



## Snapshots from Spain: Spanish impressions about Austria

How do you see yourself? Are you strong? Are you important? Do you make a difference? Now think about how others see you. When your name comes up in conversation, what comes to other peoples' minds? Everyone has a self-perception. It may not, and most likely does not, reflect how others perceive you. Countries even have a self-perception or concept of who they are and what they represent. Since they are a nation rather than one person, does that mean that they are correct, that their perceptions of themselves are true? It can be complicated if the country is only offered a one-sided view and only knows what it believes and vice versa. Problems arise when the self is not challenged, when it does not validate its beliefs. It is my understanding that Austrian media contribute to the formation of a somewhat erroneous or simply one-sided self-image of Austria and its role within the European Union (EU). Spanish impressions and views about Austria are undoubtedly alien to Austrians. We will challenge Austria's self-concept by showing how Spanish citizens view this country and their role in the EU.

Contrary to the Austria's self-image in which it plays a big role outside of Austria, the Spanish, although reticent at first, explained how they see and consider Austria's role in the EU. The first reaction I got when I explained that we were going to talk about their impressions of Austria were, "*Austria? I don't know much about Austria?*" or "*Excuse me? Austria? I'm not sure if I can be of much assistance.*" or "*No, Spanish people don't know much about Austria. We really don't interact with them.*" However, once they finally warmed up to the idea, they let me see their *snapshots of Austria* from their mental cameras.

I conducted interviews and held focus groups with students, professors, historians, linguists and other members of society to find out their opinions and views. There was an overwhelmingly large amount of responses that were similar, however I'd like to point out some very unique views that not everyone agreed on or knew about; they are the following:

- The historic relationship between Spain and Austria in terms of the end of the Hapsburg Dynasty (1700) and the war of the Spanish Succession.
- One person discussed the connection between Catalonia, the North of Spain, and Austria. They believe that one of the main reasons that Catalonia is so nationalistic has to do with their support of Austria between 1701–1714 when Spain eventually made Catalonia concede their backing of Austria.

- One person mentioned the controversial pornographic art celebrating the beginning of the Austrian presidency of the EU, which was meant to be distributed and hung all over the streets of Europe. He said what most surprised him was the fact that this project was paid in part with public moneys. The Austrian government wanted to promote their cultural heritage and they ended up promoting pornography.
- The lack of agreements and accords between Austria and Spain result in a general unfamiliarity and interest in Austria, as well as the low numbers of German language learners.
- One commented that it is much easier to talk about Vienna or Salzburg than Austria.
- They compared Portugal and Austria in terms of their close connections with "bigger countries" like Spain and Germany.
- Austria hosts the famous New Year's Day concert that takes place in Vienna and is aired on national television every year.

The focus groups started out looking at a slide with a series of selected photographs taken in Austria (a flag, Mozart, skiers, Baroque architecture) and they were asked to describe other images they would add to or take away from this collage. They did not remove any images, but they added descriptions like: Freud, Waltz dancers, Rex (Kommissar Rex) a show which is aired on the local station, Arnold Schwarzenegger, rigid facial expressions, clean streets, a map of Eastern Europe, and the Empress Sisi (*Sissy*). This is how Austria is "seen" through Spanish eyes. We held a question and answer session where the groups and interviewees were asked to share their opinions; below you can read the questions and the responses.

### When asked what they know about Austria they clearly stated without hesitation the following:

- They were one of the last countries to enter in the EU; Vienna is an important city; they have a high level of income; the UN Secretary General (1972) Kurt Waldheim was persecuted for supporting a Nazi party; there are mountains; they speak German; only until very recently have they overcome their extreme-Rightist views; amongst the many recent changes we are still very uncertain of their political stance; there is an important musical culture; the most famous ski stations are in Austria;

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it is very cold there, they have a higher standard of life than Spain; Hitler and Freud are important people in Austria's history; they don't have a good football team.

## What is Austria important for?

- They have a small population and do not have a big presence in Spanish media; they are WWI instigators; they give money to the EU while Spain receives money from the EU; racism; Empress Sissy; movies like *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Man or the Sound of Music*; Mozart; chocolate; frankfurts; Vienna (a chain of food establishments in Spain); musical instruments; beer; mountains and ski stations; they are able to speak English very well

## What are the differences between the Spanish and Austrians?

- They are very serious; they are peaceful and neutral people; language; they are more civil; they are more educated and cultured; they are racist; they have a history of an authoritarian education; they are not very friendly; they stay at home a lot because of the weather; they are rigid; they have blonde hair.

## Describe Austrians.

- They are serious, cultured, WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant), tall, they have blue eyes.

## What role does Austria play in EU decision-making?

- They have very little say-so because they are small, however they do have a lot of money; they go along with Germany; they organize decisions but don't make them; they are similar to Spain; they are important for being a strategy country – they help pass or stop laws from being passed.

## What are the main influences Austria has in Spain or in Europe?

- They have a political and economical influence on Europe; they have a strong cultural background; strong extreme-Right views – for example when the FPÖ won in 27% of the votes in the 1999 Parliament elections in Austria and was seen as the second strongest party in the country<sup>1</sup> (article sent to me by an interviewee); they continue supporting an anti-Semitic ideology; an important cultural influence on Europe, such as: musicians – Mozart, Strauss, journalists – Strauss, Robert Musil, psychoanalysis –

Freud, the architecture (that was destroyed during the Nazi era) was very positive for the rest of the Europe; in the modern world they have not contributed anything.

## Is Austria a friend and companion to Spain?

- It is too far in distance, we feel closer to Latin America than Austria; we don't have a relationship with them however we do form part of the same European political organization; they are our acquaintances.

## When you hear "Austria" what immediately comes to mind?

- Mozart; extreme-right; a very quiet country because there is never news about social topics, their leaders, or their politics; the historic aspect comes to mind because in Madrid there is a neighborhood called *Madrid de las Austrias* in remembrance of their kingdom in Spain; mountains; Vienna; cold.

The Spanish didn't seem to worry too much that their knowledge of Austria was limited to their personal opinions and views, only 2 out of 10 people had ever been to Austria, and the rest have their own images of Austria based on history, the news, and through other people's experiences. They did bring up an interesting point regarding the low numbers of Austrian tourists and Austrians coming to Spain for educational purposes. They said that in the university<sup>2</sup> the largest populations of foreign students come to study from Italy, France, Germany, Portugal, and Great Britain while Austria is in the lower half of the foreign student population at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Spain's attitude is a simple one; they are not interested in us, so why should be interested in them.

Does Austria consider Vienna and Mozart to be the most renowned aspects of the country? Do Austrians support an extreme-Rightist view? Spain's views do not necessarily reflect Austria's self-perception. Austria is very far geographically and there is no modern day connection to Spain except that they make up part of the EU. Who is to blame for these misconceptions and representations? Is Austria at fault for their proud self-image, or is Spain, for their ignorance and stereotypical impressions? Both countries should do something with the new understanding regarding their lack of knowledge. They can, for example, augment agreements like

1 [http://www.raw.at/texte/andere\\_sprachen/englisch/smash\\_austria.htm](http://www.raw.at/texte/andere_sprachen/englisch/smash_austria.htm) RAW (Rosa Antifa Wien)

2 Information from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 2004–2005 <http://www.uab.es/autonoma/xifres0405/tot/cast/index2.htm>



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Erasmus programs, which would link Austria and Spain and foment linguistic and cultural knowledge, or promote more foreign exchange programs for families or children who want to study language and encourage a stronger connection between the countries. The EU has taken on the responsibility of bringing the European countries together; now the

countries alone are accountable for gaining an understanding of who they are and what their role is within the EU community.

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## Learning Communities

### Neue Lern- und Wissensräume im Cyberspace

Internationale Tagung an der Alpen-Adria Universität Klagenfurt im November 2006

Die sich rasch wandelnde Gesellschaft hat Lernen zu einem permanenten Erfordernis in allen Lebensbereichen gemacht. Die neuen Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien eröffnen neue Lern- und Wissensräume, die dem kooperativen und interkulturellen Lernen bislang ungekannte Chancen eröffnen. Learning Communities können sich über geografische Grenzen hinweg entwickeln und so den Erfordernissen einer sich vernetzenden Gesellschaft Rechnung tragen.

Die international besetzte Tagung dient dazu, einen Überblick über das Spektrum der Lernmöglichkeiten mit Hilfe computergestützter Medien zu geben.

- Welche Art von Wissen wird im Cyberspace produziert und vermittelt?
- Was können wir mit diesem Wissen anfangen?
- Dient es dazu, Kinder und Jugendliche besser auf die Zukunft vorzubereiten, Anforderungen in der Arbeitswelt besser zu bewältigen, einzuüben in grenzüberschreitende Kommunikation und Verständigung, die im Zuge der Globalisierung von Wirtschaft, Politik und Kultur immer wichtiger wird?
- Inwiefern stellt das Internet als neuer Wissensraum neue Anforderungen an Bildung und Weiterbildung?
- Wie können sich Schulen, Universitäten und Wirtschaftsunternehmen für eine neue Epoche des Lehrens und Lernens rüsten? Welches Innovationspotenzial steckt in den Learning Communities?

International renommierte Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler wie Howard Rheingold, der den Begriff „virtual community“ entscheidend prägte, Andrew Jakubowic von der Technischen Universität Sydney und Kurt Fendt vom Massachusetts Institute of Technology werden auf der Tagung zu diesen Fragen Stellung nehmen. Aber auch die Praxis wird vertreten sein. Partner eines EU-Projekts wie Handelskammern, EDV-Firmen, Lern- und Kompetenzzentren aus sechs europäischen Ländern (Deutschland, Österreich, Schweden, Ungarn, Slowakei, Finnland) werden über lernende Gemeinschaften im Bereich des E-Business berichten.

Die Tagung bietet eine bunte Mischung aus Vorträgen, Panels, Workshops. Sie will Impulse für eine produktive Auseinandersetzung mit den Lernmedien Computer und Internet setzen, die ihre Wirkkraft nicht nur im akademischen Feld entfalten, sondern auch Wirtschaftsunternehmen, Bildungseinrichtungen und die interessierte Öffentlichkeit in Kärnten und im Alpen-Adria-Raum erreichen soll.