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National Integration and the Idea of “Zweckrationalität”

“Public History” and History Teaching in the second Republic of Austria

Society can be subdivided into several subsystems, which contributes to its continuity and further development. The individual is not isolated, not completely autonomous, as the representatives of the Enlightenment claimed. Identity is, instead, a dynamic process of adapting the inner world to the outside, to the external world. The psychologist Edward E. Sampson writes that the “other is a vital co-creator of our mind, our self, and our society”.¹ A simple structural model, created by Dieter Geulen und Klaus Hurrelmann,² illustrates the interaction of individual and social structures. This model connects the social micro level with the social macro level. Thereby, it distinguishes four inter-related areas: The first area of the model describes the formation of individual identity, the second area the social interaction, which is mentioned, inter alia, by Edward E. Sampson. In the third area we find the institutions within which social interaction takes place. These institutions include families, schools or the educational system, workplaces, or leisure activities. Finally, the fourth area describes the entire society: the economic, social, political, and cultural structure of society.

It is obvious that the educational system is important in this model. It socializes the younger generation according to certain values, norms, and role expectations.³ History teaching can support this process because it plays a key role in the development of responsibility (*Mündigkeit*). Simultaneously, there is also the danger of indoctrination through historical legitimation of political action or by evoking a certain student behavior. A contradiction of the Enlightenment may exist that we can find, even today, in the educational system – despite progressive didactic models or, maybe, only allegedly progressive models.

1 Edward P. Sampson, *A dialogic account of human nature* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 109.

2 Dieter Geulen and Klaus Hurrelmann, “Zur Problematik einer umfassenden Sozialisationsstheorie,” in *Handbuch der Sozialisationsforschung*, eds. Klaus Hurrelmann and Dieter Geulen (Weinheim: Beltz, 1980), 64.

3 Niklas Luhmann, *Das Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002). Klaus-Jürgen Tillmann, *Sozialisationsstheorien. Eine Einführung in den Zusammenhang von Gesellschaft, Institution und Subjektwerdung*, 15th ed. (Reinbek b. H.: Rowohlt, 2007), 108–115.

In this context, two periods of history teaching – with regard to the politics of history or “public history” – can be distinguished in Austria since the end of the Second World War: first, the “period of democratic indoctrination” and second, the “period of active citizenship”. Both periods are marked by contradictions.

The *period of democratic indoctrination* is characterized by the formation of national identity after the Second World War. History should legitimize the delimitation from Germany, which was burdened by National Socialist crimes. In this context, history should also prove the “victim thesis” (*Opferthese*). Textbooks, for example, described the Austrian identity as a contrast to National Socialism. Thus, the Austrian identity consisted of harmony and good nature, as well as an interest in culture. Austrian people were also characterized by their alleged need for peace. A black-and-white image was created, a contrast between Austrian identity and National Socialism.⁴ For this reason, differentiated views of the past were impossible. The textbook, “*Unser Österreich*”⁵ illustrates this contrast of “good” and “bad”. It was certified in 1955 for the “*Hauptschule*” (which is approximately equivalent to secondary school) and includes all the mentioned official elements of identity.

The textbook’s authors consider the Austrian identity as a result of the past and imagine a line of continuity from the past to the present. Therefore, the “peaceful coexistence in a state” for more than a hundred of years would have formed the “nature and character of the Austrians”. Moreover, the Austrians “have always understood how to unify peoples peacefully” and “to bridge differences”.⁶ Due to their love of culture and music or, so to speak, due to their artistic gene, the Austrians gave also birth to many poets and thinkers, to musicians, painters, sculptors, and architects. And not only artists were acclaimed but also “inventors and researchers, doctors of medicine and technicians, [...] who are recognized around the whole world”.⁷ An illustration in the textbook “*Mein Österreich*” clearly shows this line of continuity that is drawn from the past into the present (cf. Fig.10.1). During the Nazi regime, Carry Hauser, who drew this engraving, had fled to Switzerland. In 1947, he returned to Austria. His personal

4 Oliver Rathkolb, *Die paradoxe Republik. Österreich 1945–2005*, (Wien: Haymon, 2005), 17–59. Susanne Breuss, Karin Liebhart, and Andreas Pribersky. *Inszenierungen. Stichwörter zu Österreich* (Wien: Sonderzahl, 1995). Thomas Hellmuth, *Historisch-politische Sinnbildung. Geschichte – Geschichtsdidaktik – politische Bildung* (Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau Verlag, 2014), 88.

5 Arbeitsgemeinschaft.

6 Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Bildung und Frauen, mit der das NMS Umsetzungspaket, die Verordnung, mit welcher die Lehrpläne der Volksschule und der Sonderschulen erlassen werden, sowie die Verordnung über die Lehrpläne der allgemeinbildenden höheren Schulen geändert werden. Beschlussreifer Entwurf vom 4. Februar 2016, 6–7.

7 Arbeitsgemeinschaft, 6.



Figure 10.1: Illustration by Carry Hauser in the textbook “Unser Österreich”: a line of continuity is drawn from the past into the present (VBK, Verwertungsgesellschaft bildende Kunst, Fotografie u. Choreografie, Wien).

history explains his specific perspective on the past: it was important to create a specific history to differentiate Austria from Germany and National Socialism.

In the Austrian context, historical continuity also means appreciating certain royal houses. Thus, the Babenberger and Habsburger were closely connected with the “fate of our country for more than a hundred years”.⁸ Paradoxically, historical figures who fought against any democratic impulse were included in the canon of knowledge and also celebrated. For example, Field Marshal Radetzky has become an essential part of collective memory, despite his role in the suppression of the revolution in 1848. To this day the Radetzkmarsch, composed by Johann Strauss Junior, is a highlight of the New Year’s concert in Vienna. In contrast, Austria’s early democrats are forgotten; they are kept secret. Worth mentioning are, for example, Austrian Jacobins such as Franz Hebenstreit. He fought for revolutionary changes in the Habsburg monarchy and was executed in 1795 for high treason. We do not find any mention of him in textbooks – not least, because revolution seems to be too radical for the Austrian character. The historian, Hubert Christian Ehalt, writes:

Mozart, the creative and unyielding humanist and follower of Enlightenment, was belittled as ‘cute Wolferl’; the freedom movement of the first ‘Wiener Moderne’ was named ‘Josephinism’ after the monarch Joseph II [...]. Austrian history is especially insidious: First, the democrats and resistance fighters were eliminated – physically eliminated; they were chased away and murdered. Second, historical research and history teaching prevented the exploration, perception, and presentation of this part of Austrian history on a larger public scale [...]. Finally, the destruction of democracy and democratic potential is [in a positive sense] redefined as a lack of will for resistance and – so to speak – to an anthropological component of the ‘Austrian soul’ (*österreichische Seele*), [...].⁹

And this soul is defined as a disposition of restraint, modesty, and silence. The textbook *Mein Österreich* illustrates this alleged disposition: Some people would characterize the Austrians as “slow and pleasant” but, in their way, they would “better achieve what is necessary. [...] We are not quick-tempered; we’ve learned to tolerate and – much more – we’ve learned patience.”¹⁰

The aim of history teaching was not education for active citizenship but the identification with the nation, specifically the second Austrian Republic. The younger generation should be indoctrinated, in order to form a democratic identity. For this purpose, manipulative mechanisms of education that were also used

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hubert Christian Ehalt, “Rehabilitierung des Demokraten der ersten Stunde,” *Die Presse*, June 28, 2010.

¹⁰ Arbeitsgemeinschaft, 9.

in authoritarian systems were initiated.¹¹ This contradiction is obviously typical in the early stages of the process of democratization.

The “period of democratic indoctrination” was replaced in the 1970s by the *period of active citizenship*. The politics of history focused on the development of *Mündigkeit*, in the tradition of Kant, on the development of responsibility. However, the necessary didactic foundation remained underdeveloped until the 1980s. In practice, history teaching was mostly limited to historical narratives and to the presentation of an alleged historical “truth”, which was reflected in historical textbooks. This “truth” was mostly affected in Austria by the consociational democracy. For a long time, the Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ) and the conservative Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) patched up all issues and conflicts, tried to find a minimal consensus in economic and social matters, and filled positions in public institutions with party members.¹² An example of this consensus is the Austrian civil war in 1934. The official explanation for this conflict was the *geteilte Schuld*, i.e., the Social Democrats and the conservative Christian Socialists shared the blame, even though historical research was of a different opinion.

Only during the last ten years has the didactics of history changed or, better, history didactics was recognized in Austria as a scientific discipline. Consequently, competency models boomed and became the subject of intense debate. They were implemented in the school curricula and claimed to give history teaching a social significance. A current example is a draft of the curriculum for the so-called “Sekundarstufe I”¹³; lower secondary schools for 10- to 14-year-old children. The students should practice competences; furthermore, the chronological order of historical topics is largely abolished and conceptual learning is implemented. Conceptual learning means that certain concepts reappear in various topics and school levels. Thereby, concepts enable teachers, as well as students, to structure the wide field of historical knowledge. In addition, the curriculum assigns the topics to different modules; inter alia we also find modules only for civic education.

The system of the curriculum can be illustrated by the following example, a module that deals with the topic “Migration from the nineteenth century to the present”. First, the module describes the competences: The students should describe, analyze, and interpret historical sources, perceive diverse perspectives, create historical narratives and use findings which were gained by working

11 Hellmuth, *Historisch-politische Sinnbildung*, 87–100.

12 Peter A. Ulram, “Politische Kultur der Bevölkerung,” in *Handbuch des politischen Systems Österreichs. Die Zweite Republik*. 3rd ed., eds. Herbert Dachs, Peter Gehrlich, Herbert Gottweis, Franz Horner, Helmut Kramer, Volkmar Lauber, Wolfgang C. Müller, and Emmerich Tälös, Emmerich (Wien: Manz’sche, 1997), 514–525.

13 Verordnung der Bundesministerin

with historical sources for orientation in society. Then, the curriculum defines the thematic focus. According to this, students have to understand, define, and differentiate between the terms “migration” and “integration”; they also have to compare global migration flows and to identify the causes of migration. It is also important to analyze the challenges that arise from migration and to discuss solutions. Finally, Austrian migration in the nineteenth century is focused by a historical approach called *Alltagsgeschichte*, a form of microhistory that focuses on daily life. It is a term that was broadly prevalent amongst German historians, particularly in the 1980s.

Of course, on the one hand, competency models can contribute to critical faculties and also – in the ideal case – to a political democratic resistance; in short, to the development of *Mündigkeit*. This means that knowledge should be applied to the development of society and that it is not only memorized. However, on the other hand, the utilitarian and economic tenor of bourgeois society is implicit in these competency models. The tension between *Mündigkeit* and utilitarianism will become clear because – at the very least – everything we learn must be socially and economically usable. It seems to be necessary to reflect that competency models will also enforce an idea of humanity that propagates the so-called *Zweckrationalität* (purpose rationality) – a term created by Max Weber.¹⁴ *Zweckrationalität* evolved during the eighteenth century, as a result of the enforcement of bourgeois society.¹⁵ In this context, broad knowledge loses its importance; it is disintegrated into loose fragments and often replaced by superficiality.

A caricature, published in the daily newspaper *Der Standard* illustrates this problem (and the position of the artist is not really clear): A pitiable, bespectacled, and non-sporty boy collapses under the burden of heavy books or under the burden of knowledge (cf. Fig.10.2). The caricature supposes that society’s knowledge, in other words, its cultural heritage, restricts mental and physical movement. However, the very sporty girl minces to school, balancing knowledge like an acrobat. She is healthy because she has less knowledge. And, therefore, she is also ready to perform. Idleness connected with reading books is reprehensible. Imagine that someone reads “Waverley”, by Walter Scott, a 600-page book. In our society, that is, in a meritocracy, the question of utilization is obvious.

But we must be aware of the risk that the cultural context may be lost with loose fragments of knowledge. An example are teaching materials related to the

¹⁴ Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 6th ed., ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 404.

¹⁵ Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois. Between History and Literature* (London: Verso, 2013).



Figure 10.2: The burden of knowledge? – “Der Standard” (may 12, 2015).

topic “historical competence for social orientation”¹⁶; in German, this is called *historische Orientierungskompetenz*. This means that history should enable learners to orient themselves in a confusing world. Therefore, the title of these teaching materials is *Geschichte nutzen*; in English: “to use history”. In order to avoid misunderstanding: Without a doubt, the teaching materials are innovative and offer good ideas for history lessons. But we also find the mentioned problem of loose fragments. An example illustrates this¹⁷: One proposal for teaching deals with different forms of strikes. Inter alia, three pictures have to be compared. For this, only a small text box with working knowledge is provided. At least the image analysis must, inevitably, remain superficial. Therefore numerous questions remain unanswered. For example, what goals were pursued with strikes in the nineteenth century? What was or is the function of street barricades? In short:

¹⁶ Heinrich Ammerer, Wolfgang Buchberger, and Johannes Brzobohaty, eds. *Geschichte nutzen. Unterrichtsbeispiele zur Förderung von historischer Orientierungskompetenz* (Wien: Edition polis, 2015).

¹⁷ Wolfgang Buchberger, “Geschichte nutzen. Unterrichtsbeispiele zur Förderung von historischer Orientierungskompetenz,” in *Geschichte nutzen. Unterrichtsbeispiele zur Förderung von historischer Orientierungskompetenz*, eds. Heinrich Ammerer, Wolfgang Buchberger, and Johannes Brzobohaty (Wien: Edition polis, 2015), 10–18.

The proposal for teaching does not really enlarge on the economic, social, and cultural context.

But social participation based on a differentiated view of social problems is not possible without a broad knowledge about such a context. This is one side of history teaching, which can be called “political utilitarian function”. The other side is an interest in history beyond functional thinking, something that I would term “history teaching for idleness”. Knowledge that has hardly any significance for a meritocracy, because it seems to be functionless, becomes more important. Then, history teaching has to enable self-discovery and self-reflection, as well as satisfaction with one’s own existence. Of course, satisfaction is not to be equated with complacency and immobility. On the contrary, satisfaction means a mental state that is characterized by great interest in the world and in society. Beyond a functionalism determined by economy, the study of an artwork or of literature, for example, opens up an intellectual space. And, in this space, someone can achieve great pleasure, because only historical and political education enables understanding. And, at the same time, understanding makes it possible to gain insight into the (political) structures of society and – as a consequence of this process – to participate in politics and society.¹⁸

The question arises whether an alternative public history will prevail. This public history should be – in addition to its socio-critical function – an end in itself, as a foundation for individual satisfaction. In this way, history teaching could enrich a society focused on performance. Without a doubt, this is difficult to achieve, because we are all socialized in a bourgeois society and therefore trapped in the idea of *Zweckrationalität*. But we have to remember that the idea of “history teaching for idleness” is also found in bourgeois society: A watercolor by Honoré Daumier, “The Connoisseur” (1860–1865), shows a bourgeois sitting in a room crammed with artworks (cf. Fig.10.3). He admires a reproduction of the Venus of Milo, removed from reality or, better, temporarily removed from the bourgeois public to be prepared for being successful in society. Therefore, idleness in terms of enjoyment of art and – in a broader sense – of history, must be considered as a necessary part of modern society and not only as a romantic attitude. Public History could illustrate this context and encourage creative history didactics beyond narrow functionalism.

¹⁸ Thomas Hellmuth, “About Competences, or – instead – how about Education?,” *Public History Weekly* 3, no. 27 (2015). doi: 10.1515/phw-2015-4536.



Figure 10.3: “Le Connaisseur” (Honoré Daumier, 1860–65, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection).

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