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**BACK TO THE FUTURE,
NOW.**



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Parties or parties ? Youth participation when rights fit the duties.

"I don't really have an opinion about youth participation, Europe and politics. If you want me to have one I can say whatever you prefer..." This is Tobias from Vienna, 23 years, who was hanging out with his Spanish friend and skating in Wolskgarten park. "I didn't vote at the last elections [ndr. 2009, European Parliament and 2008, national Parliament], I think politics in Austria is just boring...Politicians say their blah blah and they act all the same. I think more about my soup. However, if you can work at

16 you can even vote at 16, don't you?". "I'm 16 and I think that what is important for me is party! " says a smiling Kathrin, a young blond teen ager relaxing few meters further with a cigarette and a pair of friends. "I didn't know that Austria was the only country in the European Union to allow 16 aged voting [ndr. the Austrians were the youngest voters in Europe in the last EP elections], she adds, "and I don't really care about it..." Niklas, her 17 friend, explains better their point of view: "I went to vote for

the first time in elections 2009. Well, actually I just wanted to go out, it was something new for me. I didn't really care about the politicians. We received some information at school about the elections, but only related on how to vote, not really about the meaning of voting."

At the other side of the same park, we found a new point of view, from someone having both a foreigner and a local perspective. "I'm Niko, I'm 22 and I'm half American and half Austrian" he said, "I voted for the first time



in U.S. elections 2008. I was 20, and I think 18 could be an age in which you are mature enough to vote. When you are younger than 18 you don't really have your own opinion about political stuff, and you are easily influenced by your family or the media. I'm interested in politics, but I don't really agree in lowering the voting age."

Certainly not a sample based on research about youth, these opinions are just first impressions coming from young Austrian citizens met in a summer afternoon in Vienna. However, the different perspectives come out from the interviews offer a good starting point to reflect about youth participation in civil society within the country, and probably all over Europe.

To go into this issue, we asked Maria Letter, Policy Offer of the Austrian National Youth Council and she provided us few data and information on the subject from an institutional perspective.

Austria is in fact the only Member State of the European Union that allows voting under 18. The vote at 16 was introduced for the parliamentary election in 2008. Previously the situation regarding the electoral age was not uniformly regulated throughout the country, since the elections on the local and the regional level were ruled by different laws of the federal states.

The Austrian National Youth Council started promoting this idea in 2005, opening an analysis of the voting behavior of young people (between 16 and 18 years old) at the regional elections in Vienna. The results of the investigation showed arguments against and in favor of lowering the electoral age, but the ANYC found the PROs more realistic and they launched several campaigns in order to lobby for the issue. The most important points the ANYC wanted to remark both in the campaign and during our interview are in fact more than a few. They think that young people are able to act responsibly and to reflect their own behavior; young citizens make knowledge-based decisions and are interested in politics and want to get reliable information. So, they should have rights that fit their duties.

From an institutional point of view, the lowering of the electoral age was mentioned in two chapters of the government policy statement which was signed in January 2007. The Council of Ministers adopted the changes in March 2007, the Parliament did the same in June. According to the Austrian Constitution all Federal States had to adopt these rules. So, the law is here, but something is still missing. The lack of civic education at school is on the ground: the ANYC started lobbying

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.....

on this issue as well, but at the moment the Federal States can decide differently and it seems not to be a priority within the schools program reforms. Also non-formal civic education should be seen as an adequate sustain for youth empowerment but this is not the situation at the moment.

An additional investment into democratic participation of young people is needed within the country, as the lowering age is starting the debate in other nations, as United Kingdom, and Austria could be the reference for the issue.

One way ticket ?

Words by

Benjamin Bosshard, Reda Kazlaite, Sara Drakovi.

Photos by

Wojciech Gajewski

PEOPLE

On 20th of June we are commemorating the international day of refugees. The situation of immigrants and asylum seekers is especially tough in Austria. Our story has come to life on the streets of Vienna. What do people think the future will bring ?



We talked to Kadir (20, Turkish) in his Pizzeria in Vienna.

You have a foreign background and own a turkish restaurant in Vienna. How do you think, the immigrants feel about Austrians attitude towards them?

Kadir: "Very Good! All of them like living here and feel treted extremely well by Austrians.« As your face seems very turkish, have you ever had a bad situation with Austrians?"

Kadir: Thinks for a long moment. No."

« Did they never tease you, make fun of you?

Kadir: »No!« Answers very deciseve.

Did they ever say you should leave?

Kadir: "No. They like having a multicultural city with people from all over the world! Some of my austrian friends are even very courious about turkish life. But in general, people from Vienna are not very interested and involved."

So, it's easy to imigrate at Vienna?

Kadir: Well.. mmh... I think Immigrants coming to Austria only can successfully asimilate when beeing supported by assimilated friends who are living here, many don't have. But in this case, shouldn't there be changed something in the future?

Kadir: " Well...« Thinks a long moment. »I'm sure, it will be better in the future.« It seems as he want to want to say something more.

»But I have no idea how things can change."

" I THINK IMMIGRANTS COMING TO AUSTRIA ONLY CAN SUCCESSFULLY ASIMILATE WHEN BEEING SUPPORTED BY ASSIMILATED FRIENDS WHO ARE LIVING HERE, MANY DON'T HAVE."



Florian (27, Austrian) shared some of his thoughts with us.

Vienna is a center for refugees, without doubts. No matter where you are going or which district you are living in, nearly everybody has immigrational background. Even my grand-grand-father was from Checkoslovakia. As you see, our nation is really international. Despite this, nowadays, Austria has one of the strictest immigration law which causes many problems. That's why we are here protesting againts discrimination of the immigrants.

If you would ask people on the street about

their opinion about the immigrants the answers would be mostly negative, especially about the Turks. The most success with integration have immigrants from Serbia and Poland.

To conclude, most problems are caused by the government. Since the right-wing change in 2000 many young immigrants are having problems to find employment.

Things are getting worse, mainly because of the worldwide economical crisis, problems that we already have will get worse. The elections are coming soon and I am sure all the right wing parties are going to argue in a very racist manner.

“ NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE GOING OR WHICH DISTRICT YOU ARE LIVING IN, NEARLY EVERYBODY HAS IMMIGRATIONAL BACKGROUND. EVEN MY GRAND-GRAND-FATHER WAS FROM CHECKOSLOVAKIA. ”



**Elizabeth
(54, Austrian) has a
very positive attitude
towards immigrants.**

Many people think, every african is a drug dealer, but not me! According to her, a diverse country is very important.

For example the economy would not work otherwise. Furthermore she lives nearby a turkish family and has a very good relationship with them. That is why she thinks well integrated people should not be asked to leave. Unfortunately, now there are too many immigrants

from the eastern european countries, she claims. They can not find work, so they are begging and are forced to become tiefs!

I especially fear passing through Ottakring, there are so many of them.« According to her opinion, it would be important to stop accepting people from these regions the future would not turn better. And for those who are already hier, she thinks, there should be more programs for youngsters to asimilate easier. If foreign youngsters are well integrated, everybody is profiting!

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We met Christian (25, Austrian) in one of Viennas streets by the river, where he was protesting against the strict Austrian immigration law that is disregarding the people's human rights on daily basis.

Christian thinks everybody should fight for the rights of immigrants. His fight is hap-

pening in a non-governmental organization, called Asyl in Not, where immigrants and asylum applicants get legal support and information on how to succeed in obtaining asylum in Austria. But the fight is far from easy. Austrian administration does not take the applicants seriously and accuses them of lying, so a lot of them are not successful and are being deported from Austria.

Generally Austrians are not informed on this matter and know only the stories that media wants them to know. In Christian's opinion the political parties are using the issue for political debate and media coverage but are not dealing with the problem.

The future for the youngsters looks bleak if people in Austria do not start caring for the

person next to them. It is high time for a change.

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When one starts this kind of a quest, one must be prepared that it is difficult for people to talk about such personal things to four complete strangers. It was hard enough to find people who could talk about their migrational experience but it was even harder not to offend them.

So at the end we spent most of our time talking to not very much informed Austrians. Unfortunately, immigrants were not keen on telling their story. After everything that has been said, one must ask oneself what would the future bring?

YOI



Story

The economical crisis created difficulties for many people in Europe but the group who have arguably suffered the most are young people aged 25 and under. In March 2010 more than 20% of young people were unemployed and of those who were lucky enough to have a job many were on short term contracts. Often graduates lack the skills and experience to find a job and in a time of fierce competition they cannot compete. In 2009 a lot of the young people with temporary contracts lost their jobs due to cut-backs and this therefore many young people faced uncertainty. In the short term it does not look good for European youngsters because not only is the private sector struggling financial but there are also huge cuts funding within the public sector as governments attempt to reduce their debt. The upside is that with only 15.6% of young people out of work; Austria's youth unemployment rate is below the EU-average. But still, young people in Austria are having a hard time finding a job and keeping it. Here's their story...

words by
Saskia, Jeroen, Ingrid,
Mihailo, Katrien.

Work !
What are you
waiting for ?!



A young person we chatted to was **Dominique**, 26 who works in Switzerland as a Project Manager and is enjoying a holiday in Vienna. Dominique always wanted to be a vet when he was younger but growing up his interest shifted towards working in media. He did a course in media marketing and worked during his studies combining three days working with two days studying. After graduating, he immediately found a job. “I think that it helped me a lot that I already had a job during my studies at university. I have not noticed many employment difficulties amongst young people, but maybe in Switzerland it is easier than here in Austria.”



Jana, 18 and **Andrea** 15 are enjoying their sunny Saturday outside. Jana always wanted to be a chef, but now she studies art. We asked them about their futures and Jana told us her dream job would be to work in the art sector but she thinks that it will be very hard to get work in this area. Andrea is also interested in art, especially music but she has not decided what her future occupation will be. They both have no plans to work while studying and they will be supported by their parents.



We met **Rike**, 25, a German Student of Comparative Literature. She left school with poor grades and was then unemployed for 4 months. Eventually she got an apprenticeship at the ministry of education, women and youth and here she remained for three years. Her biggest dream was to go and study so now she's in her first semester at the university of Vienna. The first six months she combined it with a job in a telecommunication company, however she had to leave, because it was too stressful. She says: "There is lot of pressure on young people and it's difficult if you need to work in order to pay for your studies. And I think that recession has made it even more difficult for young people." Nevertheless Rike is excited to be pursuing her dream to study and is hopeful about the future.



**Vicky 13, Suni 13, Sophie 12, Phoebe 13,
Lucas 13 are hanging around in the park.**

When asked about their future plans they all said they would like to study and learn more about the world. Their ideal jobs varies Vicky wants to be a teacher, Suni a musician, and Sophie a doctor. Phoebe and Lucas however were unsure what they wanted to do in the future. They believe that they will get the jobs they want, but if they don't find their desirable jobs, they are not afraid to change their profession.



**Florian, 30,
Secretary General
of the Austrian Trade Union Youth**

and he had a lot to say about the current situation. We have a system that is completely different from e.g. England or France, and if you don't know this the numbers for statistics cannot be interpreted correctly. After grade 9 you can switch to BHS, the highest system, or the dual system which is special for Austria: you learn in a company and study in school, so you get vocational education in school and practical experience in a company at the same time. 80% of young people in Austria choose this educational branch, so they learn quickly to move on the labour market, thus getting tools for a smooth transition into the labour market.

For the past 10-15 years already we have had a big problem with youth unemployment: Those aged 20-25 pose a bigger

problem than those aged 15-20. The reason for this is that the companies do not want to spend too much money on young employees, so they take those following the dual system who get paid only 30-70% of the normal salary of an apprentice which is nice pocket money for those aged 15-17 who do not yet need to fund their own living; for the ones aged 20 and older, this does not suffice.

The statistics for unemployment show that the rate is going down in comparison to last year's figures. At the moment, 137,000 young people are following the dual system, but we are 5,000 apprenticeships short and missing another 4,000.

He cites Sweden as an example of a model society. They have a good social security system - and if people feel less threatened to fall down the social ladder.

Youth exchanges: a flying start





"I want to experience another way of living and expand my horizons for the future". These are amongst the generic reasons given by many exchange students when explaining why they chose to participate in an exchange. So does the reality live up to the expectation?

Youth exchanges provide young people with an unparalleled opportunity to experience other ways of life and to make friends with other people from different backgrounds to themselves. The establishment of such an intercultural dialogue can have profound benefits for their future, in terms of their social development and for their future prospects in the job market. It stimulates greater independence and self-confidence whilst promoting an open-minded approach to new experiences. Intercultural dialogue also helps to combat racism and xeno-

phobia and promotes a tolerance, and indeed respect for, the value of an intercultural society. This in turn confers benefits not only on the exchange student, but on wider society as a whole.

Youth exchanges involve spending a prolonged period of time being exposed to a new culture. This allows for the young person to gain a broader understanding of the world and the wide ranging and diverse group of people who comprise it. Through being completely submerged in this new culture and learning to speak the local language, young people are already becoming more open-minded. It is obvious that there are many benefits for all involved, and it is therefore important for this added value to be promoted in order to gain the recognition that it deserves. This

will ensure that exchange students are not only recognised by potential employers for their academic qualifications, but additionally for the social skills and positive and tolerant attitude that they have developed during their time overseas.

Therefore, in order to answer the initial question, it appears that exchanges do indeed provide those involved with the benefits which they expect. However, it is also of vital importance that young exchange students take on a level of responsibility and ensure that they actively make the effort to become fully submerged in the new culture in which they are living. By doing so, they will be taking a positive step towards giving themselves a flying start to their lives ahead.

Excuse me, do you speak English?



“Where is the International Relations Office?” This could be one of the first questions of an exchange student who has just arrived in a new city, in a new country, looking for some first answers.

A country often with a different language, a new challenging adventure that will soon start and will positively change his life, but that could leave a bad remark too.

And here we have the point: integration. Everything starts before the departure, when the University sends you the first information about culture, studies, everything concerning the country that will be your second home for a part of your life. This is the feeling that remains for 62% of the students that participated in the “ESN Survey 2008: Exchange Cultures”, an international survey organized by the Erasmus Student Network with a main target audience of international students. Moreover, 75% of them feel more tolerant after their stay abroad and 32% have problems adapting back in their own country.

So are those students integrated? It is hard to

answer, especially because the level of integration varies from country to country. If we consider the interaction between international/exchange and local students, the results are not really positive: only 26% of them interact with the local population and 41.5% with the local students; and concerning how they spend their time, 87.80% of it is with other exchange students and 61.10% with people of the same nationality.

With this information, what is it possible to do? What has been done already? Many universities or student organizations organize the so called “welcome days” or some integration activity: tandem nights, get-to-know parties and so on. A considerable barrier is the language. Istem, an exchange student from Turkey studying in Padova, Italy says “I had taken six courses of Italian before coming, but they were all about grammar, no practical use of language, so I had a little bit of difficulty especially with the formal documents.”

It’s in fact true that the information given before arrival should also be sent in English

to make the student feel as comfortable as possible with the bureaucracy of the hosting country. The second step is the language course, necessary to survive in the country and to “feel” the culture. This is important for the integration with the local students and to fully enjoy the city life.

Finally, integration is possible, even if sometimes difficult and efforts must be taken from both sides. Universities, local institutions and student organizations can really help in different ways and covering various aspects, from the academic, to the social life of a foreign student. What really creates hope is that we are on the right path, making efforts to build, finally, a true European citizenship.

joy



***PRESS
AND
COMM
MEETING***