Challenge
SocialInnovation

Innovating innovation by research -100 years after Schumpeter

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Approaches towards Social Innovation in Civic Education

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Abstract

Information and communications technologies (ICT) like the World Wide Web and Social Media tend to shape and change social interactions, communication patterns and particularly the acquirement of information due to their inherence possibilities of participation and collaboration. Nowadays, young people grow up as digital natives. According to this fact, the embedding of technology in pedagogical and societal concepts is crucial in order to empower especially young people to an appropriate participation in ICT.

At this point these new social demands have been taken into account by the foundation of the Democracy Centre Vienna (Demokratiezentrum Wien) in Austria. In this article, a concrete overview in social innovation practices within the field of civic education will be presented using the example of the Democracy Centre Vienna its aims and current projects.

1. *Democracy Centre Vienna* as an example for social innovation

In order to provide high quality scientific knowledge by means of the Internet and its possibilities to inform about topics in multimedia style, the *Democracy Centre Vienna* is strongly oriented to applying and conveying knowledge with the usage of ICT. In this regard, this academic non-profit-organization can be described as being situated at the interface between the academic and public spheres. Taking into account the various social demands of internet users as well as the further development of technical innovations such as the emergence of *Social Media* applications in the last years, the *Democracy Centre Vienna* adapts its main foci of work along these upcoming social needs and has created projects such as "PoliPedia.at" or "Migration on Tour" (see more detailed project information on the following pages).

The innovative approach of the *Democracy Centre Vienna* as a combination of a research institution and a "Virtual Knowledge Centre" www.demokratiezentrum.org (web-based information centre and audiovisual library) can be described as a new concept in order to provide and gain information about research topics such as political culture, democratization, participation, migration and integration, Europe and media and decoding visual messages. The aim is to apply and convey knowledge in an appropriate way to different target groups in the field of formal and non-formal education as well as for adult education and the interested public. Therefore, this non-university research institution sets out to act as a kind of social innovation itself.

Beside the scientific research activities, a strong emphasis is put on the collaboration with practitioners – teachers, pupils, students and other organisations in the fields of formal and non-formal education – with a main focus on civic education issues. This enriching cooperation allows the development of educational tools for civic education such as print and online teaching materials and collaborative interactive tools as the wiki-based online textbook "PoliPedia.at." Not only for the target groups of learners but also for the interested public, the offers of the *Democracy Centre Vienna* shall draw interest in politics, shall improve competences in the handling of new media, shall support self-motivated learning, shall reinforce participative decision making and last but not least empower people to become active citizens.

2. Practice example I: The "Virtual Knowledge Centre" www.demokratiezentrum.org

The "Virtual Knowledge Centre" www.demokratiezentrum.org seeks to provide a multimedia information-infrastructure in German and also partly in English language. The "Knowledge Centre" is organized under the categories "Topics", "Events", "Projects", "Exhibition", "Knowledge" and "Education" and it contains a comprehensive supply of knowledge for various target groups, adapted to various user-needs. It offers background information, in-depth analyses, multimedia-tools such as an audiovisual library and tools for civic education.

Fig. 1: Subsidiary page "Projects" on the "Virtual Knowledge Centre" www.demokratiezentrum.org

Firstly multimedia dossiers inform about current and ongoing debates concerning democracy and politics, migration and media in Europe and Austria. The modules "European Picture Atlas"**, "**Political Picture-Strategies" and "European Political Picture Memory" provide scientific analysis of political imagery of Europe and of Austrian election campaign posters. Secondly, the category "Knowledge" contains "knowledge stations" providing basic information and further in-depth analyses concerning democracy history and also are various knowledge components such as pictures, audiofiles, videofiles, timelines, charts and graphics, a glossary, articles for free download, references to literature and links freely available.

Fig. 2: Interactive online-exhibition "Migration on Tour" on
http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/ausstellung/stationen.html

Furthermore, there are teaching materials and tools offered. One example for innovative approach of the *Democracy Centre Vienna* to merge collaborative project work and information transfer by means of the Internet is the online internet exhibition "Migration on Tour:" Together with pupils, teachers and the organization *Initative Minderheiten*, a touring exhibition "Migration on Tour" for pupils has been developed as one of the project outcomes of the project "Intercultural Tracking". An interactive internet version of this exhibition containing tools such as a quiz for young people from the age of 14 years is accessible online and explains current and historical aspects of migration patterns and integration in Europe and Austria in a comprehensive way. Additionally for teachers, teaching materials for using the exhibition in school lessons to offer new perspectives for inclusive teaching and further background knowledge is being provided.

3. Project Example II: "PoliPedia.at – Participation in the Social Web"

Representative for the work of the *Democracy Centre Vienna* is also the collaboration with teachers and pupils, not only within the framework of "Migration on Tour" but also for example in the project "PoliPedia.at – Youth participation in the Social Web" that will be presented more in detail in the following.

As *Social Media* had become more and more popular in recent years, the *Democracy Centre Vienna* reacted to these technological innovations that also shape social interactions and learning settings. In order to foster active e-participation, media literacy and provide collaborative learning settings of high quality corresponding projects were developed. In particular, "PoliPedia.at", a collaborative multimedia

wiki-platform for young people dealing with topics such as politics, democracy and participation was created together with the ICT&S Center of the University of Salzburg. It was developed to enable peer-to-peer learning and collaborative learning settings in formal and informal education supported by the project team. The leading question sets out to be how information and communication technologies (ICTs) can contribute to foster and engage participation of young people. As in Austria the voting age was lowered in the year 2007 so that 16 year-olds have the active right to vote - an innovation in European political systems - there were projects, amongst others "PoliPedia.at", initiated by the so-called "Democracy Initiative" of the Austrian Federal Government in order to encourage young people to participate as active citizens.

Fig. 3: Main page of the collaborative wiki-platform www.polipedia.at

On the internet, this wiki-based platform is freely accessible under www.polipedia.at. The wiki includes multimedia components of all kinds (pictures, video clips, podcasts, YouTube videos, documents) and allows collaborative editing of all users. Furthermore, users can exchange their opinions and experiences about democracy, politics and political participation in a forum. As "PoliPedia.at" is an Austrian project, mostly all of the content is in German but it is possible to use other languages as well. The platform encourages young people to participate in an active way in order to share knowledge by means of peer-to-peer learning. Thus, "PoliPedia.at" aims at creating innovative learning environments, strengthening media literacy and civic competences and the awareness of an active citizenship. The innovative pedagogical approach of "PoliPedia.at" is adapted with the aims of the Austrian educational programs in order to gain and foster competences as media competence, decision-making skills and method skills.

This project fits perfectly in the definition of a social innovation that meets social needs and creates new social collaborations at the same time. Users act as *prosumers* (Alvin Toeffler) in a sense that they are producers as well as consumers of the topics on *PoliPedia.at*. Integrating this participatory potential of

the *Social Web* into education settings with its equal access for all users is a turn away from traditional teacher-pupil-hierarchies and an essential precondition for sustainable e-participation.

4. Project Example III: "VOICE. Developing citizens"

Education is one of the most important basics in order to empower future generations to take actively and responsibly part in social innovation processes. The current project "VOICE. Developing Citizens - Paths to core competencies through a problem-based learning project in civic education" is focusing these issues on a multilateral European wide level. This project is a Comenius project funded by the European Commission. The objective of VOICE is to enhance civic and social competences of pupils in an innovative way through problem-based learning settings in order to facilitate active involvement in society.

"VOICE. Developing Citizens" brings together educational experts from Austria, Estonia, Germany, Slovenia and Turkey to work collaboratively on teaching material on the topics Democracy, Europe, Human Rights and Migration focusing on enhancement of pupil's key competences like social and civic competences, learning-to-learn skills competences and methodological skills like digital literacy. In the process three central principles of teaching - activity-based learning, problem-based learning and discourse-orientated learning - get intertwined. Furthermore, teacher training courses promoting necessary skills and background knowledge for implementing competence-oriented education are developed. In order to ensure that the formulated claims are met, all modules (teaching material and teacher training modules) will be tested in practice. The objective to foster the development of capability to meet challenges of changing societies and the pan-European setting of the project will enable young people to create own innovative ideas regarding future social demands whilst bearing in mind the diversity but also the unique needs and approaches. The tests in practice are conducted by the project partners (the Democracy Centre Vienna has conducted a test in March 2012 together with a project partner), will guarantee that the modules will be optimised.

To raise the ability of future generations to deal with upcoming innovations as well as social demands and furthermore to face and create social innovations, needs a strong base that demanding contemporary education has to provide. Hence, the Democracy Centre Vienna faces these challenging conditions and will still contribute a part to this utmost important issue.