

On our way to sustainability

Austrian steps towards an ESD at the beginning of the UN Decade

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Two initiatives by the

***Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture &
Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and
Water Management***

1.
commissioned a group of experts to establish a
framework concept on the subject of ESD
2.
initiated a dialogue process for the development of
the Austrian *ESD-Strategy*

Initial Starting Points in Austria

The Austrian Federal Government adopts the *Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development* in April 2002

è a national milestone in the acceptance of political responsibility

The paper describes tendencies running contrary to the concept of SD

Such tendencies must be counteracted if we are to avoid their irreversible negative effects

è There is a need of “*a fundamental reorientation in politics, society and the economy encompassing all spheres of life*” (Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development, 2002, p. 11).

One of the most important prerequisites for the successful implementation:

è a common communication basis between all actors and participating groups

è Unfortunately, a consensus agreement with regard to *ESD* currently does not exist!

Five Minimum Standards on ESD

1.

At least the *economic, ecological and social dimensions* must be thought of in unison and in the sense of sustainable development with respect to each.

Five Minimum Standards on ESD

2.

The position must prove to be democratic in the sense that it inherently contains *participative elements*.

Five Minimum Standards on ESD

3.

The position must prove to be *humane*, for which it must at least be in accord with human rights protections – also against the background of global development.

Five Minimum Standards on ESD

4.

The position must open possibilities for *questioning any standpoint from multiple perspectives*, including the position holder's own perspective

Five Minimum Standards on ESD

5.

The position must offer ideas as to how it contributes to facilitating a new quality in *the ability to act on an individual level* within the sense of the first three items above.

Results of the Dialogue Process Regarding the Austrian Strategy

1.

The majority currently still perceives ESD as environmental education supplemented by social aspects.

Results of the Dialogue Process Regarding the Austrian Strategy

2.

In comparison to environmental education, ESD is perceived primarily as the reformulation and dissemination of content and hardly ever as the rethinking of education itself.

Results of the Dialogue Process Regarding the Austrian Strategy

3.

Sectoral and institutional thinking determines the individual positions on the issue of future viability for an ESD.

Results of the Dialogue Process Regarding the Austrian Strategy

4.

The actors currently perceive themselves as having only little space to manoeuvre creatively, thus no clear motivation to assume responsibility for specific initiatives can be discerned.

Results of the Dialogue Process Regarding the Austrian Strategy

5.

Participating in an education initiative for sustainable development is understood as an interesting opportunity to legitimise sectoral initiatives rather than as a chance to pursue a vital undertaking together with others.

***Results of the Dialogue Process
Regarding the Austrian Strategy***

6.

In the absence of a common view on minimum standards, minimum standards remain undefinable.

***Results of the Dialogue Process
Regarding the Austrian Strategy***

7.

Evaluation is seen rather as a justification measure than as an instrument for promoting quality.

***The Desire for an ESD as the Problem
of Breaking with Entrenched Action
Co-ordination Procedures***

In Austria, the political and societal requirements of an *ESD* have already been juridically codified through central legal decisions and have since become firmly anchored in laws and decrees.

è An *ESD* desiring to live up to its own demands must therefore change the existing structures which continue to block fulfilment of these already legally binding goals.

è The notion that a change in course towards an *ESD* can be achieved using existing steering mechanisms proves to be the actual heart of the problem.

The Open Question of the Institutionalisation of an ESD in Austria

è What is required is a coordinating institution with the ability

1. to assume control and coordination functions based on “real-life” experience;
2. at the same time it would also need to build links between the various system levels (municipal, state and federal) and
3. represent the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors in an equal manner.

Three central questions regarding the institutionalisation of an ESD:

1.

How might such an institution bundle the many efforts towards an *ESD* without reducing the autonomous potential of each of the actors involved?

Three central questions regarding the institutionalisation of an ESD:

2.

How might such an institution see to it that a link between the various system levels (municipal, state and federal) is built up while at the same time ensuring that the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors are all represented equally?

***Three central questions regarding
the institutionalisation of an ESD:***

3.

How might such an institution rely on democratic-participative negotiation processes while at the same time remaining innovative and capable of action?

(Most of the time lengthy negotiation processes required to reach majority-supported goals block the intended activities)

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