

## >DEMOCRACY ON THE MOVE<

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### ABSTRACT:

The ongoing process of European integration presents new challenges for the evolution of democracy in Europe that will effect its citizens as well as politics in various ways. The research program >node< - New Orientations for Democracy in Europe of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture addresses the future of democracy in Europe. >node< scientists rethink democracy, analyze political developments and processes and come up with options and alternatives for the further development of democratic politics. The >node< „democracy-TABLE“ is a symbol for democracy in different environments: It is set up in different public places and promotes the scientific discussion of democracy and its development in Austria and the European Union by provoking personal interaction between passers-by and >node< scientists. As a starting point the >node< program asks people to contribute their personal definitions of „democratic is...“.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

#### Research Program >node< - New Orientations for Democracy in Europe

#### >democracy on the move<

The ongoing process of European integration and in particular the planned enlargement of the European Union present new challenges for the evolution of democracy in Europe that will effect its citizens as well as politics in various ways. The research program >node< (New Orientations for Democracy in Europe) of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture (bm:bwk), Department of Social Sciences, addresses the future of democracy in Europe. >node< scientists rethink democracy, analyze political developments and processes and the mechanisms that guide and control them, and come up with options and alternatives for the further development of democratic politics. The >node< program currently links 23 projects that deal with the following topics and questions:

- How can relations between institutions be redesigned in a democratic way and how can citizens' involvement be improved in institutional decision-making processes?
- How to deal with national, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in a democratic way?
- Analysis of the shifts in the European working society and the structural changes of gainful employment. Innovative forms of co-determination and participation have to be devised or integrated into the various new types of work.

The research policy objectives of >node< are to:

- encourage discussion of internationally relevant issues
- stimulate innovative research and research processes (i. e.: trans-disciplinary research; problem- and solution-oriented research, the results of which are applicable and useful both within and outside science; participatory research with new forms of organization

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of knowledge and scientific communication, encouraging dialogue between the scientific community and society at large – inclusion of stakeholders, NGOs, etc.)

- promote national and international project cooperation and networking (in particular, cooperation between university and non-university research, pooling of expertise and institutional capacities for participation in the 6th EU Framework Program);
- promote women scientists and
- promote young scientists

## 2. THE SCIENCE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:

It is of explicit concern to the >node< research program to enhance new and innovative forms of science communication and to stimulate the dialogue between science and society. The target audience of the >node< science communication are scientific communities and scientists, civil society, stakeholders, politicians and practitioners. In order to encourage >node< scientists to communicate their research work to these groups, the science communication of >node< aims first to the researchers to identify with not only their project but with the >node< program and the objectives of the >node< science communication. Then >node< aims to qualify and support scientists in science communication and encourages the dialogue between science and society in innovative ways. The scientists themselves are part of these outreaching actions.

### **Strategy Aspect Public Awareness: Enhance cooperative dialogues between science and society – the >node< democracy-TABLE**

The >node< democracy-TABLE (>node< „Demokra-Tisch“) is a table with the sentence „democratic is...“ inscribed on its side frames as well as across the table. The >node< democracy-TABLE is a symbol for democracy in different environments: It is set up in different places in the public sphere and animates passers-by to interact and discuss democracy and democracy development in Austria and the European Union as well as the results of the >node< democracy research with >node< scientists.



The >node< “Demokra-Tisch” (>node< democracy-TABLE)

So far the democracy-TABLE was in use in and in front of schools, in shopping malls and stations of public transport, in old peoples homes, during >node< events as for example public discussions with >node< scientists and practitioners etc.



The >node< democracy-TABLE in front of a Viennese school



>node< freecard

The >node< democracy-TABLE promotes discussion of democracy by provoking personal interaction. So called „Freecards“ as the one you can see below are give-aways–postcards and are used to strike up a conversation with the different dialogue groups in public places. The >node< program asks people to contribute their personal Freecard slogans as well as their definitions of what „democratic“ means for them. On blank postcards they are invited to complete the sentence „Democratic is...“ with their own thoughts and ideas. Selected slogans and definitions have been and will be published as a freecard series and offered in bars and pubs in Vienna and other Austrian cities.

The aim of the >node< democracy-TABLE and the freecards is:

- to discuss the research results of the different >node< projects with a wider public
- to make people aware that democratic development needs democracy research



The >node< democracy-TABLE in a communication center for adolescents

The >node< democracy-TABLE:

- is flexible and therefore can be used in different settings, places and situations
- can be used to address a wide range of different target groups (professionals as well as kids)
- is interactive and makes people contribute their own thoughts
- activates the public as well as the scientists to get into touch with each other
- provides attractive pictures to visualize an abstract content and therefore is interesting for media use
- raises public awareness and presence in the public sphere/space
- is cheap

Further strategies:

- Branding: The Austrian intercity train number 535 is now called „Wissen schafft Demokratie.at“ („Knowledge creates democracy.at“) and daily leaves Vienna for Southern Europe/Carinthia. In the train passengers can find folders with informations on >node<.
- The >node< Impulswochen “Wissen schafft Demokratie” were a series of events that comprised workshops and conferences which were already planned by >node< projects as well as so called “democracy-café’s”. Within these “democracy-café’s” >node< researchers talked in different public spaces (café’s, restaurants, schools etc.) with practitioners and the audience about different aspects of European democracy and its development. The discussions were also documented by a film team. Currently we are working on a DVD summarizing the conclusions of the democracy-café’s.
- The research program is also accompanied by an scientific advisory board and so called “godparents” – practitioners from different societal fields (NGO’s, art, economy etc.) that contribute to the grounding of >node<.

### **Strategy Aspect Community building and identity activities:**

>node< is aiming for a “contributing identity” where all people involved in the research program – researchers, program management, practitioners – are contributing to a common program. Tools for community building and identity activities are:

*Community events, for example:*

- >node< kick-off-event, objective: networking within the „>node< community“; participants: >node< project members, program management, PlanSinn; the aim was to bring all in involved people together so that they get to know each other and their projects.

*Film and DVD:*

- The >node< kick-off-event was documented by a film team. The researchers as well as the program management were asked about the aims of >node< and the projects and how they see the situation of democracy in Europe: What does the development of democracy in Europe need? How will your project contribute to the democratic development? Who will profit from >node< and from your project? What is the highlight of your project and what is special about your research team? What is missing, if your project wouldn’t participate in >node<? The outcome of these interviews is a DVD that serves the projects as well as the program management as an “audiovisual business card” and offers an overview of the projects and the aims of >node<.

*Clustering, “team-work” activities, for example:*

- Initiating and supporting joint science communication activities of >node< projects that do research on similar topics, for example conferences of the “working cluster” (projects that do research on the structural changes in European working society) or the “icon cluster” (projects that do research on icons and pictures that exist about Europe). The cooperation provides many synergy effects.

*Corporate Design:*

- >node< design manual (CD) for the projects to support the researchers in communicating the label >node<

### **Strategy Aspect Qualifying scientists for science communication:**

Many of the involved researchers are interested in science communication, but don't know how to do it.

*Individual support for the research projects:*

- according to their needs, strengths and weaknesses (support in layout, media work, moderation of workshops, conception of workshop etc.)

*Materials:*

- design manual, guidelines etc.

### **3. EVALUATION:**

- Workshops PlanSinn and program management: continuous evaluation of the >node< science communication (analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the >node< science communication)
- The feedback of the >node< scientific community is very positive (PlanSinn doesn't regularly ask for feedback, nevertheless the researchers report to the program management)
- The >node< scientific community is asked regularly by PlanSinn about ideas/proposals to improve the science communication activities of >node< (according to the needs of researchers/projects/institutions)
- Clipping service: Media coverage on >node<
- >node< was one of the showcases presented at the Science & Communication Forum 2005 in Brussels (9 – 11 March 2005, Cluster: Debates and Participatory Processes, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/2005/forum2005/showcase\\_democracy\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/conferences/2005/forum2005/showcase_democracy_en.htm)).

### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:**

The aims of science communication should be:

- to encourage approaches to non-scientific communities
- to use different settings, places and situations
- to motivate scientists as well as the public to interact with one another
- to use interactive tools so that people can contribute their own thoughts
- to encourage and enable scientists to communicate scientific theories, methods and results through continuous general and individual support and specific coaching
- to raise the awareness of what social sciences can contribute to societal development

### **5. ACKNOWLEDGES AND REFERENCES:**

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