



# EFOS

European Federation of Older Students at the Universities  
Europäische Vereinigung älterer Studierender an den Universitäten  
Fédération Européenne des Etudiants Âgés aux Universités

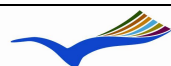


# EFOS NEWS

## 1

## 2009

Virtual European Cultural Centre  
VECU



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

English edition

## European Federation of Older Students

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## From the editor:

In September 2008 EFOS started the project „Virtual European Cultural Centre“, with financial support of the EU programme Grundtvig Learning Partnerships. Nine institutes for senior education from seven countries, all of them members of EFOS, formed among themselves working groups („triples“ or „tandems“) that work on a chosen cultural theme. They try to pass on cultural values to the young generation and to the tandem or triple partners and to start a discussion on them

The following tandems/triples are active at present:

Groningen - Vienna - Magdeburg	Theme: Literature
Bratislava - Wroclaw - Uppsala	Theme: Everyday culture
Dresden - Brno - Kiel	Theme: Housing culture
Bratislava – Wroclaw - Vienna	Theme: Proverbs
Vienna - Bratislava	Theme: Music

The present edition of EFOS News is intended to give an overview of the working methods and of the work that has been done till now.

An article of Dr. Daniel Meynen, an active member of EFOS and scientific adviser for the project, describes the ideas behind VECU and the aims that we want to achieve with it. Then, every tandem/triple writes about its work, impressions and results achieved till now.

The VECU-project will be rounded off from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010 with a scientific conference in Wroclaw (Poland). All interested parties are welcome.

Further information about the project VECU can be found on [www.vecu.efos-europa.eu](http://www.vecu.efos-europa.eu). The virtual cultural centre is part of this website and will show all the results of the project. It contains already a few articles. More will follow rapidly during the next months. We kindly invite you to visit the virtual cultural centre from time to time and follow the progress.

The website of EFOS and VECU is available in German and English. The EFOS News is also published in these two languages. Both editions can be found on the EFOS website [www.efos-europa.eu](http://www.efos-europa.eu).

December 2009

Peter Hug

## EFOS News

Publication of the  
European Federation of Older  
Students at Universities

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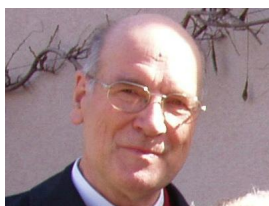
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## The VECU project. A progress report

*Dr. Daniel Meynen, Sulzburg, Germany)*



For the last twenty years older students and organisers of courses for the retired within the framework of the EFOS have been meeting once or twice a year to share experiences and discuss the new developments in the field of education for the retired in their respective countries. In the initial phase this was limited to discussions about the developments of the courses for the retired in the countries participating in the EFOS. Because the participants met in a new country each time, a desire emerged to get to know the other national and regional cultures better. At first we started to go hiking together in search of contact with the country and its people. Then the desire arose to do something together to strengthen the bridges between our countries. An early attempt at cooperation envisaged the founding of a common “European Library”, in the form of book recommendations for readers interested in Europe. This project failed due to a lack of funding. A second project was aimed at strengthening the European network of studies for the retired. This project, however, lacked adequate interest on the part of the sponsors. The third attempt developed out of an interest in deepening the intercultural exchange with respect to everyday culture and literature in the participating countries. The social and cultural events planned around the EFOS meetings showed again and again how rich the culture of the respective host nation was and the guests saw clearly that they knew far too little about this cultural richness.

For this reason we decided to apply at the Grundtvig programme for funding of a joint project. Initially we planned to create a kind of virtual museum, in which two types of European cultural artefacts should be collected; namely products of European everyday culture and products of literary culture. This intention was, however, not in line with the new guidelines of the Grundtvig

programme. They envisaged educational partnerships which were more process oriented and not so much product or result oriented. According to the new guidelines the emphasis should be on practices and methods in the sharing of cultural experiences. They wanted to see projects which showed how participants were made to appreciate the cultural and socio-economic diversity within Europe.

Therefore we modified our project and placed the emphasis on the ways and methods of passing on cultural traditions to the younger generations, instead of on the cultural traditions themselves. The primary results of our project should thus be, in accordance with the trial and error method, descriptions of successful or unsuccessful processes of passing on culture. The cultural and literary products which we will be working with and which we wish to pass on will be placed in the virtual museum, which we have already prepared on the EFOS website. The project thus has simultaneously an intergenerational, an intercultural and a medial design. That is the present situation.

### The aim of the project

The starting point of our project is the open and unexplained question, which role should the third generation – this new demographic phenomenon – assume in our society and whether the transmission of culture can be an important facet in their spectrum of roles. For this reason processes of passing on culture should be investigated, exemplified and described in the VECU project. The central question which the project should bring closer to answering is therefore:

**Can the transmission of culture between the generations be counted amongst the core social tasks of the third generation?**

In order to explain this, we will experiment with various ways of passing on culture in eight European groups of older people.

- With the transmission of culture in the field of everyday culture, literature and music.
- With the transmission of culture to various receivers: children, youths, young adults.
- With the transmission of culture between six different European countries.

The groups come together to form Tandem partnerships or sets of three (Tipple) depending on whether they are made up of representatives from two or three different countries.

### The desired results of the project

The projects should provide information on different processes, how the transmission of culture between the generations in the various countries is or can be structured.

1. Culture cannot be passed on like a slice of bread or a piece of information.

Therefore we must ask ourselves: in which typical **situations** are older and younger people interested in the cultural conventions which they pass on or receive?

2. Older and younger generations usually stay separate from one another.

Therefore we have to consider the question: how and where does the **need** arise among younger people to take on cultural conventions and make them their own? How and where does the need develop among older people to pass on their cultural knowledge and experiences?

3. Things which older people deem to be valuable are seldom viewed as important by young people.

Therefore we must think about the question: is there such a thing as absolute **cultural values** or do they have to be continually renegotiated between the generations?

4. Many people say that culture is automatically passed on. You do not need to do anything.

We want to examine, whether that is true or whether the transmission of culture requires specific efforts and **forms of transmission**? And if it does, then which ones?

5. We want to explain how the **transmission process** occurs. Can it be organized?
6. Finally we want to explain what older people must do to acquire the **competence** which enables them to pass on cultural values.

The final conference of the project should provide information about the suitability of the practical procedure: have the participants developed a stronger awareness of their cultural heritage and their role as passers on? Have they worked out a viable procedure by which the cultural heritage can be passed on to the younger generations? How should the project website be organized, so that it can become a suitable instrument for this end? In what way can the viable procedures be propagated?

### Phases of the project implementation

In order to achieve the desired results of this kind of process oriented project, we have divided the project into the following phases:

#### First Phase: **agreement amongst the participating older people.**

The participating older people agree upon the areas of interest to them.

Within which cultural sphere (everyday culture, literature, music) do they want to pass on their traditions?

Which traditions do they feel to be especially suitable for their undertaking?

Which European Tandem partner group do they wish to cooperate with in this area?

#### Second Phase: the actual **process of passing on culture between the young and the old.**

In this phase special attention is paid to the process of transmission. What are the

features of a good situation for transmission? What do the older people want to pass on, what do the younger people want to receive? How can this be found out? How can the old cater for the interests of the young and how can they rouse an understanding amongst the young for what they, as the older generation, feel to be important? Are there groups of young people who have a special need for the knowledge and experiences of the old? In this phase the European Tandem partners reach an understanding regarding the methods according to which they wish to proceed.

Third Phase: in this section of the project attention is primarily paid to reaching an **understanding with the European Tandem partners** on the search for a role for the Third Generation and on the shared undertaking of cultural transmission, as well as the shared or different procedures for this transmission.

Fourth Phase: This is where **the results** of the work with the Tipple or Tandem partner groups is presented to all participants in the project. The meaning of the results is also discussed. Did the transmission procedure young-old materialize? Under which conditions did it succeed or fail? Is it expedient to invest energy in this transmission? Should it be publicly supported? Which further education do older people need in order to be able to take on this task?

Fifth Phase: **summary of the results** of all Tandem partner groups.

The development of the website occurs parallel to these five phases.

On this website we present:

- a) the content which we view worth to pass on: that means the particulars of the culinary culture or the culture of habitation or the literature of proverbs or novels or the culture of music which we want to discuss with the young.
- b) the experiences we have had during our transmission efforts.

The website serves as a storage space open to the public for all the cultural products which are important to us and as a collection point for reports of experiences on our methods of transmission.

One of the most important insights which we have made so far concerns the development and implementation of such projects. Not only the cultures of the European countries are heterogeneous. The older people in those countries are too. It will be an exception to find groups with identical interests or preconditions for one and the same project goal. If it is about something simple such as a discussion of the culture of habitation in three countries, it will be easy to find three groups interested in taking part. After all, which country does not have a culture of habitation? But each group will understand the content of the discussion differently. For one group the furniture of a specific period will be especially important, because it is typical for their country or city, for the second group it is all about the change in the style of furnishings and the third group is interested in the customs and traditions of habitation in general. Each group is convinced that the other groups must share their interests and is very surprised when the other groups start talking about something totally different in a different context. In our experience it is an absolute exception when three groups come together with shared interests in either furnishings or changes in style or traditions of habitation in general. And a great deal of flexibility in questions of motivation and preconditions should not be expected where older people are concerned. Each has developed in the course of their lives specific interests, expectations and abilities and is anxious to contribute that to the project which they feel to be important. To curtail something here regularly leads to disappointments and demotivation.

The art of being a project leader is to avoid suppressing the diverse, often very specific abilities and motivations and instead to link them together. That means, however, that the results of the project are very variable and multiply layered and rarely predictable. For this reason projects with very narrowly defined goals are much more likely to be derailed by the participating older people than projects



with broad sets of aims. On the other hand, projects which can bring together the unique interests and abilities offer a much better prospect of producing unexpected results which are simultaneously surprising and worthwhile.

A further finding is to do with the productivity of older people. If a project strikes a chord with the participants, then their willingness to

invest time and energy in the project is almost limitless. Older people can mobilize unexpected abilities and reserves, if their motivation is appealed to. Therefore it is worth thinking about this point.

Sulzburg, 23.10.09



*Projekmeeting in Graz, April 2009*



## Everyday culture

*PhDr. Nadezda Hrapková, PhD. Bratislava, Slovakia*



The work group for the topic Everyday Culture was created at the project meeting in Kiel in October 2008. This triple group consists of the seniors from the Polish University of the Third Age (UTA) in Wroclaw, senior students from the UTA of the Centre for continuing education at the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia and senior students from the university of Uppsala, Sweden.

The decision of the participants, to focus on traditions of everyday culture, influenced them to use the following methods for their common work:

- discussion in a group of elderly students about meaning and importance of tradition,
- meeting and discussion with young students about using of daily traditions,
- discussion with elderly about keeping and transmission of the traditions to the young generation
- description of chosen traditional events from human life
- searching information in the libraries and on the internet web pages
- presentation of the concrete findings and examples of good practices
- comparison of the results
- dissemination of the project results and goals of the project in the groups of seniors, at conferences and other public meetings, dissemination by presentation on the own homepages, on TV and radio performances, etc.

During the meeting in Graz in April 2009 the tandem group decided to focus on 3 events in

the human life: birth and christening, wedding, death and funeral. The participants also agreed to describe two seasonal holidays: Easter and Christmas time. In accordance with the article presented by the group from Uppsala they decided to write articles and describe events from various points of view. The members of the group think, that the traditions vary between different regions of a country and differ also between rural and urban areas. Therefore they will have the events be presented in writing by more than one author.

During the tandem meeting in Modra in August 2009 the members of the triple group presented descriptions of events and also compared their national experiences. On the one hand they found some differences between the national customs and on the other hand they were surprised, that they have a lot of commonalities between their national traditions. The discussion during this meeting determined and specified another direction to the project work. Seniors decided for the second project year to focus on eating culture and national food in each country. Participants from Wroclaw will describe national soups and cakes, students from Bratislava will describe bread traditions, cheese made from the sheep milk and wine traditions.





The tandem and project meetings brought new dimensions to the life of seniors, international contacts, new knowledge about traditions in the different countries and they also learned from each other about the various subjects. The cultural programme of the meeting in Modra offered the participants the possibility to visit the cave Driny, the castle Smolenice and also to spend the social international evening at the fire place and sing the national songs together.

All participants were satisfied with the idea of the project and the goals, which were designed for the project meetings.



## Impressions on the triple-meeting Groningen-Magdeburg-Vienna on “literature”

*Mag. Herta Spitaler, Vienna (Austria)*



Our triple-meeting on the topic “literature” within the VECU project took place on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2009. Our group from Vienna consisted of 4 persons of which two had already been previously in Magdeburg. We were very impressed by this old town – one of the most important historic places in Germany – although during the Second World War this town had been widely destroyed. We were also impressed about our personal talks with colleagues from Magdeburg about their life in the German Democratic Republic. In this context we started to think about the fate of our country, Austria, which got off much more lightly.

The choice of literature by the Magdeburg group was a mixture between East and West German authors, Thomas Mann, Martin Walser and Günter Grass for Western Germany and Christa Wolf and Christoph Hein for the German Democratic Republic.

I started at once to read “Die Buddenbrooks” – a most beautiful and interesting book which characterizes very well the society of this period.

I also discovered Christoph Hein as an interesting author. His books “Landnahme” and “Frau Paula Trousseau” were very

informative for me since they describe the political and social development in the German Democratic Republic. I could even see and hear Christoph Hein on the occasion of his reading in Vienna.

The authors selected by the colleagues from Groningen are also very interesting – Harry Mulisch is also known in Austria, the other authors I didn’t know but I started to read some of their books, as Tommy Wieringa “Joe Speedboot” and Ferdinand Bordewijk “Charakter”.

We from Vienna wanted to restrict ourselves to books written during the latest 30 years. It was also important for us to choose women writers who write about their lives as women. In Austria we have many good women writers and poets, we even have a Nobel price winner (Elfriede Jelinek). The books chosen by Vienna are: Thomas Bernhard “Alle meine Preise”, Anna Mitgutsch “Zwei Leben und ein Tag”, Marlene Streeruwitz “Verführungen”, Erich Hackl „Abschied von Sidonie“, Felix Mitterer „Die Piefke-Saga“.

Now we are thinking about and preparing the coming triple meeting in January in Vienna. We are asking ourselves if we can draw from the chosen books a complete picture of Europe and the European values? Taken by and large our three triple countries have similar moral concepts but owing to the different fates of our countries there could arise different results surprising for us.



## VECU-Working group about Proverbs, Intermediate report October 09

*Elisabeth Marek, Dipl. Ing. Wolfgang Spitaler, Vienna (Austria)*



“The first collections of proverbs date back already to the second century after Christ, motivated by the conviction, that notions, values, the way of thinking, conventions and customs, briefly the whole character of an ethnic group cannot be visualized more in detail than by its proverbs.

Today almost every developed country has collected its proverbs. In Germany there exist not only collections of German proverbs but also translations of collections of other countries and cultures: Latin, Greek, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Iranian, Chinese and Japanese proverb collections.

“You recognize a people by its proverbs”, is written in the Old Testament; this is certainly common conviction.”

(Pentecost 1912, short form quotation Dr. Landsberger)

Seven Senior Students from three countries agreed to this notion and established a working group within the VECU-project, in order to find traces how proverbs transferred and still transfer values and ways of thinking across frontiers and generations all over Europe.

### 1) Initialization:

All members of the working group got 167 German proverbs in tabular form in order to be able to compare them to those from another language:

Category A: The proverbs in the two languages are identical.

Category B: The sense of the proverbs is similar, the used metaphor is different.

Category C: Actually no corresponding proverb of the compared language has been found.

### 2) The planned steps of the project:

- Collection of common proverbs in 7 (8) languages:
- English, German, French, Gaelic, Latin, Polish, Slovak, perhaps also Yiddish.
- Comparison in tabular form to make it easier.
- Evaluation and discussion of the comparison.
- The role of proverbs in the history of education
- The role of the Latin language as to the transfer of proverbs.
- Religion and proverbs.
- Proverbs as a part of national identity.
- Actuality of proverbs (questioning in schools)
- Proverbs and humour.
- Modern proverbs, do they exist?
- Presentation of the results on the website.



### 3) State of the project:

The collection of proverbs in tabular form is nearly completed with the following division of work:

- Grunwald Katarina (SK), Slovak.
- Leonhard Inge (A), English, Gaelic.
- Lutonska Lenka (SK), Latin.
- Marek Elisabeth (A), French.
- Mierszejewska Urszula (PL), Polish, perhaps Yiddish.
- Spitaler Wolfgang (D), German.

Fritz Weikert, Magdeburg (D) gave us an additional input of English proverbs and

epigrams, which have been integrated into the German/English table.

The text about the transfer of proverbs by the Latin language will be written by Lenka Lutonska and the chapter about religion and proverbs by Wolfgang Spitaler.

The next meeting of the working group is planned on 21/22 January 2010 in Vienna, at the same time as the meeting of the working group "Literature".



## Music project Bratislava

*PhDr. Katarina Grunwald, Bratislava (Slovakia)*



Culture is like a living organism: it breathes, it learns and it grows, always tends to unitise itself, to incorporate the stimulations that influence it as part of its spiritual richness. The spiritual world of an individual is not only formed by his own thoughts and his own cognition, but also by thoughts and influences of people whom he meets and by the facts that he experiences or reads about.

Music has been a means of communication from time immemorial. With music you can express grief and joy, it is a loud companion in all situations of our daily life. That's why we decided to choose music as the theme of our VECU project. We worked out a questionnaire that we gave to 60 pupils of an art school of the age of 7 to 16 years. The questions related to music and dance.

On the question how their relation to music was formed and how they were influenced by the musical environment at home, most pupils answered that at home it was the grandmother who sang folk songs for them or taught them to play the piano. At least one of the family members played an instrument and the children sang and danced to it. This made them choose for music already at a young age. Some pupils grew out of their children's dreams but the parents still stimulated them to keep playing the chosen instrument. Today they are thankful to their parents that they did. Some, on the other hand, say that it was their own wish to study music. They exercise out of themselves most of the time without needing explicit stimulation from their parents. Only one of them said that he was forced by his parents..

A pupil remembers that, as a small child, he went camping with his parents and that they played guitar and were singing. These

wonderful experiences during childhood did help him with his choice of a school - he attends the secondary art school, subjects piano and guitar. Another pupil grew up in a totally non-musical environment, but after her arrival in Bratislava, noticing the multitude of possibilities for art education, she decided to go for music. Till then she knew music only through radio, CDs and TV.

Since there were also children of 7 years amongst our respondents, we also asked them: what had it been like in the kindergarten? In pre-school? We received some nice answers like: „Tante Miska played and sang for us in pre-school. That's why i asked my parents to register me for this school“ (the school being the art school). Other children sang in the kindergarten choir or took part in a dance group. They played the flute or other music instruments that are easy to handle. The answers to the questionnaire show that the children were busy with music from the age of four.

All pupils are able to read music. Nearly all of them have given concerts.



Besides the music, some pupils like to dance. I questioned two dance students at the conservatory about their conception of dance as their profession. Regrettably their answers were not optimistic. The chances to get an engagement with a dance society are minimal. It's only the love for the dance that motivates them to continue their study and the hope to get an engagement nonetheless after graduating.

The pupils of the higher grades see music and their study of it more as a hobby. Only three respondents intend to become professional musicians. For all respondents music plays an important role in their daily life. After school they always and everywhere listen to music, be it from the radio, the CD player (Minidisk, Ipod...). They listen to it when they are sad, it makes them feel free and comfortable and they can think better. Since at school they mainly deal with classical music they compensate it in their free time with their favourite music like HIP-HOP, RnB, Soundtracks and various songs. National music was mentioned only once.

Concerts of various performers, performances of theatre companies etc. forming the usual music entertainment, have a big influence on the artistic development of the young generation. Despite all the recording media they use like CDs, disks or on the computer they are still willing to pay 30 – 70 Euro for a

live concert. For special concerts even 100 Euro. They also don't mind long trips.



The young art adepts are keen on new artistic experiences. They imitate or they are themselves creative. This way learning to be persevering and persistent. The path to become a good and renowned artist is a rocky one and has to be passed even by a born virtuoso. Maybe, one day, one of our respondents will be a great and famous artist. Who knows?



## How a team from Dresden, Brno, and Kiel researches "European Everyday Culture"

**A report about the work of the Triple on the "VECU" project up to now.**

*Ingrid Dummer, Kiel (Germany)*



Within the project theme "Everyday Culture" all three working groups study "Life at Home".

The group in Dresden studies family life in their region over the last 100 years. To do so, they look into descriptions of living, toys, and technical developments. The group in Brno shows what life was like in the different architectural style episodes. In addition, the working group in Kiel tries to figure out, what traditions and customs played a role in everyday life for people in their city and its surrounding.

In regular get-togethers of each partner group the research methods were planned and the work split up between the participants. The meetings are not only meant to exchange and summarize results, but also to exchange experiences and knowledge as well as to plan future steps.

Research sources that are used by all are: books, press publications, libraries, musea, and knowledge passed on by the older generation. The results are illustrated with pictures etc. and the references are listed. At the meetings these results are put together.

Up to now this has led to a nice and interesting documentation. Toys, technical instruments, and homes from different periods are presented, as well as examples of various architectural styles or of traditions and customs.

The meetings are often lively and funny, as examples from own experience - playing and the use of household utensils, living at different times, or celebrations for all kinds of occasions - are taken into account,

As the collaboration with the younger generation is an important part of the project, all three groups have given special attention to this point:

Dresden has contacted the evangelical student parish, and organized monthly talk groups with interested students. Through role play and sketches, as well as stories and anecdotes the contrast between life in the past and nowadays will be illustrated. It is hoped that, this will lead to lively discussions and further cooperation with the young generation. Moreover, a visit to a youth club should provide further information. Unfortunately, the attempt to win students of the Technical University for the theme "Questionnaire and biography of living" was not successful. The idea to talk with children about playing in former days and now - using toys and games - did not work out either, as not enough children came to the "Day of the Generations".

Brno presented a questionnaire to a group of students. The results are still pending and they are looking for more groups, that can fill out the questionnaire.

In separate documents the different architectural episodes are described, illustrated with photos.

The connection between the different architectural episodes and the organization of society during the last 100 years is also studied and described. For this, social aspects are just as important as the comparison with neighbouring countries.

While gathering and sorting an enormous amount of material, the group from Kiel was amazed by the number and variety of traditions and their different developments. Many have changed or become obsolete; some disappeared completely and are being replaced by new customs.

During the first meeting of the triple in Brno in May 2009, this theme in particular caused laughter and led to lively discussions. It was really nice to hear what traditions there are in different cultures. The way they were presented and sometimes demonstrated was very enjoyable.

After collecting many examples, a choice was made of the main traditions, that did and still do influence life at home. Later on the others might still be added to the newly founded cultural centre. In order to keep an overview, the traditions were

divided into categories and illustrated with pictures.

For the intergenerational part of the study a questionnaire was drawn up, that was filled out by pupils of one of the higher classes of a secondary school and by ethnology students of the university of Kiel. As these questionnaires haven't all been worked out yet, only a preliminary impression can be presented. It shows that - in contrast to the originally feared disinterest - the participants asked questions and were willing to discuss the project. In general, the idea of a cultural centre got a positive reception and the website will likely be visited later on. Most participants take part in customs they like, and appreciate it, when elderly people hand these down to following generations. Quite a few plan to do this themselves in the future.

The same questionnaire was filled out by kindergarten teachers and elderly students. Here, too, the results are still pending.

During the second meeting of the triple in Dresden at the end of November, the partner groups will try to make a combination poster for the triple. It will be based on the posters, made by each of them recently, that give an overview of their results up to now. This promises to be a fascinating job. As everyone is working hard and likes the project, the meeting will not only be a learning partnership, but all will profit from this get together.

For the coming months the groups plan the completion and documentation of their studies, as well as preparing the results for the internet. They also look forward to the results of the triples of the other countries, as the combined efforts have to result in the common "Work" VECU.

Last but not least it may now already be concluded, that by working on the project theme a broad interest for the diverse cultures in Europe has been awakened, especially in representatives of the younger generation. Moreover, by working together, once again, the basic idea of EFOS is confirmed: "WE LIVE EUROPE!"