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Vielfalter – Diversity as Chance

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1   The initiative and its organizers

Vielfalter was set up in 2009, in cooperation between the Vienna hub of *Western Union*, an international US-based company specialized in money transfer, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (nowadays Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs) and *Interkulturelles Zentrum* (IZ), an independent non-profit organization based in Vienna that was founded in 1987. The original idea came from *Western Union's* Vice President Hikmet Ersek, who was at that time based in Vienna and has in the meantime been promoted to become the CEO of Western Union (based in the United States).

IZ aims at developing and improving intercultural relations on national and international level by providing training in the field of intercultural work and contributing to intercultural communication. It has launched several projects in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and has also been appointed the Austrian agency or coordinator for some EU policies such as "Youth in Action". IZ has therefore strong expertise in managing funding from private as well as public sources.

Western Union had a big corporate footprint in Vienna when the initiative started; the Vienna hub was responsible for 120 countries and almost all regions apart from the Americas. Being such an important regional center for *Western Union* globally, they wanted to make a difference and create corporate social responsibility credentials.

Vielfalter aims at contributing to a gradual change of perspective in the Austrian education system by regarding diversity and multilingualism as valuable resources. Children and their parents from diverse cultural and social backgrounds should feel 'proud to belong', they should feel empowered to actively participate in kindergartens or schools and – as a larger desire – in society in general. *Vielfalter* itself is a play on words: *Vielfalt* means diversity, *Falter* means butterfly, so it is a butterfly that brings diversity to the education system. Hitherto, its system logic has mostly been on learning German and showing a strong orientation towards performance while the individual and her/his potentials are not being sufficiently recognized. Parents are often afraid of attending parent conference days as many of them have experienced a completely different school system when they were young or did not have the opportunity to go to school at all. Also the journal of students, which is common in primary and lower secondary schools to inform parents about key issues at school, bears big potentials of conflict as many parents cannot read German or simply ignore the messages they receive from school.

Vielfalter projects aim at helping children to discover their talents, to strengthen their self-esteem and thereby also to enhance confidence of parents in the school system or at least their interest in school affairs. This applies not only to children and parents of a foreign language background but also to native Austrians. In general, the Austrian school system is based on much support from the parents, e.g. with regard to helping children with home exercises (which would be different if children spent the whole day in school like in other countries) but also when it comes to selecting the best institutions for sound education possibilities and exerting some pressure to make sure that their children get access to the best possible education. In this context, *Vielfalter* tries to strengthen the partnerships between children, parents and schools for groups of the population that usually do not have easy access to the education system. By means of increasing pride in the mother tongue as sound basis for identity and by supporting activities in

which parents can contribute competences (such as cooking), *Vielfalter* tries to create trust in the school system which is based on mutual understanding and individual self-esteem.

Despite the relatively long and successful history of *Vielfalter* in Austria – *Western Union* only in very rare occasions funds a project for such a long time –, it is only one of several contributions to intercultural education in Austria. Nonetheless, there have been even plans to expand *Vielfalter* also to other countries, although no concrete actions have been taken in this regard so far.

2 Basic information on the (local) context and the emerging problems

In the school year 2010-2011 a quarter of primary school children in Austria had a native language other than German. This share can be as high as 40% in large cities in the provinces of Salzburg and Upper Austria and more than half in the capital Vienna. The most frequent languages other than German are Turkish and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian with about seven per cent each (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2012, 6), the rest being a mix of almost all languages that are spoken in the world. Recently, results of the international PISA comparisons have shown the big differences in educational achievements between children of native Austrian and those of foreign descent (see OECD 2010), although reading and mathematics competences of pupils leaving primary school are in general only in the medium range of OECD countries. What is even more striking, however, is that performance levels of 15 and 16 year-old children with regard to reading and mathematics as well as interest in the natural sciences have even declined in the last years. Although the differences of reading performance can partly be explained by family background and especially the cultural practices of the family (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2012, 11), the levels not only of the weakest readers are insufficient, but also the pupils with the strongest performance cannot compare with international levels. An open question to be discussed politically is therefore whether the selective Austrian school system not only fails to sufficiently support children from families with low levels of education, but whether it also fails to support talented children to develop their full potential (Schabmann et al. 2012). One central question is obviously how competences in dealing with languages and the access to language can be improved.

With 13.4% of 15-19 year-olds not attending any school or training, the NEET-rate (not in employment, education or training) is significantly above the rates in countries such as Germany, Finland, France or the Netherlands. In contrast, 87% of those who manage to enter the workforce after having completed their formal education report to have found a job that matches well with their qualification (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2012, 12-13). Career opportunities, however, do clearly vary between children from a native Austrian and non-native background (see Krause/ Liebig 2011). Although even in times of the crisis youth unemployment (8.7 per cent in 2012) is comparatively low in Austria, the share of young adults of non-Austrian descent who are unemployed is more than twice as high as among the reference group of native Austrians, i.e. roughly 17 vs. 8 per cent (Mayrhuber/ Bock-Schapelwein/ Rückert 2012, 34). All these numbers indicate that when compared with similar countries, the Austrian deficits in providing the youth (or at least some groups of the younger generation) with sufficient perspectives for the future have less to do with a weak labor market (such as in the economies in the European South) or with inadequate education

opportunities than with access problems that certain groups confront. Besides issues of ethnicity, empirical data also show a relatively strong correlation between household income and educational careers of children (e.g. Schenk 2008).

With regard to systems logics, the Austrian education system oscillates between universality and strong segmentation. There are two important structural features: Despite well-established private, often Catholic institutions, the education system is still clearly dominated by public institutions that – apart from tertiary education – do not charge fees whatsoever (even nursery schools are free in some provinces). When compared with other OECD countries, Austria not only "spends considerably more per student per year than the OECD average in primary and secondary education" (OECD 2013, 3), classes are also smaller than in the OECD on average. Moreover, not only in the field of primary and secondary education but also in tertiary education the share of private households' expenditure is significantly below the OCED average (ibid., 3-4). Because of early segmentation, however, the education system is not equally accessible for all social groups and thereby also redistributes public money to those with the longest educational careers. National education reports show that despite the concept of equal opportunities – regardless of origin – as laid down in the Austrian constitution, multilingual children confront serious disadvantage in the Austrian school system. This is not only reflected in the low levels of competencies but also in low participation rates in higher education that contradicts the dedication to multilingualism as requested by several documents of the European Union and the European Council (Herzog-Punzenberger/ Schnell 2012). Most likely because of worsening results in performance measurements (such as the PISA indicators mentioned above) and the feeling that the powerful teacher's union is blocking any reform initiatives, but also due to ideological differences about early segmentation, the public opinion towards the school system has worsened for many years with only 53% of Austrians rating schools a very good or good in 2009. Recently, however, changes in the school structure that have been discussed and partly also effectuated in the last years – such as the reduction of class sizes as well as the introduction of educational advising and extra German lessons for children with insufficient language skills – have been appreciated by the public (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2012, 13).

While independent from family background almost all children have attended some form of kindergarten before compulsory schooling sets in - mostly already at the age of 3 – (ibid., 8), attending nursery school has recently even become mandatory at the age of 5. This should enable all children to have a sufficient knowledge of the language of education before entering the school system. Regular schooling starts at the age of 6 and is compulsory for 9 years. In the first 4 years, children attend primary schools *("Volksschule")* in which basically all children of an age group are taught together. Only children with special educational needs may attend a special needs school *("Sonderschule")* from the age of 6 to 14, although there is also the option to attend integrative classes in the regular school system. The first major differentiation in the Austrian school system starts after the 4th year. At the beginning of the lower secondary level, children may continue their education in the regular school system in the lower secondary school *("Hauptschule")* or secondary academic school *("Allgemein bildende höhere Schule – AHS")*. From the ninth year onwards, students can choose between different types of intermediate or higher schools with thematic priorities on professional or general education (see Weiß/ Tritscher-Archan 2011 for a slightly more detailed description of the education system). Although it is in principle possible to continue school in the upper circle of

the secondary academic school (AHS) after having completed the lower secondary school *("Hauptschule")* at the age of 14, this is not very likely.

In order to avoid the negative consequences of too early differentiation for children from rather uneducated or poor family backgrounds, a new school type – the pilot project 'new secondary school' *("Neue Mittelschule")* – was introduced in 2008 and will become mainstream in the coming years. Despite strong evidence-based arguments for the mainstreaming of all-day schools (like in other European countries such as France) and the possibility to introduce all-day programs on the request of a certain amount of parents and teachers in a school, this school type is still relatively scarce in Austria. Moreover, the existing examples of all-day schools are not the fully integrated type with mixed forms of teaching, learning and leisure time and strong involvement of parents that shows the best results in improving the educational achievements of pupils from weak social backgrounds, but rather separated forms of intensive morning classes and afternoon supervision. To realize more fully integrated school types, however, also the framework would have to be modified, including the opening of the school for different professions, the adaptation of facilities and salary schemes and serious investments in teachers' training and further education (Hörl et al. 2012). The institutional framework for changing the structure of schooling is however quite complex. While education is in the primary responsibility of the federal ministry of education, some aspects of primary and lower secondary schooling – such as occupational laws and salary schemes as well as the maintenance of school buildings – are organized by the provinces. Nursery schooling is almost the sole responsibility of the provinces, although the framework and strategic aspects for all types of education are mostly negotiated with the federal level. Besides the distribution of competences between the levels of statehood, frictions are also caused by ideological differences between political parties and special interests, not least those of teachers.

Due to the selection at an early age, education opportunities are clearly dependent on the education of the parents. While children with a non-German mother tongue are clearly underrepresented in academic secondary schools (with a share of only 16 per cent), they are strongly over-represented in special needs schools (about 30 per cent). Moreover, within school types and individual schools, children with a foreign mother tongue are often strongly concentrated in certain classes (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2012, 6), leading to cases where German-speaking Austrian children find themselves in an absolute minority or are almost absent (especially in Vienna). As there is no agreed upon definition of competence poverty, inadequate competences are often concentrated in schools with a difficult social context (Bruneforth et al. 2012). The high share of migrants in special needs schools can be explained by the fact that disadvantaged students with learning disabilities are often labeled disabled (Luciak 2009). This is even more striking as out of the group of children with special educational needs (about 4% of an age group), only 45% are taught in special needs schools or segregated classrooms while 55% are nowadays integrated in the mainstream school system. While 70% of pupils attending academic secondary schools have parents who have left school with a university entrance certificate themselves (Matura), this applies only to about 30-35% of children who attend less advanced school types. Besides ethnical and class-based differences, however, there is also a marked gap between cities and rural areas. Whereas in cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants almost half of the children attend AHS after primary school, this rate is only half of the urban rate in rural areas (Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2012, 8-9).

Within the group of multilingual children, however, their standing in the school system depends on the several context factors such as the prestige of the language, the immigration history of the ethnic group, its socio-economic composition and their legal standing (Herzog-Punzenberger/ Schnell 2012). Comparative studies show that children from the second generation of Turkish immigrants have significantly less chances in education systems such as the Austrian or the German when compared with countries such as France or Sweden that are more strongly based on integrative all-day learning (e.g. Baysu/ de Valk 2012). While foreign language has long been considered a deficit, languages that have always been taught as part of the curriculum such as English, French, Italian or Spanish have also always had a much higher social standing than the languages of the majority of the immigrant population, especially Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian and Turkish. Despite the establishment of intercultural education as a guiding principle in the Austrian school system which should be mainstreamed in all curricula for primary and secondary schools in the beginning of the 1990s, the focus of the educational praxis has long been on training German language skills. This is largely a result of lacking awareness of the guiding principle by teaching staff, which is in turn due to the paradoxical lack of its enshrinement in the curriculum of teaching colleges. In general, there is a lack of research and underlying data. One assumption is that the teachers' and principals' actions are extremely important to develop academic competences in children. The OCED has already suggested some measures to improve the opportunities of multi-lingual children in the Austrian education system. These concern the quality of early childhood education (incl. compulsory further education for teachers and the recruitment of multilingual staff), the funding of competently guided and inter-institutionally coordinated continuous language development, compulsory education of teachers in the field of cultural diversity, stronger contacts with parents and ethnic communities and structural changes in the education system that postpone student selection to a stage as late as possible and create an all-day school type (Herzog-Punzenberger/ Schnell 2012).

In this context, *Vielfalter* is just a little piece in the puzzle of creating a framework that allows for equal opportunities in the Austrian education system. Besides the structural changes that have been described above, the ministry itself also supports small projects in the areas of multilingualism and interculturality by an initiative that has been established in the second half of the 2000s. In contrast to *Vielfalter*, however, it does not cross the borders between institutions and can only provide relatively small funds for individual initiatives. Besides *Vielfalter*, there are also other private initiatives to improve the chances of migrants in the Austrian education system such as *Teach for Austria*, a project built after the international role models *Teach for All* and *Teach for America* that was initiated by the Austrian branch of *The Boston Consulting Group* and is also supported by the federal ministry of education. The reason for the requirement of having different projects is that structural and especially legal changes are slow and require political majorities while small projects show results comparatively quickly. Teutsch, the representative from the ministry in the *Vielfalter* is skeptical, however, that small projects can have major effects by working as lighthouse for comparable initiatives.

3   Genesis of the initiative

Vielfalter was a personal matter of Hikmet Ersek, that time CEO of the regional office of Western Union in Vienna. Being the son of an Austrian mother and a Turkish father, Ersek grew up in Istanbul and Vienna

and thus experienced himself what it means to live between two cultures and – having first been educated in the Austrian school in Istanbul – to come to Vienna as a migrant. As *Western Union* makes a significant share of its profit with migrant communities, the company has some dedication to also return something to the community. In 2008, without having a clear concept in mind, Ersek knew that he would like to start an initiative in the field of education. A first contact with the minister of education was created by the PR agency *Ecker und Partner* that had *Western Union* and the ministry as its clients. Based on the contact by *Ecker und Partner*, Ersek wanted to see if the ministry would be interested. After this first meeting, the office of the minister asked the newly established unit for migration, intercultural education and language policy to assist in the development of a joint project. Rüdiger Teutsch, the head of unit and a former managing director of *Interkulturelles Zentrum (IZ)*, then invited his successor Mari Steindl to join the process as a competent partner from civil society. *Western Union*, the ministry, IZ and 'Ecker and Partner' finally developed the project together. The agency left the consortium after the first year as there was a feeling that the PR aspect was less important than originally imagined. The start of the initiative required much trust in the organizational capacity of the NGO as a very vague idea of the minister and the vice president of an international company needed to become operational. Therefore, it was the most appropriate way for Teutsch to contact IZ directly and see if they would be interested in investing some personnel resources in order to generate a potential long-term project.

The starting point of the project was less the funding opportunity than the generation of a joint idea. From the ministry representative's perspective, innovation is dependent on group dynamics, especially fruitful communication and trust. The idea of *Vielfalter* was born out of a working group in which Teutsch on behalf of the ministry, Paul Foster as representative from *Western Union* as well as Mari Steindl and Andrea Fiala from IZ met several times. Fiala, the later project coordinator, got involved as she had several years of experience in giving trainings in intercultural work with parents. The original idea was about creating quite traditional offers in the field of language trainings. From this starting point, they were thinking about how the deficit-orientation in Austrian pedagogy could be overcome and the potentials of migrants could be supported in a more all-encompassing way. This was also based on the more conceptual ideas of *Western Union* and *IZ* to support diversity based on the experiences of the ministry in the field of education policy. The project was soon conceptualized in a two-directional way. Not only should migrants be empowered and gain self-confidence. More broadly, children should get the feeling that they are enriching society, that they are not caught in ethnic boxes. It should support social cohesion by drawing onto people's diverse background, and thus Austrians should benefit as well.

Besides the idea of corporate social responsibility, the rationale for *Western Union* was to do something for their customer base, as many parents of kids with an immigrant background are also customers of the company. It should thereby also contribute something to business. As kids with an immigrant background are often in schools with a bad reputation, it was about generating confidence in themselves and self-improvement, about integration and awareness rising at the same time, about making kids realize that they are special, about creating a 'pride to belong'. The original idea for the title was therefore 'proud to belong'. *Western Union* regarded *Vielfalter* a successful partnership right from the start as they never expected the ministry to do more than open doors. In the company's self-understanding, *Western Union's* product is a win-win situation between a company and the community that is being served as global foreign remittances are much larger than any foreign aid or FDI flows, so they already change a lot by their

business practice. While making money, *Western Union* strives to help their customers to help themselves, and *Vielfalter* should add to this practice. *Western Union*'s vision for the *Vielfalter* was therefore never to change the entire education system in the short run, for instance by political lobbying, but to lead by example, and to bring about change in the longer term via influencing the discourse on education, stimulated through a small-scale project landscape. They wanted to show what impact companies in Austria can make even without investing a lot of money, rather by inspiring the generation of new ideas and by empowering people to become role models. In the longer run, thus, they see *Vielfalter* even as umbrella name for the celebration of diversity and empowerment under which not only projects but also scholarships and other measures could be funded.

The big opportunity for funding was that Paul Foster from *Western Union* in Vienna, who was involved in the project right from start, was also on the board of the *Western Union Foundation*, the corporate social responsibility branch of *Western Union* which supports initiatives that are adding something on top of the company's core business. Based in Colorado in the United States, the Foundation mostly supports education projects all over the world, but having a focus on the countries of origin of their customers. Originally the funding came only from the *Western Union Foundation* which was later topped up with some money from the Austrian branch of *Western Union*. The advantage of having the project funded by the *Foundation* instead of the company was from Foster's point of view that this made sure that funding rests on a stable basis instead of being dependent on the business cycle. Moreover, according to Foster, the project was not difficult to justify in front of the Foundation as it is directly touching on customers and even more so on potential employees, a fact that was even more important in the Austrian case. For the Foundation this was also a chance to see what is going on on the other side of the developed world. Obviously, those were sufficient arguments to justify the support of an initiative in one of the richest societies in the world. Foster could also use its influence with the Foundation to make sure that funding was secured over the years.

Vielfalter was even to some degree ahead of the game as the *Foundation* has only later started to focus its initiatives on economic empowerment. Moreover, *Vielfalter* was an exceptional project right from the start as it should be an ongoing initiative based on an ongoing relationship, which is clearly different when compared with the typical on-off projects that are much more often funded by regional branches of *Western Union*. As the market in Austria itself is rather small and not very revenue-generating, *Western Union* did not have many projects going on in Austria before. They would have rather made donations via third actors than initiated something on their own. But the genesis of *Vielfalter* was not only very special from the perspective of the Austrian branch of *Western Union* but also seen from the *Western Union Foundation* as usually are taken out of the Foundation's head office in Denver. This time it was taken by a local group but embedded in the larger experience made in the context of other projects of the Foundation, which made sure that there is a real demand for such an initiative.

The major challenge in the development phase of the project was first to find a legal framework for *Vielfalter* that fits the requirements of all organizations involved. Besides, also the brand and organizational structure, such as the call for and selection of projects by experts collaborating in a jury, had to be developed. Another major issue from the ministry's perspective was whether they could cooperate with a profit-oriented organization and provide access to school for them, which they felt justified by the fact that access is provided to an initiative and is moreover mostly funded by a Foundation and not by a profit-making company directly. Another challenge was how to deal with criticism, e.g. when in the public opinion that

was reflected in a short article in an Austrian newspaper *Western Union* was accused to only compensate for its exploitative business model by supporting small projects in the migrant community, an issue *Western Union* is quite familiar with.

Despite the strong personal relation between Hikmet Ersek and the genesis of *Vielfalter*, it soon stood on a much broader basis as changing people have taken the responsibility for accompanying the project on behalf of *Western Union*. However, although there has always been strong support as all involved actors were convinced of the project's relevance, *Vielfalter's* future has nonetheless always been depending on proving its legitimacy to changing supporters within *Western Union*, also because the ministry would not be prepared to replace the funding for the case that the private sponsor terminates its engagement. Right from the start, the role of the ministry was more coordinative: it tried to combine essential players (specifically, *Western Union* as the motor behind the idea of the *Vielfalter* and the IZ as a capable implementer) and to check if ideas matched with the opportunities the legal and de facto framework of the education system offers. The PR agency was left out of the consortium after the first year as there was a feeling that virus marketing would be sufficient to generate project submissions and experience showed that the media would be much more interested in individual projects than in *Vielfalter* as the larger initiative. Nonetheless, from a marketing perspective, there is a feeling that there are still unused potentials to better communicate *Vielfalter* internally within *Western Union*. Although Vienna is still – despite major re-organizations[1] – a major player in the Western Union family with more than 200 people working there, it is not as global as before and so impact assessment is getting more weight. From the key actors' perspective, though, the reason for doing this project is still there and thus it should be easily justified.

4   The activities and organization

Vielfalter is co-ordinated by *Interkulturelles Zentrum* by a part-time employee (Andrea Fiala). The core of the project is the funding of individual projects based on a competition. The call for project submission is usually opened in autumn at the beginning of the school year and stays open for about 1.5 months. Projects may be proposed by kindergartens or schools but also by large associations or private initiatives. The distribution of the call to schools is pretty easy as the ministry can provide all relevant data. More difficult is the contact with kindergartens and associations, but in the course of the project duration the co-ordinator has collected about 10.000 e-mail addresses in a databank to which the call for proposals is distributed. Initiatives may also contact the co-ordinator before submission for personal advice. As only about 20 percent of submitted proposals (about 20-30 out of 100-150) can finally be funded, the selection of projects is organized in a quite sophisticated process consisting of three consecutive rounds. First, projects that do not fulfill formal requirements or lack key conceptual ideas are excluded in a low level decision. Then, in a second round, a multi-professional jury consisting of representatives from the project

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[1] The *Western Union* regions handled from Vienna were originally called EMEASA (Europe Middle East Africa South Asia) and were later even extended to include also Asia-Pacific. However, when Ersek moved to the United States in 2010 it became clear that this big share of the global market was too difficult to handle from Vienna and so first only Europe and the post-Soviet states remained under the Vienna hub while in the meantime also the headquarters for Europe were moved to London and the headquarters for the post-Soviet states were moved to Dubai in order to increase efficiency.

partners but also other key insitutions and individuals evaluates the remaining 50-70 proposals and score them in different categories. Projects that receive less than half of the maximum score are not considered in the final round. In this final round, the remaining projects are discussed in detail by all members of the jury. The final selection of projects is completed at the end of this meeting.

An annual budget of about 150.000 Euro (of which about 90,000 Euro are reserved for project funding) is provided to the IZ as implementing body, in collaboration between the *Western Union Foundation* and *Western Union Austria*. When the first operational year of *Vielfalter* started in 2009, projects received financial support of 3000 Euro. Funds by the *Western Union Foundation* were increased in the second year and thus not only slight modifications of the operational framework such as longer project durations (also 12 and 18 months instead of only 6) and the possibility of long-term projects (continuous funding over a longer period) were created, but also individual funding increased to 5000 or 8000 Euro respectively (8000 for projects with a duration of 18 months). However, when the crisis hit the banking sector, funding from *Western Union* was somethat reduced for the year 2013 and as a consequence the funding for individual projects was fixed at a rate of 5000 Euro. Originally, long-term projects were selected in close co-operation with *Western Union*. However, as one of the employees who was very actively involved in *Vielfalter* left the company two years after the implementation of the project, today most duties in this regard are done by the project coordinator alone. She decides not only based on project reports but also on the basis of continuous contacts during the year. Today, a certain share of available funds is reserved for long-term projects (about 12000 Euro in total), of which individual projects may be supported with another 3000 Euro based on a new amended proposal that shows that some conceptual development has taken place. If long-term funding is not granted, project leaders can re-apply nonetheless, although only with a new project idea. The introduction of long-term funding followed the explicit wish by the actors behind the *Vielfalter* to contribute to the sustainability of successful projects in terms of an institutionalization (of values, methods, tools..) within the respective school, kindergarten or association.

In the first five years of the *Vielfalter,* 132 projects were financed, including 16 long-term projects. Regardinig the geographical distribution of projects, there is a strong bias towards the capital (see chart 1). Although Vielfalter supports projects all over the country, most projects by far have been located in Vienna which can only partly be justified by population numbers – Vienna is the largest Austrian province with a population of about 1.75 million, followed by Lower Austria with about 1.6 and Upper Austria with about 1.4 million, while the smallest provinces Burgenland and Vorarlberg have only 287,000 and 373,000 inhabitants respectively. While there has not been a single application from an initiative in Burgenland so far, the share of Viennese projects has even been increasing in the course of time (see chart 2). The reasons for this unequal distribution are not clear; in principle, the project is promoted via the same channels all over country, although there are some provinces such as Vorarlberg where the integration department is more actively involved. One explanation for varying interest between regions might be that issues of cultural diversity are concentrated in the capital and some other major cities such as Linz in Upper Austria, an important industrial center, as these are the places where also the most migrants settle (while in Austria 19.4 per cent of the population on average were either born abroad or have parents who were both born abroad – i.e. the defintion of having an immigrant background –, this share is 38.5 per cent in Vienna). In contrast, the provinces where the autochthonous Austrian minorities – i.e. especially Burgenland Croats and the Slovene minority in Carinthia – live, have a share of immigrant population that is significantly

below average (11.1 per cent in Burgenland, 11.9 per cent in Carinthina). As the provision of bilingual schools for those minorities is guaranteed by the Austrian constitution, less additional action seems to be necessary in these communities, although new immigrants are a totally different target group.

Chart 1: Funded projects in Austrian provinces 2009-2013
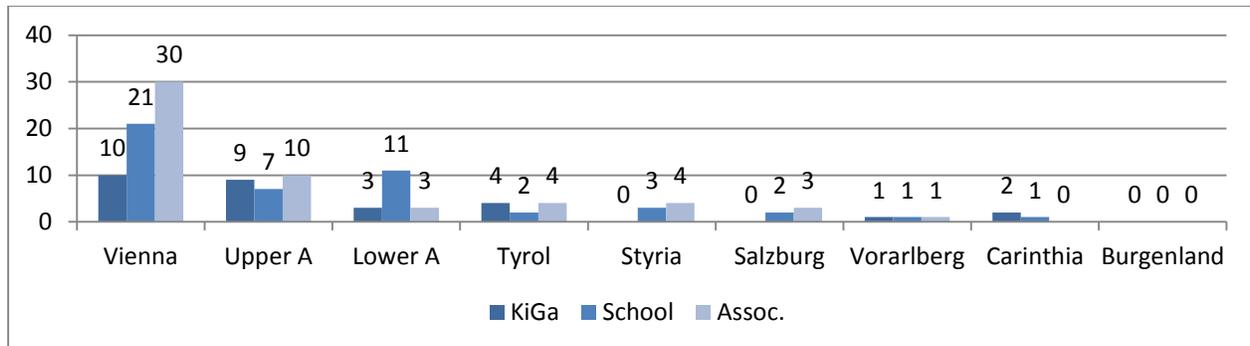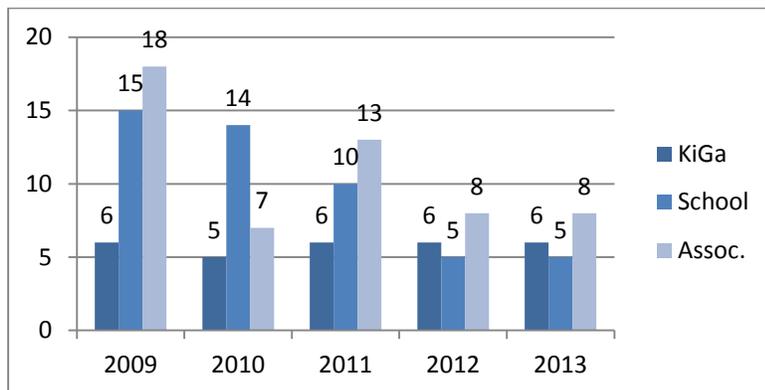

Source: *Vielfalter* evaluation

Chart 2: Development of the distribution of funded projects 2009-2013
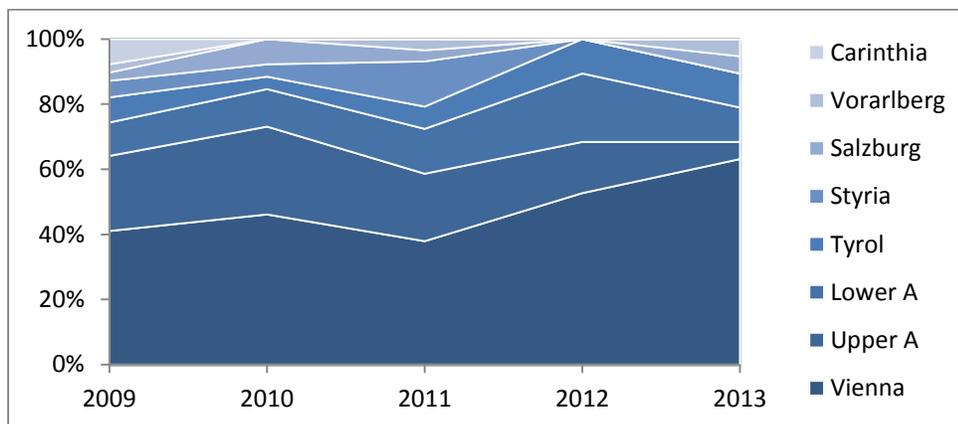
Source: *Vielfalter* evaluation

In terms of funded organizations, associations are acquiring the most projects, although the distribution between kindergartens, schools and associations has become more equal in recent years (see chart 3). Within the school sector, the primary level is clearly overrepresented while academic secondary schools show relatively little motivation to acquire projects, which can also be interpreted as an indicator that – due to the segmented school system – they confront the least challenges with regard to integration and diversity issues as well as access to funding. The number of long-term projects has oscillated between three and eight in the last years and has not shown any clear pattern of distribution between organizations. The share of funded projects has remained pretty stable in the course of time. Although less projects can be selected nowadays than in the first project year (due to higher individual rates), the share of funded projects among all submissions has remained pretty stable, oscillating between 17 (2nd year) and 27 (1st year) or 19 (4th and 5th year) and 21 (3rd year) per cent. On average, about 3000 persons per year directly participate in Vielfalter projects (see *Vielfalter* evaluation for numbers).

Chart 3: Distribution of projects between kindergartens, schools, and associations

Source: *Vielfalter* evaluation

When projects are accepted for funding, there is not a standard approach to the organization of contacts between the coordinator and the project. In principle, there is no need for personal contacts by telephone or site visits. However, when projects need some advice in respects such as estimating costs of some activities, inviting experts or speakers or learning from other selected projects, the coordinator is always available for giving advice. The coordinator would also be interested in visiting projects (and especially their final presentations), but there are limits set by available time and funding. Nonetheless, there is a feeling that in the course of time often pretty good relationships are established with project leaders due to frequent exchange of information. As the coordinator also communicates successful project stories, there is a potential that project leaders are also learning from each other while their activities are still going on. Exchange of experience is also facilitated by a big final event at the end of the school year to which all initiatives and the key partners are invited.

Projects have to submit final reports briefly after their activities are finished. All project leaders reported that the (online) administration of projects – from submission of applications to final reports – is simple and does not create a barrier for applications, especially when compared with other sponsors that disadvantage smaller initiatives that lack the resources to go through lenghty, complicated application procedures. The low threshold for accessing funding is also considered a major opportunity for interested but not yet active individuals to start an initiative (and found an association which is required to apply for funding).

IZ reports to the sponsor about their activities, the use of funds and how the target group has been reached. So far, there has not been a real impact assessment. The implementing organizations measure success in different ways. Often it is more impressions based on observations of participating children and observed changes in kindergartens or schools, or on feedback from children and parents or reports about the children's future educational careers. Generally, high attendance figures in projects are also seen as an indicator of success. Some projects' successes are quantified in other ways, such as the number of books taken from the schools' multilingual library or rising enrollment numbers. There is a feeling, however, that a real assessment of achieved successes (such as structured data on careers of former *Vielfalter* participants) will be required in the future if the *Foundation* intends to expand the idea either in the Austrian context or even to export it to other countries.

5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

Vielfalter projects aim at innovation in a broad range of societal challenges and social needs in the fields of interculture, multilingualism and the empowerment of socially excluded groups. These range from initiatives that aim at motivating kindergarten childrens' interest for the cultures and languages of their peers, projects addressing structural racism in the Austrian education system and the insufficient anchoring of the themes in the education of pedagogues, immigrants' lower chances to receiving sound education or the requirement to involve parents in children's educational empowerment. What pulls the diverse projects together is an innovative response to a perceived problem, even if the target groups, contexts and challenges are different. Innovative actions can be as diverse as parents cafés to which migrants are personally invited in order to improve their access to the school system, the development of a code of conduct for all kindergarten pedagogues being employed with a particular organization, the involvement of the target group in the conceptualization of ideas, the re-orientation of pedagogic concepts to better embrace the resources of the target group as well as the re-conceptualization of mental framings in order to see diversity as a resource, to sensitize for institutional racism and to re-assess the value of languages. The link between projects is the flexible response to perceived needs which are not or insufficiently adressed by the education system and the government.

However, *Vielfalter* achieves learning effects on different levels. Also the key partners of *Vielfalter* learn from each other and their professional approaches. *Western Union* has a strong orientation towards diversity in its personnel and marketing policies, as a strong representation of native speakers creates value for giving services for the client community. This is something schools can learn from an international company. IZ has much experience with youth work and intercultural trainings. In contrast, the ministry has little experience with winning people for its actions by other means than legal instruments but can provide the institutional framework to support peer-learning and networking among initiatives. From a broader perspective, *Vielfalter* is one of several projects that show that private initiatives can have impacts on the innovation capacity of the Austrian education system. Education initiatives that are sponsored by foundations have become increasingly popular within the last seven or eight years even if they still rather small (e.g. projects such as 'SagsMulti' that is supported by some Austrian companies in cooperation with the city of Vienna, the above mentioned project *Teach for Austria* or some funding by *Erste Foundation*, the CSR branch of a large Austrian bank).

In the perception of the representative of the ministry, *Vielfalter* is lived diversity which not only shows in the diversity of involved institutions and the diversity of project durations but also in the diversity of core actors which already created dynamics and innovation capacity in the set-up of the project. *Vielfalter* creates bridges between institutions, points at structural deficiencies in the education system and tries to achieve productive disturbances in the rigid system. One specific potential of *Vielfalter* is that it can create opportunities at the transitions within the education system, e.g. by linking formal and informal education, by linking adult education and the school system or by creating links between the kindergarten and school. Otherwise, no single actor within the education system (in a broad definition) would take initiative at these margins. Another important element is the resource approach, i.e. the change of framing by replacing a deficitary view of the cultures and languages of immigrants with a view that regards diversity as a potential for an increasingly heterogenous society. While experience shows that the projects sometimes live and die with the personal commitment of an individual, in general successful project implementation depends

on the mobilization of all involved actors, i.e. the kindergarten and school staff, the children, and often their parents play a crucial role as well. Besides participating groups and communities, also the general public should become sensitized. Even if these effects are difficult to measure, all projects are designed to contribute to social inclusion in the long run.

In the majority of cases, project leaders reported that the respective initiative would not have taken place without the support of *Vielfalter*. Over the last 20 years, public funding for innovative educational initatives within kindergartens and schools has been constantly threatened by austerity measures due to the European economic governance and – over the last years - the fiscal consequences of the crisis. A lack of funding – and especially funding that is accessible without having to take major administrative efforts – is perceived to be the main reason behind project ideas being stuck in drawers instead of being implemented. Even if in some cases projects would have been implemented, vital aspects would have been sacrificed or the whole project would have simply been much smaller in size. Sometimes *Vielfalter* was the motivation for initiatives to set the focus on aspects of diversity and multilingualism. *Vielfalter* therefore creates a room to maneuvre for innovative actions in the Austrian school system which is based on a logic of assimiliation and universal and objective knowledge.Besides the funding aspect, *Vielfalter* also creates legitimacy and might give the final impetus to find allies within an organization to draft a relatively elaborated concept in order to eventually realize an idea. Especially the head of the kindergartens or schools are regarded as important role models to carry openness, respectful attitude towards 'otherness' and appreciation of diversity into their teams. In the case of long-term funding, even attitudes of formerly sceptical staff members have been turned and schools and kindergartens grew more cohesive and respectful as a whole. *Vielfalter* is therefore seen as a strong enabler of change despite the fact that most work in the projects needs to be done on a voluntary basis and requires much commitment by the people involved, be it teachers or other contributors such as parents and other family members. In this regard, some project leaders claimed that *Vielfalter* gives them a form of recognition and support that they usually would not get from within the eduation system.

A key feature of *Vielfalter* that distinguishes the project from other funding opportunities is its thematic openness that gives applicants and project leaders much autonomy with regard to topics and methods – reaching from theatre plays and cycling courses to peer learning – and thus leaves much room for creativity and innovation, while the coordinator is easily availbale for personal feedback and provides them with a sense of security at the same time. Autonomy and self-confidence should also be strengthened among project participants by creating a feeling of pride for their identity (e.g. make children insist on the correct pronounciation of their names) and empowering them to participate in the education system (e.g. reducing the feeling of insecurity among parents when meeting teachers, improving the understanding for educational careers and tertiary education among youth and parents or training teachers so see culture and language as resource), in the labour market (e.g. by helping children to acquire writing competences in their family language) and society in a more broader understanding (e.g. make women wear the head scarf with pride when doing physical activity in public, making black people visible in literature by writing a book). Speaking a second language and knowing different cultures should be understood as assets. Immigrants' active involvement in society, the creation of a feeling of cohesion and mutual belonging among children and the demonstration of lived democracy and participation should at least impact on the mainstream in the long run. In contrast, ambitions to directly shape public discourse vary between projects

and implementing organizations, alhtough impacts should be more immediate when actions are targeted on adults, i.e. in particular parents or teachers.

Innovation can also be evaluated by processes that sustain in organizations and even lead to a shift in organizational structures. While the *Vielfalter* funded projects don't aim at restructuring the entire education system at once, some projects, especially those that have been long-term funded, have at least partially been institutionalized within the respective schools and kindergartens. While some projects die with the personal commitment of the project leader or when the context changes, some innovations such as parent cafés, language courses or codes of conduct in kindergartens have remained. Besides processes, also materials that have been purchased for the projects – such as books for a library or information brochures – are often still in use. The ultimate success would of course show if projects were no longer needed as their contents or procedures had already been mainstreamed or enshrined in the education system. Although it can be shown that some modifications have been achieved within institutions, whether these small initiatives are adequate steps to contribute to a system change must remain an open question. Seen from the perspective of the ministry representative, there are not any quantifiable results such as better education careers or an improvement of competences within the target group that show up in education standards, although this link of course cannot be reliably established between a small initiative such as *Vielfalter* and tests that check students' competences for the whole country. The improvement of individual competences could be tested more easily. As has been mentioned above, however, also in this respect there are only individual stories available.

In conclusion, a widely shared opinion in the field is that while the projects are important steps and certainly lead to deep, positive ramifications for the directly involved target group and potentially also the project implementing school or kindergarten, they are a mere drop in the ocean that cannot satisfyingly compensate for the slow change in the education system: an empowering project at the kindergarten level will have a much larger effect on the individual, and therefore in the long run on society, if the values and approaches are not undermined by but enshrined in the curriculum of the primary school that follows the kindergarten expierence and so on. In other words, the issues and challenges the projects respond to will continue to hinder social inclusion and equality of opportunity at a larger, societal level unless structural change is induced and the contents are enshrined in the education system. This perception has been a key outcome of the ImPRove-focus group discussion. That the ministry is involved in the initiative is therefore a positive signal, but not a major support for people who are practically doing projects.

6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

As has been explained above, the core consortium consists of *IZ*, *Western Union* and the *Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs* (see Illustration 1). They meet one or two times a year to discuss strategy issues. In addition, there is the celebration of projects at the end of the academic year at which all partners meet. In between there are more frequent meetings between *Western Union* and IZ. The exchange of ideas and information on content, public relations and finances was intense in the beginning of the partnership as the responsible desk officer of Western Union was able to invest much time in the initiative. The involvement of persons on behalf of *Western Union* has changed time and again, however,

and therefore the contribution of work time has also undergone some changes. Since January 2013 when a new team within *Western Union* has taken over responsibility, there is again much commitment and interest on behalf of the responsible staff members. If time allows, they even visit individual projects in order to get a real life impression. Organizationally, the responsibility for *Vielfalter* has also been moved from the marketing unit of *Western Union* to the team of the CEO, which has contributed to a speedup of procedures, especially with regard to financial issues. At the same time, there is a feeling that administrative requirements have also been reduced due to strengthened trust between the partners. While IZ had to render accounts for all expenses before, they now receive the full budget for a year and only have to report on activities four times a year (which was also much more frequently before), unless expenses exceed 2000 Euro. In general, there is a feeling that the backing by the management of Western Union has even become stronger in the course of time.

Illustration 1: Relations of ERfA
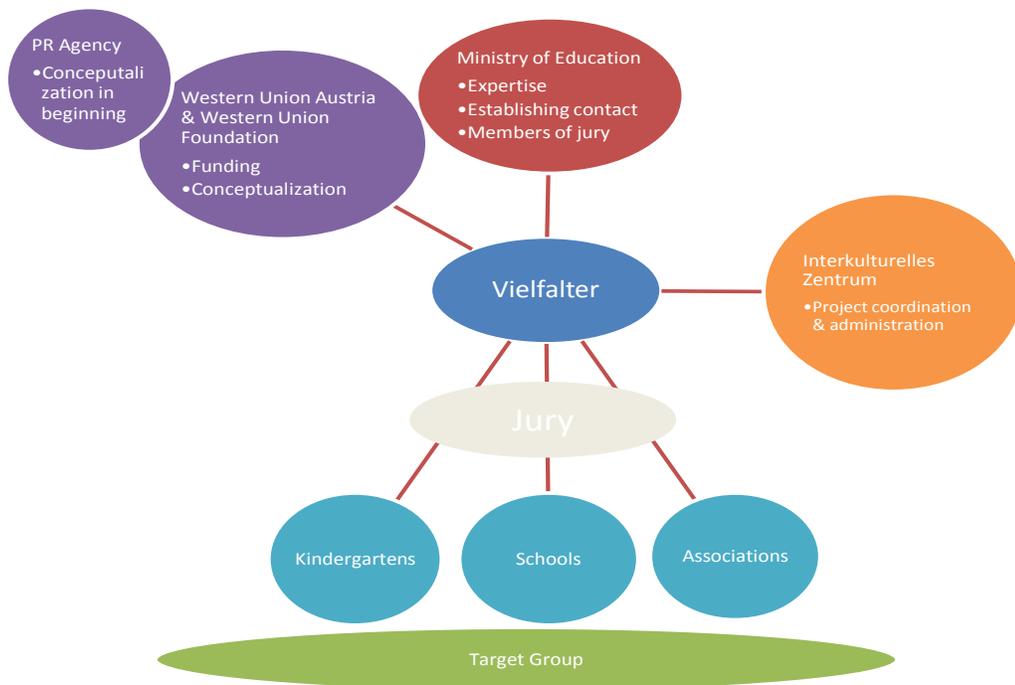
Within IZ all decisions are made in collaboration with the responsible managing director of the NGO who is also available for internal coaching. She and the coordinator prepare all relevant decisions which have to be discussed with the other core partners together. Although the ministry is in principle also available for contributing ideas, they mostly give feedback on suggestions that are presented by the other partners. Besides the core partners, more organizations and sectors are involved in the jury that is responsible for

the selection of projects. Out of eight to nine members, six are representatives of important institutions (the ministry, *Federation of Austrian Industry*, *University of Teacher Education Vienna*, *Chamber of Labor*, one or two representatives from *Western Union*) while the others are more or less individuals from associations, from the arts – mostly writers – and someone who represents the perspective of kindergartens. As a principle, they seek to find gender parity in the composition of the jury. Membership in the jury is based on an invitation by IZ and granted for a year, although most members stay for a longer period of time despite the requirement to work in an honorary capacity.

In 2012, they had an additional cooperation with the association *Verein Wirtschaft für Integration*, in which a project called *Aktion 365 plus* – that resembled *Vielfalter* in many ways such as the selection of small projects by a jury to support integration – was implemented. However, *Verein Wirtschaft für Integration* – an association that is sponsored by a number of Austrian companies (or the Austrian branches of international companies), the *Austrian Federal Economic Chamber*, the *Federation of Austrian Industry* and an outsourced enterprise of the City of Vienna – could not provide funding for an additional year. The reason for this discontinuity was also that there were differing opinions on the set-up of the initiative. As the strategy of *Aktion 365 plus* was strongly based on the targets of the national action plan for integration, the focus was on German language training, the orientation towards individual achievement and a discourse on migrants' contribution to Austrian society. In contrast, IZ's and *Vielfalter's* strategy are much more oriented towards individual development and the recognition of personal talent and resources, both in a broader understanding than in the official integration strategy. As this endeavor is largely supported by *Western Unio*n and the project coordinator even has the feeling that *Western Union* is proud to sponsor a quite progressive project, there have not been any major conflicts or disagreements so far. Even if there are some minor differences of opinion – such as *Western Unions's* desire to have two representatives in the jury while IZ would prefer seeing all organizations to send just one person – there is the feeling that discussion are taking place among equals and all sides can express themselves frankly, even if the sponsor has de facto more power. On behalf of *Western Union* they also reported only minor dissent on issues like communication strategies and the required amount of money.

The ministry is represented by the head of a new ministerial unit without operational competencies and with the objective to mainstream diversity issues within the ministry. In the project, it perceives its role in providing the know-how on the national and international framework of education policy – including expertise on recommendations on how to improve the equality of access for immigrants – and in creating a link with the institutions of the education system, not only schools but also the institutions for the training of teachers. This may also be essential for the sponsor in order to see that the initiative is being clearly recognized by key actors. From the ministry's perspective the provision of knowledge and steering capacities are a contribution to social innovation which is feasible in the short run. More important, but much more complicated, would be to provide an adequate legal and institutional framework for a diversity-sensitive educational system. The corporate and federal structure of the Austrian welfare state is a hindrance to innovation in general; in the educational system the situation is worse due to the constitutional status of many regulations, thereby requiring two-third majorities in national parliament, and coordination with the federal states.

Apart from this expertise, the ministry can also provide some overview on comparable projects and key actors in the field. In contrast, the public sector is not able or willing to provide funds for the development and implementation of additional model projects in the education sector. While the project is seen as smooth and conflict-free space due to a shared world view of the key actors involved, what is missing from the perspective of the representative of the ministry is a more general informal panel to discuss issues of integration and cultural diversity with civil society actors, politics and the administration on different levels besides the more formal advisory board on integration that has been established a couple of years ago.

The perspective of project leaders with regard to the involvement of the ministry is differentiated. Some project leaders had the feeling that the engagement of the ministry does not bring much benefit for them. Others regard it as an important sign that the projects' work is appreciated and that the ministry has an understanding for its responsibilities. The involvement of the ministry would also give the project more legitimacy. From a more critical point of view, however, some initiatives argued that the initiative also needs to be seen in the context of a failing education system in which the government sheds responsibility for its roles as sponsor, legislator and coordinator of relevant initiatives. Concerning the networking opportunities with other initiatives, most projects do not strengthen existing or forge additional contacts, although there are some examples where new co-operations between initiatives were set up at the final event at the end of the school year. This, however, cannot be regarded as indicator of lacking interest or motivation of project leaders but rather needs to be interpreted as result of, firstly, strong existing networks in which most projects are already embedded due to cooperation practices of project leaders and, secondly, the broad spectrum of funded initiatives (in terms of target group and content) which are often not relevant for a direct exchange of experience.

Within IZ, *Vielfalter* is also connected with other projects, in particular by means of mutual marketing. The same applies to individual projects which are often active as multipliers for the initiative and its ideas. Some of them even organize media contacts and contacts with local politics, while most projects would at least involve the local community and of course the target group and thus raise awareness for *Vielfalter's* ambitions. Many project leaders and organizations are relatively well connected to or at least in contact with other initiatives, associations, and commited inidividuals in the field. Several also spread their ideas and know how formally, e.g. by giving presentations and workshops in higher education institutions or associations. Some are even active in education policy on regional level. Nonetheless, projects usually remain locally scattered since there are no coordination entities in place. Evidence shows, however, that networking potential increases when projects have a longer term perspective. There was a feeling that in order to achieve more mainstreaming, the government would have to improve the accessibilty of relevant institutions and authorities in order to involve progressive initiatives in the modification of curricula. Despite some mainstreaming potential due to small-scale awareness raising, a larger (structural) feedback loop with politics and the administration is missing. It became clear in the ImPRove-focus groups that the ministerial unit involved in *Vielfalter* is only one, and by far not the most powerful, actor in mainstreaming diversity-issues in the educational system. Awareness-raising, lobbying and networking for this objective would require more deliberate coordination and cooperation of bottom-up initiatives as well as a joint strategy of alliance building of actors in civil society, educational institutions and different layers of the state.

Although it could be beneficial to think about the application for EU resources in the future, so far there have not been any actions in this respect. From the perspective of a former Western Union employee, it would actually be a good time now to think about a further expansion of the idea to other European societies that basically all face the same challenges. While the energy in the first year was used for setting up the project and the cooperation, the second year for its improvement, the third year for its expansion and the fourth year for growing in vision, now there might be capacity for project expansion – which however should be based on the results of sound impact assessment. With regard to expansion, the application for European funding might be a good idea.

7 Governance challenges

7.1 Mainstreaming social innovation

So far, mainstreaming has not been an explicit target of the initiative, neither on behalf of the initiator nor of the coordinator or the administration. From the perspective of *Western Union*, they want to lead by demonstration and have never intended to change the overall education system by funding a relatively small project. Seen with the eyes of the coordinator, the impact of the initiative is in particular dependent on available funding and societal pressure. The involved unit of the ministry welcomes the initiative as long as it can sufficiently demonstrate its legitimacy. Should the lead partners lose their interest in the project or the motivation to continue, it would also be justified to terminate the process or try something new. Another key barrier to mainstreaming is, however, the complex distribution of responsibilities in the education system between levels of statehood and the interaction with political parties and a strong teacher's union, which can be regarded as characteristics of the Austrian corporatist welfare model that is by definition in large parts based on consensus finding by multiple stakeholders or interest groups. Even if there were strong mainstreaming ambitions, this would always take some time. The lack of relevant knowledge and illuminating initiatives is no reason for the slow change of the Austrian education system. Much more important are conflicting interests between key actors: differential payment between teachers from different school systems, different competences for different types of school between central government and the federal states, and, finally, an influential part of the middle class with a strong meritocratic ethos which defends a hierarchical school system. This cultural struggle about the structure of the public system is fiercer in Austria due to the fact, that private schools are not yet a widespread alternative for the middle class.

Initiating processes of social learning is definitely an issue for the initiative. However, as individual projects (and especially project leaders) confront serious limitations in terms of available time and financial resources, networked coordination between projects is more the exception than the rule. Nonetheless, many projects contribute bits and pieces to the whole picture by achieving essential outreach via media contacts, political connections and networking with other projects or initiatives in the field.

7.2 Governing welfare mix – avoiding fragmentation

The participation of a unit of the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs definitely bears some potential to avoid fragmentation. Despite the complex structure of the Austrian education system, the federation tries to contribute to a coordinated modification of the whole system (e.g. by supporting kindergarten

with additional funding in order to level off language competences, even if many initiatives are rather in a pilot stage). The participation of the ministry is also appreciated by many project leaders as a sign of interest for what they are doing. Nonetheless, despite these promising framework conditions, as *Vielfalter* is just a small piece in a big mosaic that can only demonstrate innovation potentials by even smaller projects, the field is necessarily quite fragmented. Due to the marginal position of the involved unit within the ministry, the coordinating role of the state in the project itself is rather weak. Projects often depend on the support or at least openness of local players for processes of innovation, not least of which are to be mentioned the heads of schools and kindergartens. Nonetheless, there is a feeling in the field that despite the structural barriers, the avoidance of excess fragmentation works pretty well.

7.3   Governing welfare mix – developing a participatory governance style

Due to the complexities to be taken into account, participation of the target group was not seriously considered in the stage of project development. However, in later stages of the project the feedback of projects leaders and participants has always been valued and based on the relatively established (and institutionalized, such as in the case of the *Vielfalter* event) exchange of information and ideas between the coordinator and the projects, there were also some feedback loops in the system. The implementation of long-term project, for example, was also based on the feedback that for some initiatives the framework of onetime support is simply too short. Moreover, the empowerment and participation potentials of projects are essential criteria for project selection.

The core idea behind *Vielfalter* was the creation of an environment where everybody can be 'proud to belong' and thus become an actor in and of her own life. By the empowerment of youth with less access to societal resources (or of disadvantaged groups in a more broader understanding) should enable them to play a more active role in, first, the education system and on the labor market, but also, second, in society in general. Some core actors see the essential method to achieve this empowerment in acting together. A key feature seems to be that an initiative for a target group soon after its implementation becomes the initiative of this group. While disadvantaged groups may have a lack of cultural capital to access relevant societal resources, they need to get involved once the project is set up.

Over the last years, *Vielfalter* has become a learning partnership of the involved stakeholders. It has linked grassroots professionals, educational administrators and decision makers. This potential of mutual learning and joint lobbying has not been explored more systematically yet, due to a lack of resources, esp. time. In the ImPRove foucs group, however, it has become clear that there is a broad consensus to deepen the knowledge alliance of the project partners within *Vielfalter* and to strenghten the cooperation with similar projects aiming at educational reform. This is highly welcomed by *Western Union*, as it increases visibility as well as impact. It is appreciated by project leaders because they are aware that more systematic change beyond a single *Vielfalter* project is necessary. It might turn out that some of the stakeholders of *Vielfalter* assume a more active role in mainstreaming some of the innovations of individual projects.

7.4   Equality and diversity

Early differentiation leads to unequal access to education in Austria. The idea of *Vielfalter* is to change this unfair distribution of chances by a two-tier approach: On the one hand, diversity and multilingualism should be understood as resources by the target group themselves, i.e. of children from a disadvantaged social background. On the other hand, by changing the local institutions and their actors (teachers in

schools, pedagogues in kindergartens) the institutional framework should also become more open and this accessibility for children from diverse background easier. Openness for diversity has been a core business strategy of *Western Union* for many years. They can therefore credibly show how organizations (and perhaps even societies) can benefit from an adequate consideration of diversity. By transferring this experience to the Austrian education system, it should be shown how the whole society could benefit from enabling people from diverse backgrounds to achieve powerful positions in society (e.g. by having multilingual doctors, ministers etc. who are able to reflexively deal with issues of cultural difference).

7.5   Uneven access

Uneven access is a necessary consequence of the project character and the intention to lead by example. As projects are selected in a competitive procedure, only the best ideas and proposals can receive funding. Against a background of a fragile feedback loop with the education system, uneven access to the innovative procedures that are initiated by the projects needs to be regarded as the rule. However, once innovations have been adopted by the education system, they will most likely become accessible for all children living in Austria, although some variations between urban and rural areas remain.

So far there is no social right that guarantees the equality of opportunity in the field of education. Although the education system in Austria is dominated by public institutions, relevant studies and reports have shown for years that children's careers in the school system significantly depend on their family background. From the perspective of interviewed experts, however, the codification and operationalization of a social right to equal education opportunities would not have large impacts without a change of attitudes on the behalf of stakeholders, decision makers and children and parents themselves. A good example would be the UN 'Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' that despite being ratified by most UN member states would not have large impacts without pressure from civil society. In contrast, if certain target groups that have a right to special support would be defined instead (such as children with special education needs), this might contribute to further stigmatization.

In Austria, the political and cultural struggle about the educational system is so fierce, because the public sector is still the main service provider. There is a widespread assumption that integration should be via assimilation of the dominant German-speaking culture. Concerns are still expressed within the system, while exiting the public system is getting increasingly widespread. The open challenge is whether the public sector can be reformed without switching to a system dominated by high-quality private provisioning of educational services. The latter would probably make it easier to deal with diversity, but at the cost of increasing segregation and polarization. In this respect, the role of a private initiative like *Vielfalter* is ambivalent.

7.6   Avoiding responsibility

The question whether the state is avoiding responsibility is difficult to answer. With regard to *Vielfalter*, the state is in fact investing resources (time and ideas) in an initiative that was taken by a private actor and that primarily causes additional work for the administration in the ministry, i.e. in addition to the state's own initiatives. With regard to the education system as such, schools and kindergartens are not only primarily funded by public resources; also a severe retrenchment of state funding cannot be observed still. The problem is therefore rather that the system has problems in adapting to (new) context factors and challenges that it confronts, which would perhaps require the provision of additional funds. From the

perspective of interviewed stakeholders, however, the state – or legislator – is not only expected to provide additional funding for new challenges, but also to change the structure of curricula for the training of teachers and pedagogues and, of course, also the structure of the education system itself.

The real challenge is therefore to create structures that facilitate universal access to innovative approaches, or put differently to develop a strategy that creates the institutional setting to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and unequal society. As long as this is not done, the existing structures are confronted with an increasing amount of tasks that have to be accomplished within the existing framework (resources, know-how, etc.). One problem is therefore to change the structure against a background of a complex distribution of responsibilities, opposing interests and partly also contested evidence on "the best" concepts (e.g. acquire sound knowledge of German vs. the family language first). As has been mentioned above, this would also require pressure or at least a change of attitudes by all relevant parties involved. One interviewed stakeholder argued that in some cases heads of schools would not tackle issues of diversity as they are afraid of negative reactions by Austrian parents.

Another problem is, however, that even in cases where the legal framework has already been modified (such as the establishment of intercultural education as a cross-cutting issue in the legal framework for schools), this change is not sufficiently communicated to affected parties and thus only slowly changes the pedagogical practice.

7.7   Managing intra-organizational tensions

There have not been any conflicts in the core team of the initiative so far. Original strategies and the revisions of strategies have always been made together and despite different opinions on some issues (such as the prioritization of PR which is more important for a company than for an NGO), all decisions have been made in collaboration between the actors. Moreover, the relationship between the individual projects and the coordinator are based on trust, a climate of cooperation and mutual respect. The only conflicts that have been mentioned in interviews, thus, concern rather minor issues of opposing opinions in supported projects. These conflicts, however, usually do not put a project's success at risk. Another issue that could be regarded as conflictual is a skeptical attitude of some media people with regard to CSR activities of a company like Western Union that has times and again been criticized for its businesses practices. However, this hardly affects the concrete public-private cooperation in the project context.

7.8   Enabling legal framework

With regard to project implementation, due to the rather defensive role of the state the legal framework is not a real challenge. The regulatory framework of the project is much more defined by the agreement between Western Union, IZ and the ministry and clearly promotes competition as principle of project selection, but also trust and generosity in the relationship with selected initiatives. Also the form in which issues at stake are being discussed and decided (such as the decision for doing an evaluation) show the whole partnership is based on principles of trust and cooperation. However, it was also mentioned that there were times when NGO work was not only dependent on project funding but also received a certain share of fixed subsidies. As this does not exist anymore, room for the reflection on and the evaluation of an organization's own activities has been decisively shrinking.

Regarding political barriers, the most prominently featured is the lack of enshrinement of interculture and multilingualism in pedagogic curricula. In the education field in general, the government's response to increasing diversity and changing societal needs has been too slow, uncoordinated and lacking vision. In this context, the diversity in projects funded by the Vielfalter, and the innovation associated with it, is hoped to have positive impact on the sluggish legislation. In order to appropriately respond to the changing realities in the classroom, schools furthermore need more autonomy in the implementation, while the government needs to take on a stronger role in the definition of targets and goals. This flexibility should also entail school autonomous budgets. Another issue is that projects only arise where the pedagogue-student ratio permits it. In other words, in order to permit mainstreaming, schools and kindergartens need to be able to employ more pedagoges with slightly different qualifications (e.g. with special language competences or special trainings in intercultural work). Hiring external experts and native speakers, however, remains a legal grey area in which at least salaries are usually much lower. This also has to do with the lack of formal recognition of teaching degrees earned abroad. The political unwillingness to recognize teacher's degrees earned abroad is not only an indirect obstacle to the mainstreaming od key issues that Vielfalter tries to promote; it is also hard to understand given the need and demand for teachers with multilingual competences in the increasingly diverse Austrian society.

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Interviews

- Project coordinator; representative of Interkulturelles Zentrum
    - *27 January 2014, Interkulturelles Zentrum, Lindengasse 41, 1070 Wien*
- Head of Department for Integration at Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs
    - *20 March 2014, 1.45-2.30pm, Ministry of Education and WA, Freyung 1, 1010 Wien*
- Representative of Western Union
    - *7 July 2014, 10.00-10.45am, per skype (Foster was based in London)*
- 15 interviews with project leaders and 1 with an education expert from Burgenland
    - *March-June 2014, different Austrian provinces (external 5-year evaluation of Vielfalter)*

Focus group

- Participants: representatives of
    - Interkulturelles Zentrum (2)
    - Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, Department for Integration
    - Western Union
    - Federation of Austrian Industry
    - 3 project leaders funded by Vielfalter (heads of kindergarten, primary school & middle school)
- *WU Wien, Welthandelsplatz 1, 1020 Wien, D4.2.213, 26 June 2014, 2.30-5.30pm*

Feedback to draft version by focus group participants & interviewees

- June 2015

ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe.
Social Policy and Innovation

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7th Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website http://improve-research.eu.

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