



## The Austrian Association of Cultural Educators in Museums and Exhibitions

### **Review**

The first sporadic beginnings of cultural-educational work in Austria came at a time in which cultural-political measures promoting “culture for everyone” were undertaken. Initially, these measures pertained exclusively to the area of arts education. There were systematic educational efforts of lasting import in Austrian museums, and individual exceptions (in the Museum of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, for example, under the directorship of Alfred Schmeller) starting in the 1980s. It was not primarily the museums that implemented initiatives and offerings for visitors, but rather the Ministry of Education at the time, in addition to the pedagogues, artists and cultural educators who restored arts education to the museums according to the English and French models. A “discursive museum” was postulated, which was to be dynamic and open to visitors, rather than static. Among the primary initiators was Heiderose Hildebrand. Other project groups in Austria followed, including Stördienst, Kom.m.a., KIM, seegang, and perspektiva kulturservice. (Stöger)

In 1985, the *Museumspädagogischer Dienst der Bundesmuseen* (Museum-Pedagogical Service of the Federal Museums) was founded. In 1993, as part of the reorganization of the institutionalized educational effort, according to the decision of the then-responsible Federal Ministry of Education and Art as well as that of Science and Research, the Office of Cultural Education (*Büro für Kulturvermittlung*) emerged from the Museum-Pedagogical Service (*Museumspädagogischer Dienst*). Through this organization, programs and services were offered mainly in the area of museums and exhibitions. A focus of the efforts lay in the development of communication-oriented cultural educational programs in professional basic training (projects with trainees) and the development of participatory forms of education.

At the beginning of 2004, the Office of Cultural Education was integrated into the organization *KulturKontakt Austria (KKA)* in Vienna. The KKA sponsors innovative initiatives throughout Austria, as well as methods of personal education based on participatory and action-oriented communication (for instance, cultural education in new social contexts).

### **The founding of the Austrian Association of Cultural Educators (*Österreichischer Verband der KulturvermittlerInnen*)**

In 1990, Austrian cultural educators met for the first Austrian Museum Pedagogues meeting, which was followed in 1991 by the founding of the Austrian Association of Cultural Educators in Museums and Exhibitions (*Österreichischer Verband der KulturvermittlerInnen im Museums- und Ausstellungswesen*). This initiative emanated from freelance arts educators who performed most of the educational work at the time. It was, after all, a still relatively young profession that only began to permeate German-speaking countries in the 1970s. What complicated matters was the view, widespread in Austria, that educational work—like all other museum activities—could be performed voluntarily. With the founding of the Association of Cultural Educators, a professional organization was created that strove for a stronger public presence and betterment of cultural educators, among other goals. Numerous activities followed that sought to make people aware that arts and cultural education are an “occupation” that requires schooling and must be performed by professionally active employees.

The annual general meeting of the association is held in conjunction with a seminar. Reports on association meetings in the 1990s were published as of 2002 in the association’s journal *faxen*. As of 2005, reports on association meetings in cooperation with the Austrian League of Museums (*Museumsbund Österreich*) are published in the Austrian museum periodical *neues museum*. The meetings, in chronological order:

**1992** Steyr, Das “gelungene” Museum (The Successful Museum)

**1993** Graz, Schau’, was die da machen—Vermittlungsarbeit in Graz (Look at What They’re Doing—Educational Work in Graz)

- 1994** Hallein, Salz und Pfeffer—Publikumsarbeit in Großausstellungen (Salt and Pepper—Public Work in Large Exhibitions)
- 1995** Vienna, WerkSTADT—Kulturvermittlung im Stadtraum (Vienna, Workplace—Cultural Education in Urban Spaces)
- 1996** Hohenems, “KulturENvermittlung” (CultureS Education)
- 1997** Steyr, DiplomkulturvermittlerIn sucht bezahlte Beschäftigung (Certified Cultural Educator Seeks Paid Work)
- 1998** Innsbruck, Kommunikationsprozesse in Gruppen (Communication Processes in Groups)
- 1999** Friesach, Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters—Wege der Vermittlung (Middle Ages Cultural History—Ways of Conveying)
- 2000** Klosterneuburg bei Wien, Kulturvermittlung & Imagebildung (Cultural Education & Image Building)
- 2001** Vienna, Realität und Virtualität. Kulturvermittlung und Neue Medien (Reality and Virtuality. Cultural Education and New Media)
- 2002** Linz, Neubau—Aufbau—Umbau. Baustelle Kunstvermittlung (New Construction—Construction—Reconstruction. Construction Site Arts Education)
- 2003** Vienna, Dialog über die Zukunft des Verbands (Dialog on the Future of the Association)
- 2004** Linz, Ansprüche und Realitäten in der Kunstvermittlung (Demands and Realities in Arts Education)
- 2005** Vienna, Wort & Aktion (Part of the Austrian Museums’ Day)
- 2006** Linz, Adult learning in Museums and Galleries
- 2007** Vienna, (Involved in the ICOM/CECA Conference)
- 2008** Linz, Audio and Multimedia Guides in Museums and Galleries

### ***Cultural education today***

The meaning of cultural educational work has changed since the founding of the association. Arts and cultural education are now important components of work in most museums in Austria. Large museums often have available one or two salaried educators. In addition, there are teams—in precisely those large museums—of educators who work on a fee basis. The field of arts and cultural education is multifaceted and can be conceived as varyingly broad. Thus, the domain of core tasks ranges from the conception, execution and coordination of tours and

workshops for various target groups, to the organization of events, project planning and development, volunteer management, text production for exhibitions, the production of audio guides and other types of media, through to cooperation with marketing, the press and the exhibition curators.

### ***Training the educators***

To this day, arts and cultural education in Austria is not governed by law. Salaried employees or freelance workers in the arts education program of an Austrian museum have generally completed study at a university, and a smaller number of them are students. By far the largest group of arts and cultural educators are degree holders in art history. In addition, there are graduates of numerous other degree programs, such as history, philosophy, literary studies, German studies, ethnology, business administration, and languages. A good third of educators have pedagogical training, and more than ten percent have artistic training (Ihrenberger).

Despite the increasing importance and apparent necessity of professionalizing this occupation, there exists to this day no uniform training for this profession in Austria. In the late 1980s there emerged specific supplementary educational curricula in the form of training programs. In Austria, it was above all individuals who became involved with the introduction and formulation of programs of study for arts and cultural educational work. In 1988, a college course of study in museum pedagogy (*Hochschullehrgang für Museumspädagogik*) was offered at University of Klagenfurt by the Inter-University Research Institute for Distance Learning (*Interuniversitäres Forschungsinstitut für Fernstudien*) (IFF). The most important impetus for professionalizing museum and exhibition services occurred via the Institute of Cultural Studies (*Institut für Kulturwissenschaft*) (IKW) in Vienna. The institute was founded in 1989-1990 by Dieter Bogner and Renate Goebel and initially offered programs of curatorial study. In 1992, the IKW initiated a course of study specializing in educational work in museums and exhibitions, titled "Communication in the Museum. Work for Visitors." This program was deliberately not named "museum pedagogy" and the communication term was inserted in its place. In 1994, the description "Curator for Communication in the Museum" was introduced, in order "to counteract the hierarchical gap between educators and curators" (Goebel). The programs sought to achieve a change in mindset concerning the arts education

occupation and to prevent the disregard of education. The IKW's study programs were conducted up to 2000.

At present, there is the postgraduate university program Exhibition and Cultural Communication Management (ECM). This course of study is effectively a continuation of the IKW's curatorial program and has been offered by the University of Applied Arts (*Universität für angewandte Kunst*) in Vienna as an on-the-job postgraduate program. The program offers supplementary education for the arts and arts education sector and is based on an intensive examination of the theoretical foundation of artistic and cultural work. It is financed by means of a tuition fee and its students are granted a Master's of Advanced Studies (MAS) degree upon completion. Likewise built upon the system of self-financing is the *Zertifikatskurs für Kunst- und KulturvermittlerInnen* (Certificate Course for Arts and Cultural Educators), which was first offered in 2007 by the *Institut für Kulturkonzepte* (Institute for Cultural Concepts) in Vienna.

### ***The role of the Austrian Association of Cultural Educators in Museums and Exhibitions***

The Austrian Association of Cultural Educators in Museums and Exhibitions serves as a common platform for all those engaged in the field of communication with the visitors of cultural institutions and organizations. The name reflects the development of our agenda, which has come a long way from working exclusively with school groups in museums to employing innovative methods and strategies directed at the most diverse groups of visitors and individuals. The Association is an independent organization working within Austria, and pertains to Austrian and international museum organizations, especially to its parallel organizations in Germany and Switzerland.

Membership is extended to all working in the field. It guarantees free entry to 65 museums in Austria, Liechtenstein and South Tyrol (Alto Adige, Italy). At present, the executive board of the Austrian Association of Cultural Educators in Museums and Exhibitions is composed of 5 persons. All functions within the Association are honorary.

## **The Chairwomen of the Association:**

**1991 - 1997** Gabriele Stöger

**1997 - 1999** Eva Kolm

**1999 - 2000** Monika Reindl

**2000 - 2008** Claudia Peschel-Wacha

The Association is involved in the development of the profession and the discussion and furthering of related issues, including conditions of work and payment, lobbying and informing the public and politicians on these matters, as well as the social situation, tasks and challenges for those represented.

Presently, the Association is made up of more than 100 ordinary members working in the field of cultural education in both freelance and salaried capacities. Most of the salaried educators in the major Viennese museums and the State Museums in the provinces are members of the Association. This connection is advantageous to the educators as well as to the Association's overall authority. For the past several years, the Association's primary access to a wider public has been via the internet ([www.kulturvermittlerinnen.at](http://www.kulturvermittlerinnen.at)). Notices of services as well as regional and international further educational events pertaining to the arts and cultural sector are published on the website. Dates and times for the intermittently occurring professional exchange in Vienna, the so-called "KulturvermittlerInnen-Stammtisch," are announced on the website. At the Stammtisch, colleagues are invited to speak at museums and introduce innovative educational programs.

The Association offers a forum for discussing common issues, information on job openings, seminars, courses, publications and information exchange on a regular basis. In addition, since 2005, the Austrian Association of Cultural Educators in Museums and Exhibitions has offered professional certification for arts and cultural educators. As a reaction to the increased demands made on cultural educators by museums and their management, a paper was produced detailing criteria and a job description for the profession. In it, quality criteria for the certification of professional cultural educators are formulated. The goal of this certification is to professionalize the job description of arts and cultural educators and to promote competent educational work in museums and exhibitions. Among the criteria and prerequisites for the certification is the stipulation that the educational activity is to be practiced as an occupation and for at least one year. Among other things, a current, elaborate

educational concept must be submitted. Communicative or otherwise education-specific training is considered preferable. Upon application, and after passing the requirements and criteria set out by a commission staffed of respected members of the Association, a certificate (*“zertifizierte KulturvermittlerIn,”* or certified cultural educator) may be granted.

### ***Participation of the Association at ICOM/CECA 2007***

The chairwoman, Claudia Peschel-Wacha, was part of the organizing team and acted as the ICOM/CECA National Correspondent on that occasion. The Austrian Association helped to sponsor the ICOM/CECA 2007 meeting in Vienna by organizing the CECA reception desk. A team of three members, directed by Hadwig Kräutler, prepared the activities in advance. The reception desk for CECA members was located in the AUDI MAX cloakroom at the university. Stefanie van Felten, who developed the trailer played during conference breaks, is a board member. She selected two other members, Ulli Fuchs and Barbara Stieff, who together helped Hadwig and her team manage the CECA reception desk. Thanks to all of them for their commitment!



From the left to the right: Claudia Peschel-Wacha, Ulli Fuchs, Stefanie van Felten, Barbara Stieff

The CECA program arranged for a poster session in the afternoon of the opening day of the conference. The poster session could be considered a presentation in

which cultural educators from Vienna's museums introduced their institutions' respective educational activities in a sort of booth located in a university lecture hall. The association invited its members to participate in the poster session. This was an opportunity for members to get colleagues to their museum, present and discuss their work, and make international contacts. After receiving information at the poster session, CECA members visited a museum of their choice and saw for themselves the creativity and variety of methods in the public initiatives. The organization wienXtra, part of the organizing committee, supported the Viennese holiday activities for children ("*Wiener Ferienspiel*") during ICOM, so colleagues were also able to receive impressions of the educators' practical work in Vienna's museums.

Thanks to the poster session and the subsequent museum visits, the main speaker of ICOM and keynote speaker of CECA, Elaine Heumann-Gurian, visited the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art. After she visited the exhibition project *museum\_inside\_out*, where the museum's staff performed their work before an audience of visitors, exhibiting and explaining museum functions, she made the following entry in the visitor book: "*inside\_out* is an experiment in sharing authority. It is engaging, interesting and wonderful. Congratulations."

Claudia Peschel-Wacha

## Literature

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