradition. This is especially true for Salzburg. Other disciplines in the social sciences are rather dominated by quantitative approaches although some do also have a parallel tradition of qualitative research, for instance in the historical sciences.

In Austria media research took off with printed mass media (newspapers); this started in the 1920s/ 30s (Fabris 1983¹). Audio-visual/ electronic mass media got a place on the agenda in the 1950s but had little relevance until the 1980s (until then the discipline in Austria mainly focused on the history of media with a strong emphasis on the press). In the mid-1980s they

¹ Fabris, Hans Heinz (1983): Österreichs Beitrag zu Kommunikationswissenschaft und -forschung: Zwischen Aufbruch und Verhinderung. In: Publizistik, 2/1983, p. 155-178.

became an important issue. (Randl/ Monschein 1996²). At the start of 1990s some Austrian students in social or communication sciences did their master theses on the use of telephones. Since then studies on interpersonal communication via telephone or mobile have been conducted. Gradually mobile communication has gained attention. However, studies of interpersonal communication are still not considered very important.

The first studies on issues concerning the internet in the field of social sciences were conducted at the beginning of the 1990s in Austria. In the first years work on this topic was mainly organised by students. During the 1990s surveys concerning the use of the internet, increased and since 2000 there has been good deal of research conducted in this field.

Sources of Funding for Research

A survey from 2004 conducted by Statistik Austria says that there search in social sciences conducted at public universities, private universities or universities of applied science are to a large extent financed by governmental authorities or research councils (more than 90%). Commercial companies finance about 2.5% of research done at universities in the field of social sciences and 1.7% is funded by private, non-commercial organisations/ initiatives. 1.6% of the money needed for this kind of research comes from the EU. (Source: Statistik Austria 2004, http://www.statistik-austria.at/web_de/static/hochschulsektor_finanzierung_der_ausgaben_fuer_fe_2004_nach_wissenschaftsz_023674.pdf).

There are some (market) research institutes that conduct surveys to sell to companies and sometimes commercial enterprises (telecom) pay market research institutes to conduct such surveys for them. However, the results of these studies are not publicly available (except for brief summaries). Sometimes companies ask researchers at universities to do specific research for them in the field of ICTs and make the results available for the public (in particular we only know one project like this).

There are very few studies on children's and adolescent's use of the internet. A reason for this may be that in Austria – unlike Germany – private television was introduced very late (2001). Until then the only TV programme for children in Austria was offered by the public service broadcaster. Therefore the awareness of problematic media content for children and the protection of kids is traditionally rather low in Austria. This limited awareness of problems related to the children's use of media may influence the ways in which children's use of the internet and online media are discussed. As a result of the missing public debate and governmental initiatives there are very few institutions that are interested in funding research on these issues

Nevertheless, a significant part of the limited studies available is funded by the Government, mostly by regional governmental authorities and some by national ministries. Yet, none of these studies are conducted by academics working at universities. To a large extent these studies are done by market research institutes, some by official or private institutions dealing with media pedagogy. It is remarkable, that there is not a single study financed by a research council. Academic work in universities is mainly done by students in the form of master's projects. Only a few researchers deal with media children und adolescents. The small number of researchers working in this field deal with various aspects of (public) communication. Only very few have an emphasis on children and the media. Research concerning new media, the internet and online media pedagogies is largely interested in their potential for learning processes, especially in school (E-Learning). The focus is on cognitive aspects; the general usage, handling and experiences of children and adolescents with the internet or online media, and the social consequences of new technologies play a minor role.

² Randl, Fritz/ Moschein, Wolfgang (1996): 50 Jahre Kommunikationswissenschaft an der Universität Wien (1942 -1992). Teil 2: Analyse des Lehrangebots and der Abschlussarbeiten. In: Medien & Zeit, 2/1996, p. 14-40.

Political initiatives influencing research

There was an initiative by a commercial organisation, the Telekom to encourage the use of the Internet – in this case Web 2.0 applications like Wikis and Weblogs – in Austrian schools. This project was strongly pushed by the Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture. The evaluation of the work with these tools in schools was done by a team headed by Paus-Hasebrink at the University of Salzburg.

Particular debates and concerns about children

The commercialisation of childhood is rarely discussed in the media, mostly when there is a special event (e.g. an exhibition of trade marks for children or an EU initiative on advertisement for kids). Some concerns are also voiced in parental papers and in media education settings. For example, the media education consultancy offers a special module for parents' evenings on "Children and Consumption" as well as in further education courses for early childhood educators- "Kids do not need to have everything they want to have".

There was an initiative to define children's rights in the Austrian constitution. The institute for democracy in Lower Austria offers courses for pedagogues on political education and the media-educational advisory centre at the Lower Austrian State Academy discusses political participation (through media) of young people in courses for social education work and so forth. Media coverage on this topic is not very extensive and the academic debate is also weak. The safer internet initiative tries to raise awareness for online-risks and risks of mobile phones. The awareness for problems concerning other media is low. Advertisement in schools is not discussed in a proper way; this is also true for the problem of bullying (by mobile phone).

Case Studies

"Lernen mit Web 2.0"

Telekom Austria (an Austrian telecommunication company for telephone, mobile phone, internet, TV on the internet and IP TV) started a project to encourage the use of Web 2.0 (Wikis and Weblogs) in Austrian schools. In this project several schools tested these applications in teaching. Telekom Austria asked Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink if she would like to conduct an evaluation study. In this case it was important to consider the experiences of all the people involved in the project, therefore a quantitative questionnaire was filled out by all pupils, teachers and principals of the schools/ classes who worked with the Wikis and Weblogs. Moreover class interviews and guided interviews with selected pupils, teachers and principals were conducted to identify problematic aspects. We choose people who had either had very positive or very negative experiences. The results showed that qualitative methods were able to generate more meaningful results. The age of the children was fixed. The school taking part in the project and testing Wikis and Weblogs in teaching were not chosen by the evaluation team but by the project leader.

The project was initiated by the Telekom Austria (an Austrian telecommunication company for telephone, mobile phone, internet, TV on the internet and IP TV) who paid all costs including the evaluation study.