

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING

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Analysing and understanding the demand for schooling Austrian country report

Lorenz Lassnigg

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Introduction

The scope of the report covers compulsory education. In the Austrian system the period of compulsory education has been extended to the first year of upper secondary education, and includes also vocational education and training (VET). Therefore the analysis of demand orientation in education and training policy also includes this area.

The methodology of the report is based mainly on literature and document analysis and includes some secondary analysis of data.

The main sources used are documents from education policy, internet search, data bases and research reports about the field. Main sources used are the recent government programme, the homepage of the Ministry for education, research and culture, the material of the main reform initiatives for the development of education and training in Austria, and data for the monitoring of education in the public opinion and among key stakeholders as parents, students, and teachers.

Particularly the monitoring data include time series information about the general satisfaction with education and training, and the sub sectors of the system, as well as information about specific aspects of educational demand. This source is exploited by secondary analysis in the report.

1. Demand and Views about Schooling in Society

Questions:

1.1 Does the notion of “demand” feature in policy discourse and public debate in your country? How commonplace is it now to propose that schooling should be more “demand-sensitive” - by whom, and what is that taken to mean? How important are the distinctions between “social”, “individual”, and “private” demand?

1.2 Have studies addressed changes in the way schools and education in general are presented and discussed in the media? What do such analyses show about the nature of public debate on education?

1.3 What is known about how society values the different aims of education? Are there major differences between different sections of society, defined in terms of political affiliation, age, gender, and cultural and ethnic background? What evidence is there to suggest how society in general, and different groups in society, believe that these aims are achieved?

1.1. Demand in the policy discourse and public debate

Following the accession of the European Union and the opening of the eastern neighbouring states in the 1980s, and more recently during the Lisbon process, Austrian education and training policy has become increasingly aware of the challenges which are arising from European integration and internationalisation. Comparisons of the Austrian system with other countries, and benchmarking exercises in the European context are used to find out strengths and weaknesses to be tackled by education and training policy. The notion of “future demands” is an important issue in those exercises,

however, the understanding of demands is much broader than being expressed in a more narrow economic sense referring to the demand side of the education and training market. The multidimensional meaning of the concept of “*Bildung*” in a broad humanistic sense is an important reference in those debates, the economic dimension being seen as one aspect among others. A strong tradition of seeing the education and training system as a democratic responsibility, taking into account a broad notion of societal demand, e.g., in terms of supporting citizenship and culture, has remained stronger than a mere economic market orientation supporting mainly competitiveness.

Following the guidelines of the project, the study is focused on a demand orientation in the more narrow economic sense. The role and impact of the demand for education and training expressed by the young people and their parents on education and training policy is nevertheless an important element worth to be studied more thoroughly. The feature of demand for schooling in this more narrow sense does not rank very high as an explicit and operative objective in Austrian education and training policy. It is visible very differently in different sectors of the education and training system. Demand orientation works an explicit important topic in the Fachhochschule sector of higher education, where the assessment of demand for qualifications from enterprises as well as of the demand for study places from students is part of the accreditation process. In other sectors the issues of demand are rather brought up indirectly and by actors with specific interests, not as a broad issue of making the system more demand-sensitive. In debates about the topic of demand the focus is on higher education and on VET, with an emphasis on the demand of the economy for qualifications and competences, rather than on individual or social demand for the provision of schooling or study places.

Since more than ten years the responsible Ministry has commissioned a yearly monitoring survey of the public opinion about the education and training system, including also questions about varying policy issues. Three groups are investigated by that monitoring: the general public, parents who have currently children in the system, students, and teachers. This instrument allows to get a kind of feedback from those groups about more general questions of education and training policy, and also background information about current issues under debate or measures which are planned or implemented. In a more general sense, key information about demand issues is produced by that monitoring system.

At the several decision points for educational choices in the Austrian education and training system the issue of how to influence and guide demand is more important than the topic of making the system more demand sensitive. To some extent there is a feeling that the development of demand from the side of parents and young people does not perfectly fit into the structure of the system, therefore proposals and strategies for increased assessment and guidance is frequently brought forward in the debate, in order to achieve the „right choices“ at the main decision points (lower secondary schooling, and transition from lower secondary schooling to upper secondary schooling and apprenticeship).

The more specific issues which are important with respect to the debate on demand for schooling are the following:

- demand for and provision of early childhood education and care
- demand for and provision of education for disabled children and youth in special institutions or in an integrated way
- demand for and provision of primary education in remote rural regions

- demand for and provision of private schooling
- demand for and provision of lower and upper level programmes at lower secondary level
- demand for and provision of programmes at the 9th grade
- demand for and provision of apprenticeship training places.

At each of those specific points debates are going on among specific groups and stakeholders taking their specific positions.

1.1.1. Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care is in Austria organised in the *Kindergarten* model, provided by the communities and regions, separated from the education and training system, and its main emphasis is child care. There is debate about the magnitude and the forms of provision, particularly in combination with the issue of female employment participation. Increasingly the issue of strengthening the instructional functions is also coming up on the agenda, in combination with the effects of early childhood education for equal opportunity. The bearing of the costs for early childhood education is also a point of debate in this area.

Early childhood education and care is provided privately to a higher extent than education and training at the subsequent levels. A recent reform has provided new subsidies for parents with small children in a demand oriented way (*Kindergeld*), so they should be able to choose which kind of care they want. It was objected whether the reform would bring disincentives to work for mothers.

1.1.2. Demand of disabled children

The case for the integration of disabled children into mainstream schooling was an important policy issue during the last decade, the demand of parents for integration of their children was brought forward very strongly. Reforms of compulsory schooling have given much room for integration, now the question is what should happen after compulsory schooling.

Rationalisation and public saving is partly seen as a challenge for integration, as the necessary resources may become scarce.

1.1.3. Primary education in remote rural regions

Regional dispersion of primary education is high in Austria, leading to a high number of very small schools at the primary which are coming under pressure because of the demographic decline of pupil population. This issue is also under debate because of rationalisation and public saving policy, because maintaining the high number of small schools is comparatively expensive. On the other hand

there are the social cost of closing schools as cultural units in the local communities and transportation costs.

Because of the mixed responsibilities for administration and financing among different layers of government (federal, regional, and local) the organisation of provision at the primary level is also part of the financial negotiations and regulations between those layers, in which the Ministry of Finance plays a key role (*Finanzausgleich*).

1.1.4. Private schooling

The Austrian education and training system is a predominantly public one. Religious private schools which subscribe under the public regulations are predominantly financed publicly.

Since two decades a certain amount of demand for alternative forms of schooling has developed, which has to be provided mainly on a private basis. There is debate whether those schools should be to a higher degree publicly funded or subsidised.

1.1.5. Demands at lower secondary level

At lower secondary level two tracks of schooling are available, one leading more directly to grades which give the right to attend higher education (the academic track: *Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule*), the other (the popular track: *Hauptschule*) providing this opportunity also, but in a more selective way. The respective demand for those tracks is under dispute since decades, with the tendency that a shift of demand to the academic track is going on. Several policies to meet more specific demands of parents and pupils have tried to strengthen the popular track, with differing effects.

On the background of the demographic decline of pupils' numbers, the competition between the two tracks will become more fierce, with rising challenges for coordination because of the differing regulatory frameworks of the two tracks of schooling.

1.1.6. Demands on 9th grade

During the last year of compulsory schooling the system diversifies strongly, providing four different tracks: continuation of the academic track (upper secondary short form of the academic track can also be taken by pupils from the popular track); a specific one years' polytechnic school which should provide the completion of basic education in combination with occupational orientation in order to improve the choice of an apprenticeship (or another VET programme); higher level VET colleges with many specialisations; medium level VET schools with many specialisations and different length (one year to four years).

At this level the high diversity of provision, and the strong VET system is unanimously seen as a strength of the Austrian education and training system which caters for the diverse demand from the pupils side, and for the demand of the economy for qualifications. Three issues are under debate at this level: First, the differing entrance point into VET schooling (at grade 9) and apprenticeship (at grade 10), and the unsatisfactory demand of pupils for the transitory polytechnic school at grade 9, which is often bypassed by the first year of a VET school or college; second the strong shift of pupils demand towards the upper level VET colleges which causes partly tensions with the supply of study places; third the appropriateness of the VET specialisation vis a vis the economic demand for qualifications and competences.

At this level systematic action is taken to improve the anticipation and foresight of the economic demand as a part of quality assurance and quality development, in order to coordinate supply and demand in a reasonable and future oriented way.

1.1.7. Demand for apprenticeship

The demand for apprenticeship is periodically under debate because of the ups and downs at the apprenticeship market, where the effects of the economic cycle interact with more long term trends of demography, and the demand of young people and the demand of the enterprises. Overall, there seems to be a long term tendency of apprenticeship towards decline on both sides, with differing market relations on the short term (*ceteris paribus* more apprentices seeking scarce training places during the downturn, more enterprises seeking scarce applicants during the upturn). Young people tend to prefer the upper level VET colleges instead of apprenticeship, and at the enterprise side the structural change seems to work against the sectors where apprenticeship is particularly strong.

The causes for decline are under dispute, some argue that because of the rising share of young people who choose the schooling track, the demand for apprenticeship places increasingly shift to another group of young people who are less able or less motivated, other argue that the costs of apprenticeship are too high given the increasingly competitive environment of the enterprises, particularly in sectors where the training is of high quality (in addition, the qualifications provided by VET schooling are a public good for the enterprises).

1.2 Studies about the policy discourse

No comprehensive study is available which would analyse the policy discourse about education and training reflected by the media. However, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture observes the public opinion about education and training by a yearly commissioned survey which provides results for the period 1999-2003. In addition, several specific surveys observe the public acceptance of more specific aspects of policy making.

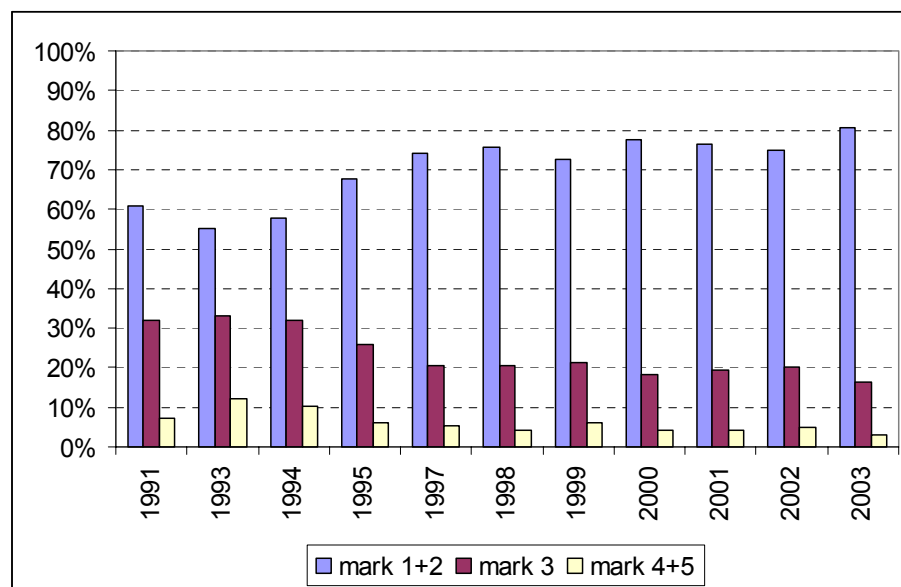
Some studies are available which have studied policy discourses in special areas of Austrian education and training policy making, by directly observing some of the stakeholders. Those studies

cover rather the VET system, particularly apprenticeship, and the role of different actors, including the role and activities of the social partners in that area.

1.3. Valuing education by the public

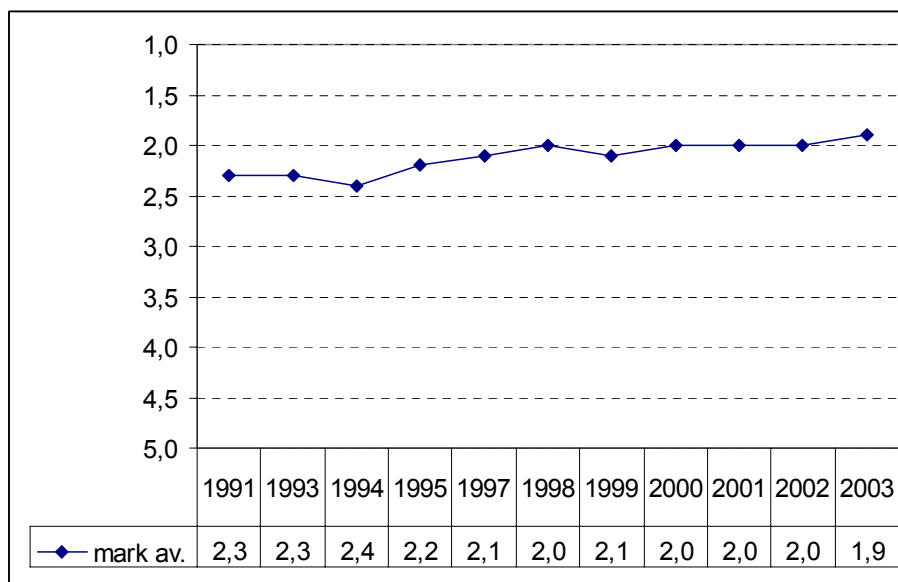
According to the monitoring data the public opinion about the Austrian education and training system is very favourable, and fairly stable in time with a slight tendency to improve even further. There are no differences among groups in society (status groups, parents, students), however there are differences by regional aggregates (more rural regions and small cities give better marks than bigger cities) and population density (in Vienna, the only Austrian big agglomerate the marks are worse than in other regions).

Figure 1: Public opinion about the quality of the Austrian education and training system (Total figures; school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); Distribution of categories, %)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 10)

Figure 2: Public opinion about the quality of the Austrian education and training system (Total figures; school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); mean value)

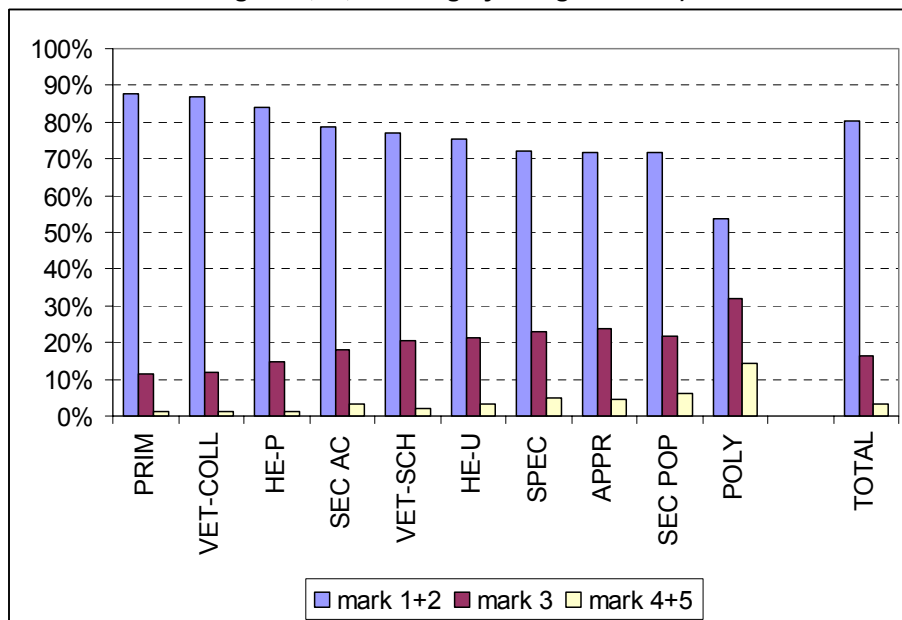


Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 11)

There are differences in satisfaction according to different sectors of the system. Primary schools, upper level VET colleges and Polytechnics rank above the average; the upper level academic track of secondary school, the medium level VET schools and universities rank medium slightly below the average, and the special schools, the popular track of secondary school, and apprenticeship rank lower in public opinion; the lowest satisfaction is expressed about the one years' polytechnic school. The expressed satisfaction varies rather clearly according to the perceived status of the different sectors of the education and training system, and is in line with the development of student numbers.

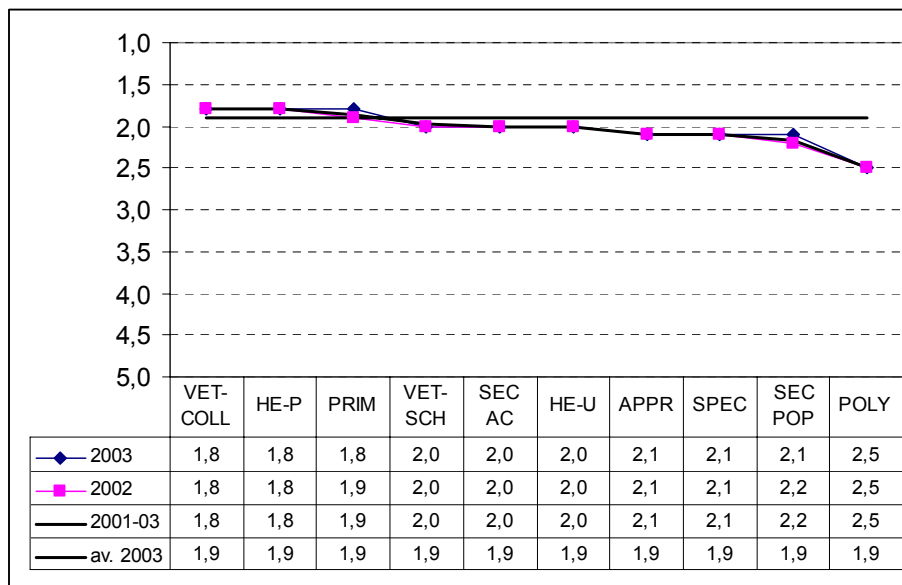
Regional differences are observed particularly for the lower secondary level: Here the rural regions and small towns give similar marks to both tracks (AHS and Hauptschule: 1,9-2,0), in medium towns with 20.000 and more inhabitants the assessment of the popular track is slightly lower (2,2), and in Vienna it is at bit more below that (2,5). Those differences are stable in time, and reflect the different position of those tracks in the system in different regional aggregates. In more rural regions the popular track is much more common than in Vienna, where more than half of a cohort attends the selective academic track.

Figure 3: Public opinion about the quality of the Austrian education and training system in 2003 (figures about sectors of the system; school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); distribution of categories, %, ordering by categories 1+2)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 13)

Figure 4: Public opinion about the quality of the Austrian education and training system (figures about sectors of the system; school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); mean value); ordered by 2003)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 13)

2. The Attitudes and Expectations of Parents

Questions:

2.1 What is the evidence relating to levels of expressed parental approval of/satisfaction with what is achieved by:

- a) schools in general;
- b) those which their children actually attend.

2.2 What evidence exists on the priorities held by parents in general, as well as different groups of parents, about the main aims of schooling and on how well they assess that these priorities are actually achieved? Is anything known about parental satisfaction with the demands made on their children by the school system?

2.3 Is there any basis to the assertion that parents tend to the conservative as regards their children's education? Is anything known about the extent to which parents regard schools as a "public good" or instead as a "private consumer good"?

2.4 How well do particular groups of parents feel they are served by the school system? How equitable do different groups of parents believe the system to be - in general and in relation to their own children?

The attitudes and expectations of parents can be documented on the basis of selected issues from the monitoring survey.

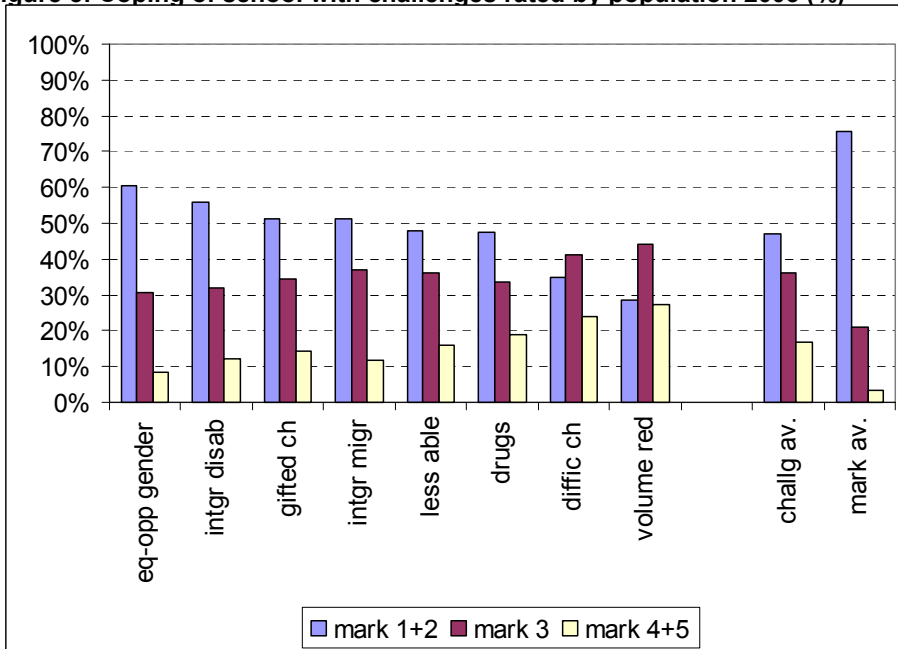
2.1. Approval/satisfaction with achievements by parents

The parents of students in the system at the time of the survey are considered as a specific group in the monitoring survey. We do not have the opportunity of analysing and presenting the data in detail here, however the opinion of parents is documented in the reports at several points. Grossly no marked differences are reported in most questions between the assessment by parents and the assessment by the general public.

In addition to the more general assessment of the performance of the Austrian education and training system the satisfaction with some more specific issues can be documented. A question asked since 1993/93 considers how the education and training system copes with some important challenges. Eight of those challenges have been assessed: Equal opportunities for both sexes, integration of disabled persons, integration of migrants, support for gifted persons, support for less able persons, information about drugs, coping with difficult persons, reduction of the volume of the syllabus.

About 50% of the population have rated the coping of school with those challenges at level 1 or 2 (very good or good), the average mark of the population is 2,6 – thus the assessment of coping with challenges is less favourable than the overall satisfaction with schools at the same scale. There are differences concerning the single items, equal opportunities for both sexes and integration of disabled children is rated more favourable, coping with difficult children and reduction of the volume of the syllabus is rated less favourable.

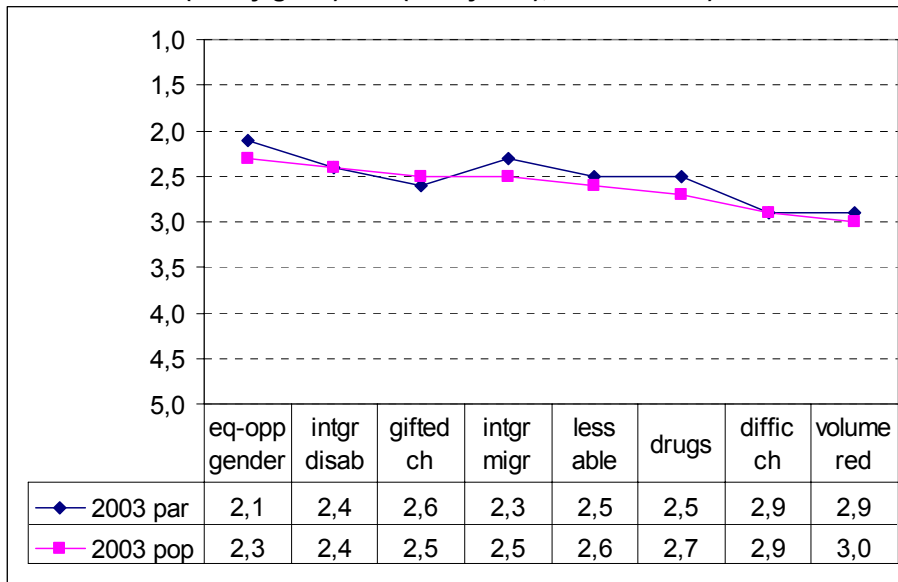
Figure 5: Coping of school with challenges rated by population 2003 (%)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 28)

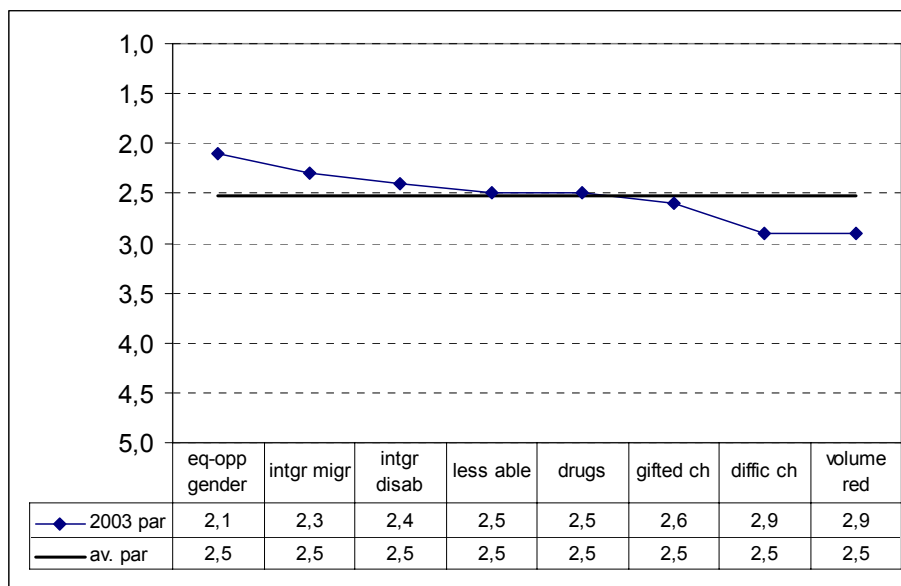
The assessment of parents is for most items slightly more favourable than that of the population. An exception is particularly the support for gifted children, which is assessed by parents less favourable than by the population. Parents have also ranked the integration of migrants more positive – the less favourable items are the same for parents as for the population.

Figure 6: Coping of school with challenges rated by parents as compared to population 2003 (school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); mean values)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 30-33)

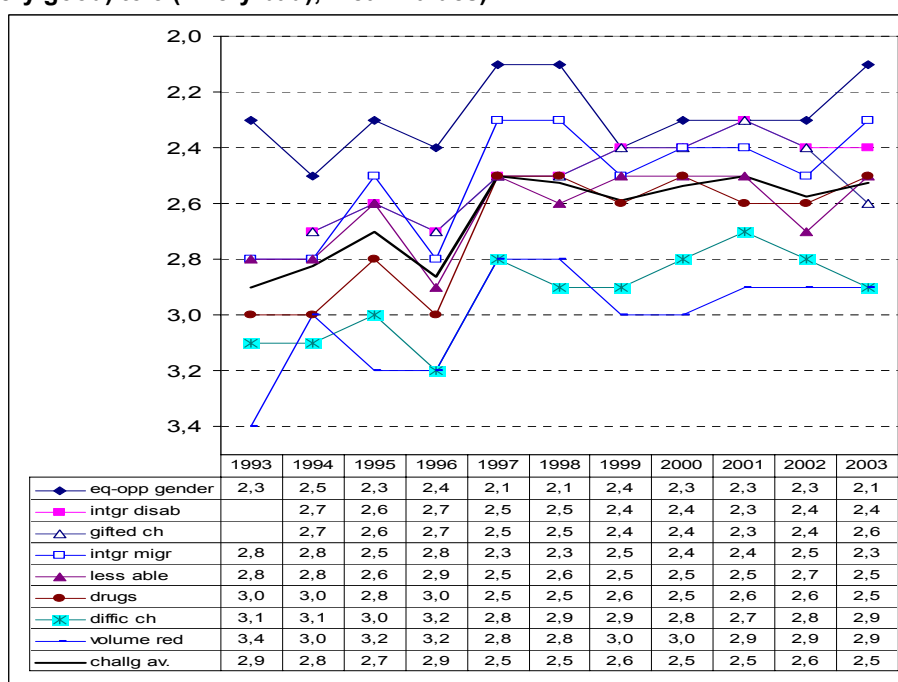
Figure 7: Coping of school with challenges rated by parents 2003 (school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); mean values)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 30-33)

The time series shows improvement in the mid 1990s, and different developments during the most recent years. Particularly the assessment of drugs policies has improved from below average to above average.

Figure 8: Coping of school with challenges rated by parents 1993 - 2003 (school marks 1 (= very good) to 5 (= very bad); mean values)

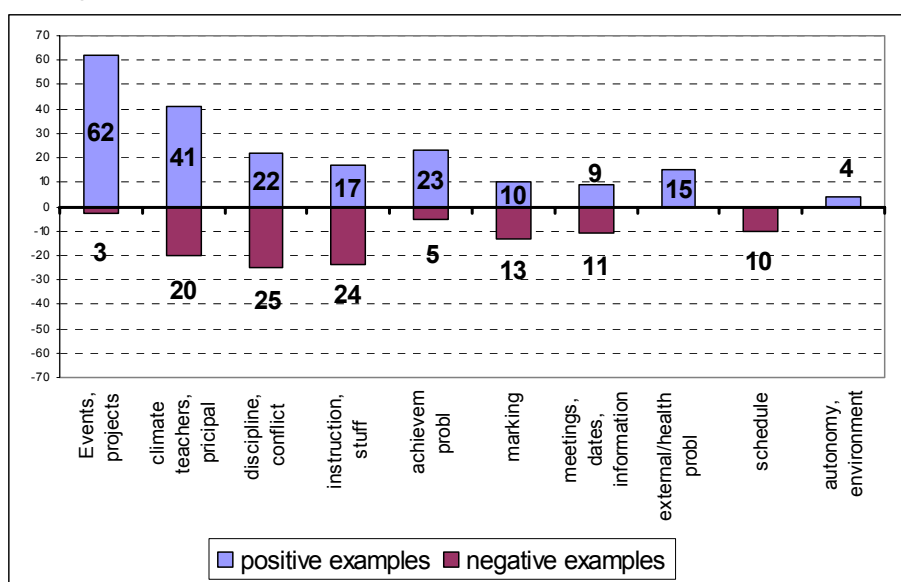


Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 30-33)

In a study about democracy and participation in Austrian schools at secondary level (Eder 1998) the observed parents had the opportunity to report about particularly remarkable positive and/or negative experiences in the interaction with schools or teachers. The examples were classified to 10 categories¹ and might provide indirectly an overview about important issues, and about issues which are positively or negatively related to the experience of parents.

Higher numbers of examples were reported in the areas of organisation of events or projects, the more general climate or problems in school or with the staff, discipline and conflict, and instructional practice and stuff. Almost all examples concerning organisation of events and projects, and also experience with achievement problems and external or health problems among the less frequent examples, are positive. More mixed experiences are reported about the overall climate and interactions with teachers and principals (predominantly positive), disciplinary and conflict matters, instructional practice and stuff, marking, and organisational matters concerning dates and climate of meetings (predominantly negative). Only one issue, scheduling matters, was reported with negative examples only.

Figure 9: Positive and negative examples of interaction of parents with schools of their children (ordering by the absolute number of positive and negative examples (absolute number))



Source: Eder 1998, 102-103, 106

¹ Originally the author of the study had classified 11 categories, thereof two about the climate in school and with teachers and principals (with positive examples) and problems with teachers and principals (with negative examples) have been reclassified to one category in this study.

2.2 Priorities of parents

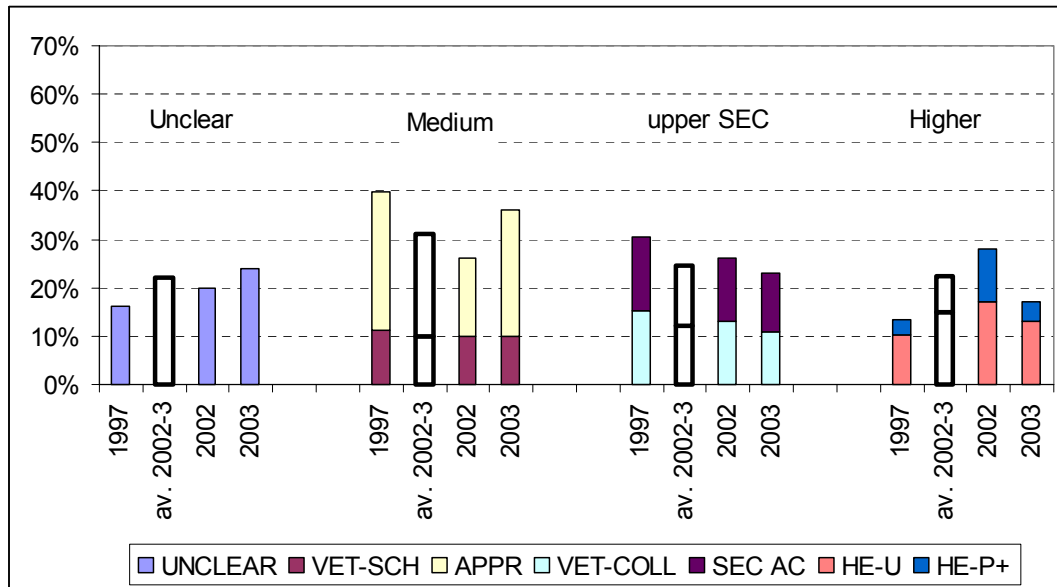
Priorities can be assessed by more dimensions of the monitoring surveys: the intended credentials (2003, 2002, 1997), a rating of the objectives of education (2002 and before), different forms of assessment of quality criteria (2003; spontaneous ratings and given categories), and attitudes about subjects by the assessment of a reduction of instructional hours by subjects (2003).

2.2.1. Intended credentials

The intended credentials might give an impression about the priorities in terms of the status which the parents want to achieve for their offspring. The comparison of the last five or six years, however, does not give a conclusive picture. One clear tendency stands out, this is the increasing insecurity about what to intend: this category rises consistently from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2003. A quarter of parents with children within the system thus does not know which credential they should intend for their oldest child.

If we look at the categories of credentials, the tendencies are not consistent and, moreover, the changes from 2002 to 2003 are bigger, and partly in the opposite direction than those from 1997 to 2002/03. If we look at the overall tendency from the earlier year to the later years (also represented by the average of 2002/03), we see a decline of the medium level credentials and of the upper secondary credentials, and a rise of the higher education credentials. However, between 2002 and 2003 the preference for apprenticeship rises sharply, and that for higher education (particularly the non-university track) declines.

Figure 10: Intended credentials by parents of school children 1997 – 2003 (%)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 25)

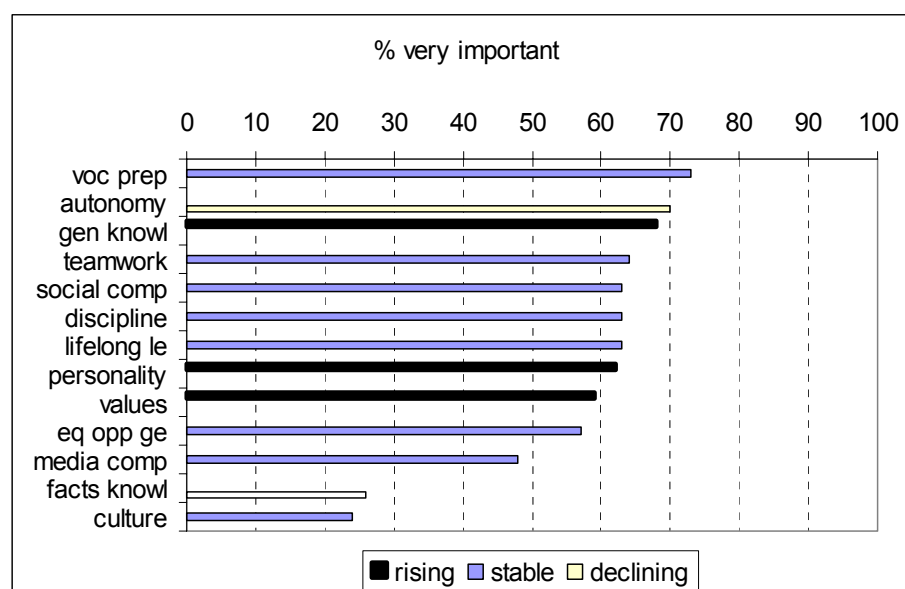
2.2.2. Objectives for education

The monitoring survey has observed the opinion of the population about 13 objectives. First the respondents were asked about the importance of those objectives, second they were asked whether the objectives should be a primary or a secondary concern of schools, or whether they should be a concern of parents.

Three objectives are rated as very important by about two thirds of respondents or more: vocational preparation, individual autonomy, and general knowledge. On the other end of the spectrum two objectives are rated very important by about one quarter or less of the population: cultural education and factual knowledge, also media competence was rated very important by less than half of the population. The remaining items are rated very important by around 60% of the population: teamwork, social competence, discipline, motivation for lifelong learning, personality development, value education and gender equal opportunity.

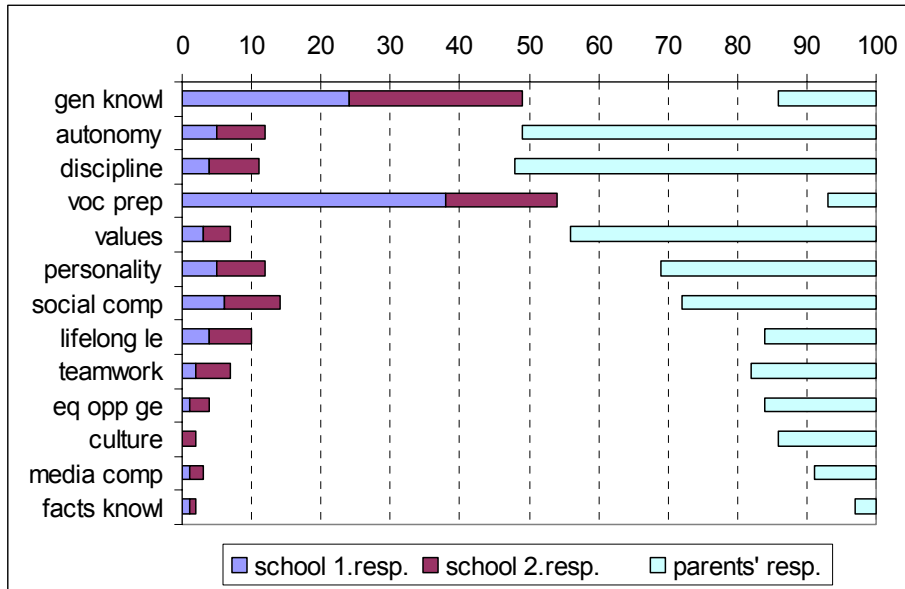
We can see that some objectives which are hotly debated in education policy discourses are rated rather high by the population. Differences between groups are not very marked, parents are rating similar to the population, they are preferring value education more frequently (70%). Discipline is more frequently supported by older persons (almost 80%) and less frequently by persons below 30 years (about 50%) old. During time the rating of the majority of objectives has not changed, three objectives are increasingly supported: personality development, general knowledge and value education; the support for two objectives is decreasing: individual autonomy and factual knowledge.

Figure 11: Importance of objectives related to education and training rated by the population 2003, and stability of rating over time (% very important of three categories: 1 = very important, 2 = fairly important, 3 = not important; ordering by rating „very important“)



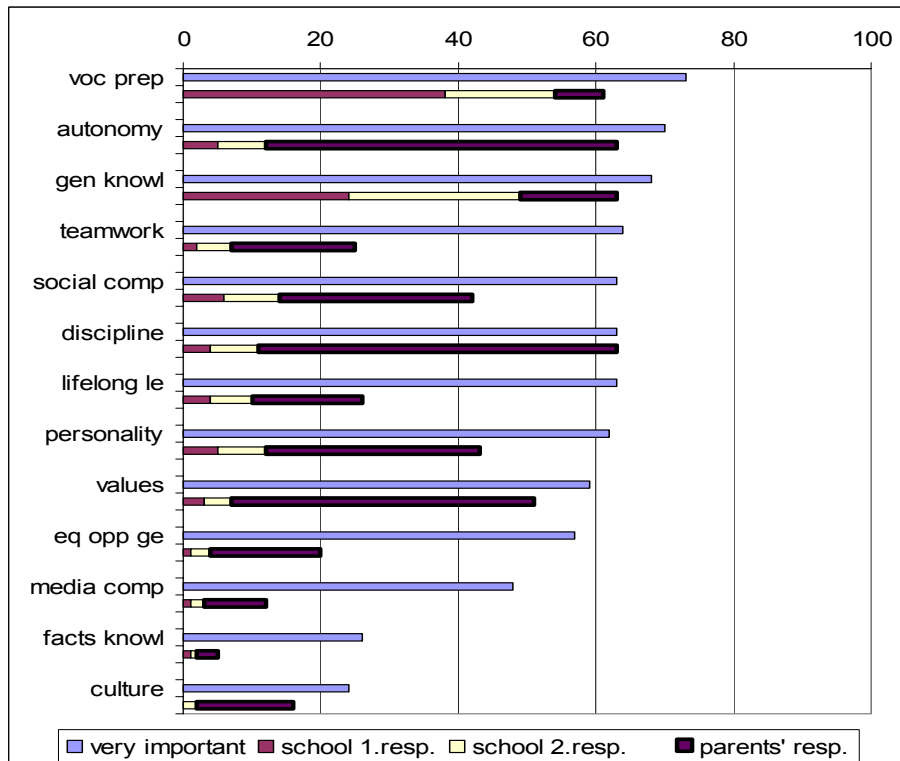
Source: Education Monitoring 2002 (IFES 2002, 26)

Figure 12: Rating of responsibility for enforcement of objectives by school or parents (% responsible; for school: primary responsibility, secondary responsibility; ordering by difference to 100%: neither school nor parents responsible)



Source: Education Monitoring 2002 (IFES 2002, 27)

Figure 13: Importance of objectives compared to allocation of responsibility for enforcement (ordering by rating very important).



Source: Education Monitoring 2002 (IFES 2002, 26-27)

More interesting is the allocation of the concern for objectives to parents as compared to school, and – indirectly – also the difference between that allocation to 100%, which indicates that no specific responsibility is allocated to someone for the enforcement of the objectives. The results of parents are similar to those of the population. The responsibility for five objectives is allocated to more than 50% to certain actors, with a rather clear pattern: schools are responsible for *vocational preparation* and for *general knowledge*, the other objectives are rated as a primary responsibility of school by about 5% or less, as a secondary responsibility social competences, discipline, individual autonomy and personality development are rated slightly higher (less than 10%) than the others; parents are responsible particularly for discipline, individual autonomy and value education, and a bit less for personality development and social competences. However, for the latter two objectives almost 60% of respondents did not allocate responsibility to either school or parents. That ratio increases to 75% to 95% with the remaining six objectives: motivation for lifelong learning, teamwork, gender equal opportunity, cultural education, media competence and factual knowledge.

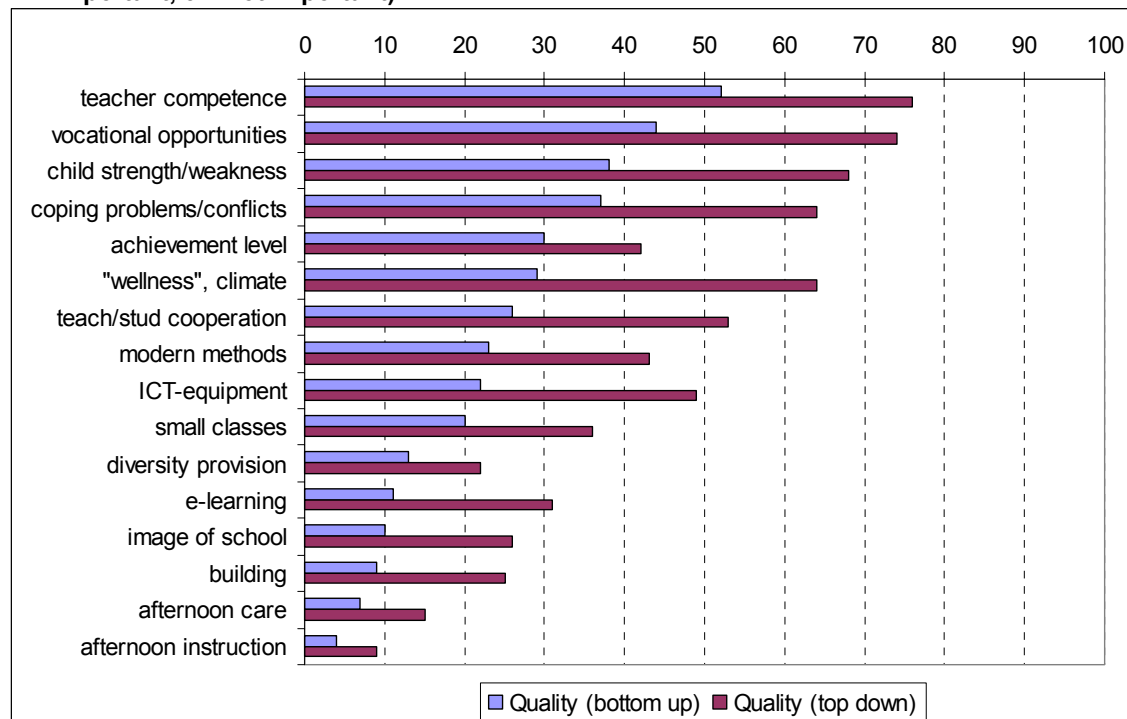
If we compare the rating of importance and allocation of responsibility we can see that there is a communality at certain objectives: discipline, general knowledge, individual autonomy, value education and vocational preparation. Certain values are rated important, but responsibility is allocated to school or parents to a very much lower degree: teamwork, motivation for lifelong learning, gender equal opportunity and media competence. Also with factual knowledge, which is rated very low in terms of importance, that gap is rather marked. The latter objectives have come strongly up on the agenda more recently, and it seems to a high extent unclear, who should take the responsibility. Those results also indicate that the often cited statement is not supported by evidence, that each problem which comes up in society is over handed by the public to school to be solved. Rather, some of the key objectives are allocated to parents, or to neither, and thus are not so much seen as public responsibility – with implications for equity concerns: if the capability of parents to enforce those objectives is distributed unevenly, then a preference for social inheritance is indirectly supported by those observations.

2.2.3. Quality criteria for school

The population was asked for the assessment of quality criteria by two different questions: firstly respondents should spontaneously rate quality criteria for schools; secondly, a set of 16 items was rated by three categories (very important, important, not important). The spontaneous answers were categorised to the items. The following figure shows the results for both procedures. Most items were rated similarly by both approaches, only three (achievement level of school, use of modern methods, and diversity of provision were rated more frequently in the spontaneous „bottom up“ procedure. The most important (about 40-50% „bottom up“, and 65-75% „top down“) quality criteria are: teacher competence, provision of vocational opportunities, coping with the children’s strengths and weaknesses, and coping with problems and conflicts (social competence of teachers). The least important quality criteria (about 5-10% „bottom up“, and 10-25% „top down“) are afternoon instruction, afternoon care, quality of the school building, and the image of the school).

Grossly the opinion of parents is similar to that of the population, in the „top down“ procedure parents have expressed a stronger preference for the social competence of teachers (coping with problems and conflicts), and also for smaller classes (that item ranks rather low).

Figure 14: Quality criteria for school rated by population 2003 (% spontaneously rated and classified to categories („bottom up“); % very important, of three categories 1 = very important, 2 = important, 3 = not important)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 36, 39)

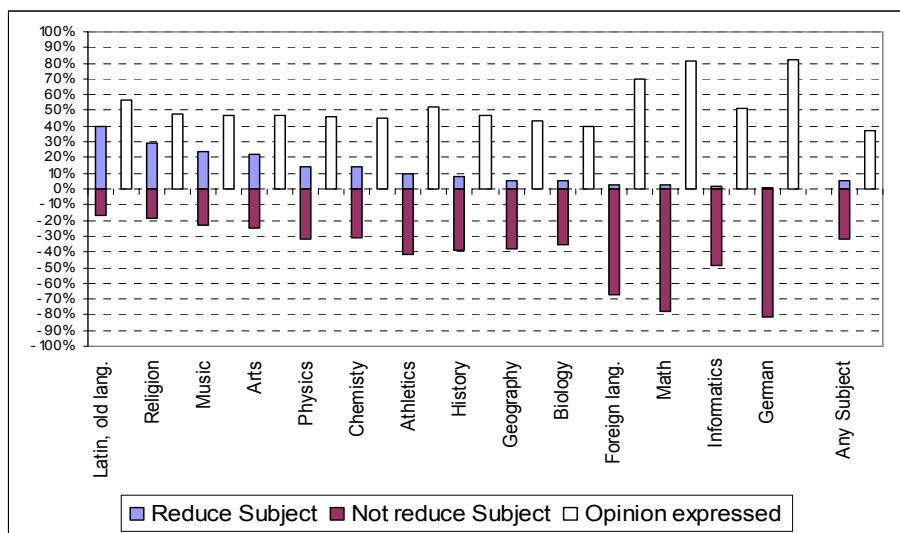
2.2.4. Attitudes about reduction or non-reduction of instructional hours for school subjects

On the background of a political debate about the reduction of instructional time in Austrian schools questions were asked about specific subjects. Overall reduction was not supported by the population or parents or even not students. The ratings for specific subjects might be taken as an indication for the weight which is attached to those subjects. If we hold in mind the overall opinion about overloaded curricula, and the very low support of the teaching of specific knowledge showed above, the attitudes about subjects are somewhat contradictory, or point to tensions in the patterns of opinion.

About a third of respondents reject an overall reduction of instructional time for any subject, and only a very small minority agrees to that. Concerning the specific subjects, an opinion about either to reduce or not to reduce is expressed by a clear majority of respondents only to three subjects (German, Math, and foreign languages), which should clearly not be reduced. To the remaining subjects only about half of the population expresses an opinion, showing a rather marked pattern: for two subjects (Latin and old languages, and Religion) a reduction is supported to some extent, two subjects (Arts and Music) are contested, and the remaining subjects (the Sciences, Athletics, the liberal Arts, and Informatics) should not be reduced in the opinion of the population.

The preferences of parents are similar to that of the population.

Figure 15: Opinion about the reduction of instructional time for school subjects by population 2003 (%)

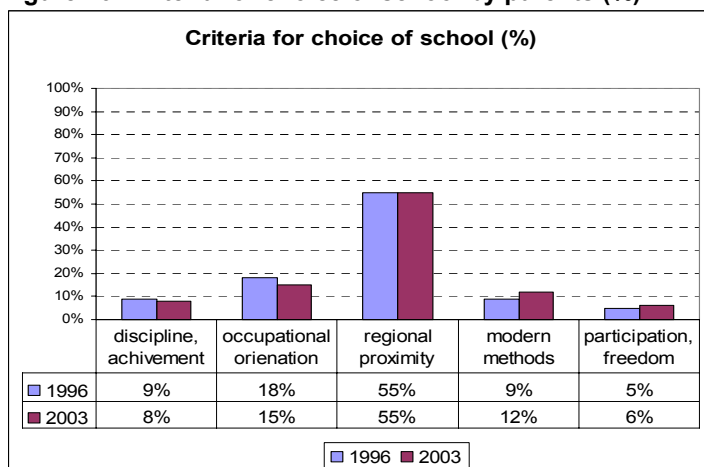


Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 20)

2.3. Parents' attitudes

The evaluation of the often cited belief that parents tend to hold conservative expectations about schooling depends on what is classified „conservative“ or „progressive“. We can make some deliberations from the material, however, not many items can be clearly related to that question.

Figure 16: Criteria for choice of school by parents (%)



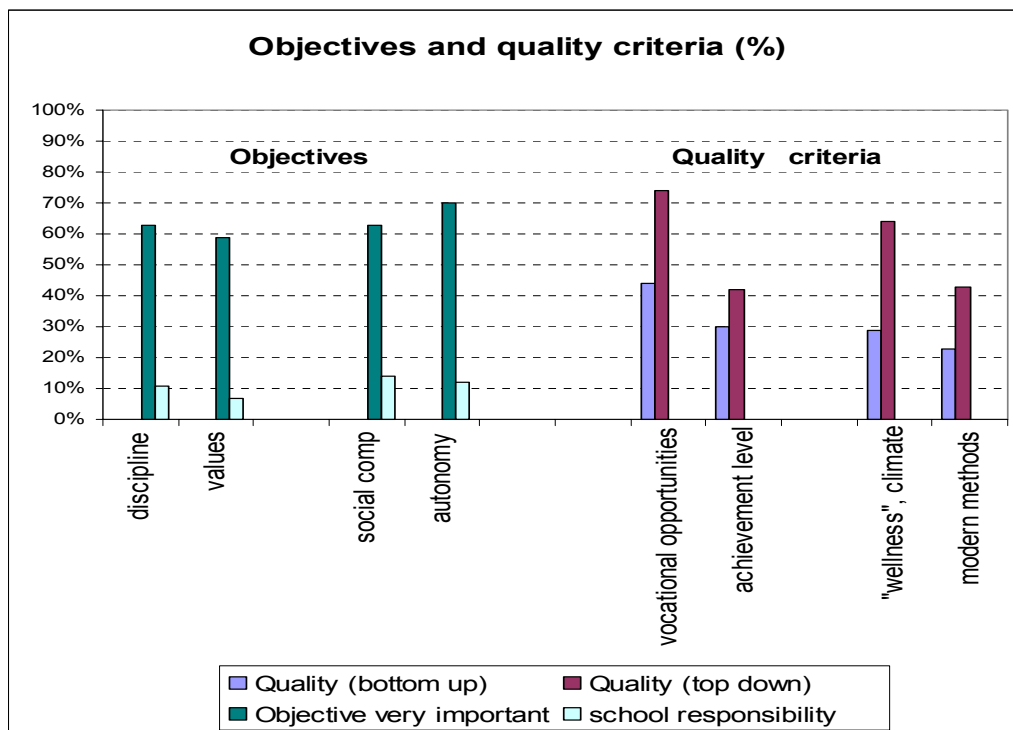
Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 22)

If we take the criteria for the choice of a particular school as an indicator for the orientation towards more „conservative“ attitudes (discipline and achievement, occupational orientation) or more „progressive“ ones (modern methods, participation in school life), we can see that only small shares of

parents have mentioned those criteria, and the proportions are quite similar. The most important item is regional proximity. However, we can see a slight tendency of „progressive“ orientation to increase.

The above cited results about objectives and quality criteria for school show that „conservative“ and „progressive“ items seems not to exclude each other, and are rated both at a medium level. About 60% support the objectives „discipline“ and „social competences“ as very important, „value education“ is supported less frequently (60%) than „individual autonomy“ (70%). Responsibility for the enforcement of objectives is attributed to school slightly more frequently for the „progressive“ objectives. The attitudes about quality criteria show a similar picture. „Achievement level“ is supported less frequently than „modern methods“ from bottom up (30% vs. 23%), but almost equally from top down (42% vs. 43%), a „wellness“-climate is supported equally from bottom up (30%) and more frequently from top down than „achievement level“.

Figure 17: Selected objectives for education and quality criteria for school rated by population (%)



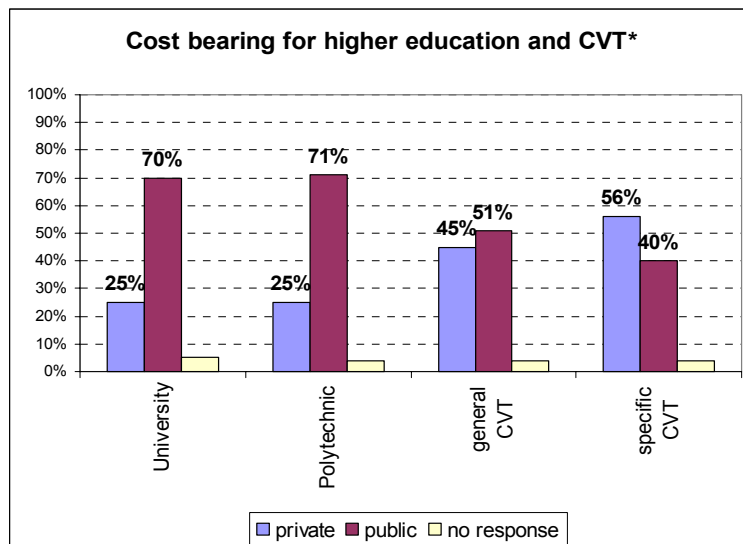
Source: Education Monitoring 2002, 2003 (see above figures)

Unfortunately we cannot obtain to which extent the objectives and quality criteria used for the description of conservative or progressive attitudes are held by the same persons. In sum we cannot support from these observations that parent would hold particularly conservative attitudes. Maybe, there are „two camps“ which might be similar of magnitude, or to a more or less extent overlapping attitudes.

The Austrian initial education and training system is publicly financed to a very high degree, whereas continuing education and training is provided on a market with a high „collective good“ component,

executed by the social partners. In 2000 the monitoring survey asked a question about who should bear the costs of higher and continuing education in Austria. Clearly the majority of respondents prefer publicly finance higher education, and about half of the population prefers publicly financed CVT with a slight difference between general and specific CVT (the latter with a higher proportion of respondents preferring private financing). Thus education and training is strongly supported as a public good.

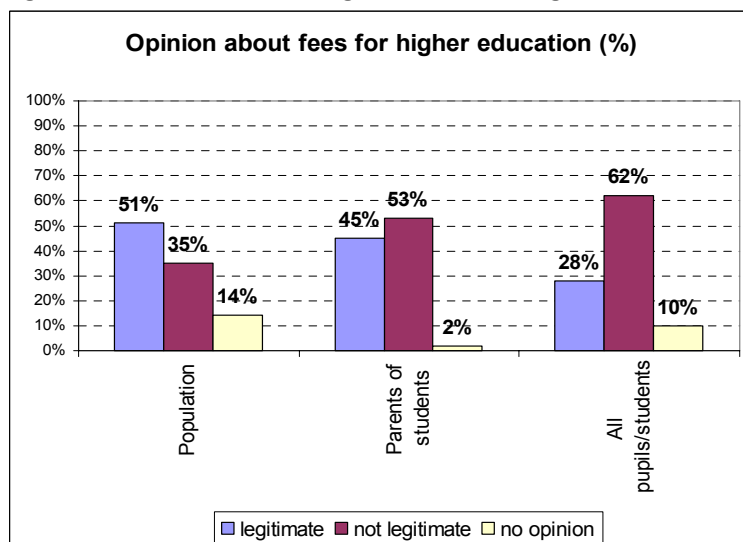
Figure 18: Who should bear the costs for education and training (% , population)



* general CVT: 2nd chance education, Volkshochschule (typically longer provision, formal and non-formal); specific CVT: e.g., Internet training, language learning, rhetorics (non-formal training, typically shorter provision).

Source: Education Monitoring 2000 (IFES 2000, 57)

Figure 19: Are the fees for higher education legitimate?*



* The question was formulated specifically about the implemented fee of about EUR 464 per term.

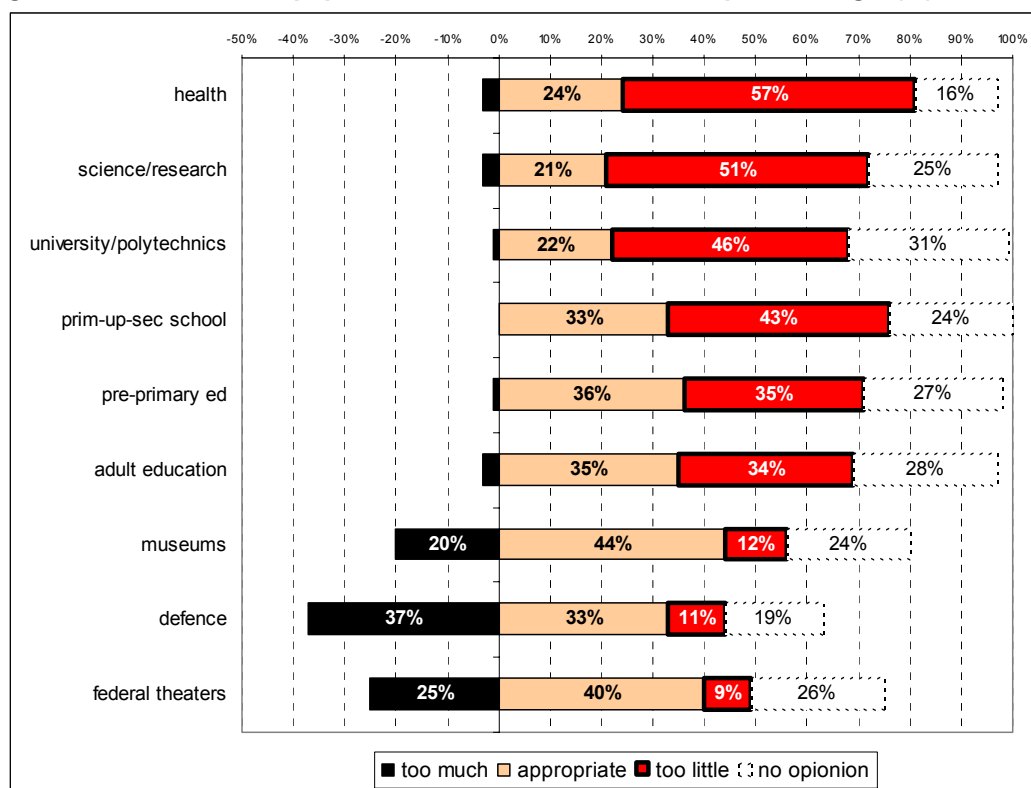
Source: Education Monitoring 2002 (IFES 2000, 60)

However, that strong support for education and training and training as a public good does mean that fees for higher education are unanimously rejected. A majority of the population supports the fees,

parents of students are rather separated with a slight majority against the fee, and pupils/students hold a clear majority against fees (with more than a quarter supporting them and about 10% holding no opinion).

Asked about preferences for the distribution of public money, almost 60% percent of the population charge a higher proportion for health purposes, more than half for science and research which is an ongoing issue in Austrian public debate, one third to 50% charge more money for educational purposes, with declining proportions from higher education to pre-primary education and adult education. Defence is the item with the highest proportion of respondents thinking that too much would be spent. For cultural purposes a quite high proportion of respondents want to be less public money spent, however, a high proportion of respondents is also satisfied with spending in that area. About 30% percent of the population are satisfied with spending for education up to the upper secondary level and adult education, whereas only about 20% are satisfied with spending in higher education and science and research.

Figure 20: Preferences of population about distribution of the public budget (%)



Source: Education monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 66)

2.4. Equity

Not much is known about equity in the Austrian education and training system. Equality of opportunity has been a strong issue during the social democratic era, however, evaluations of the extent to which that objective has been achieved have been not sufficiently performed. Some knowledge is available

which points to rather stable relations of social reproduction, except a clear reduction of gender inequality (with some remaining differences, particularly with respect to choice of subjects).² The recent PISA study has also shown rather clear relationships of social inheritance of achievement in education and training.

At the policy level equity is not a strong issue, meaning that debates about the acceptable level of inequalities are lacking. Rather the opinion prevails that equity has been achieved. Indirectly, the results of the monitoring survey also point to that direction, that inequality is not felt to be a very pressing issue in the Austrian education and training system, despite its selective and early differentiating structure. Policy recommendations towards a reinforcement of selective elements of the system are contested between political camps, but are not a very strong issue in the public.

3. Participation in Decision-making in the Schooling Process

Questions:

3.1 What light does research shed on the *level* of involvement of parents and other members of the community in the directions taken by schools in the:

- a) day-to-day directions taken for the education of different classes and pupils;
- b) local governance of schools as institutions?

3.2 Are there clear *patterns* relating to which groups of parents or other members of communities tend most to be involved and which least involved, and in what kinds of decision-making? What does the evidence show about *who* exercises available choices over school enrolment [Question 5.2 relates to legislative and constitutional entitlements rather than how this is exercised in practice]?

Traditionally, and in terms of the structure of policy making the overall shape of the Austrian education and training system is a state led, highly regulated top-down system, with some influence of the regional authorities, and – more recently – a certain degree of devolution of authority to the school level. In the apprenticeship system, which is also highly regulated, the social partners, and particularly the training enterprises have a predominant influence. In sum the style and structure of state policy making does not very much encourage involvement of citizens because of that overall political structure, however, a strongly developed and formalised system of partnership and codetermination of parents, and at the upper levels of pupils too, is also obligatory in the Austrian system.

Starting with the reforms of the 1970s, a framework of co-determination, including parents and pupils, as well as students and apprentices, has been set up in most parts of the education and training system, with legally determined responsibilities and a rather limited room for discretion within the strongly regulated structures and procedures. Since the 1980s the steps toward more autonomy have increased that influence to some extent, however, as this development has been complemented by financial austerity measures some critics have called it “the co-determination of scarcity”.

² Gender differences in science and technology studies are among the largest in the EU, and choice of VET programmes at the upper secondary level remains to be strongly segregated by gender.

A recent expert-proposal³ about school development points to several observed tensions in the relations between schools and parents:

- schools and teachers accept parents' engagement, however, are not enough serious about parents' opinions about school and teaching matters;
- parents fear to some extent for their children to get inconvenience if they are giving critical feedback (Eder et al. 2002, 23-24).
- The study mentions structural imbalances in the co-determination process, and cites the results of a broad survey among Austrian experts, which have rated some deficits of democracy in the school system as one of the six main problem areas (Eder et al. 2002, 19).

The expert-proposal for the implementation of a comprehensive system of quality development and quality assurance across the whole school system strongly advocates a strategy to guide schools towards a model of organisations which should be able to learn and able to act (Eder et al. 2002, 27). The proposed concept of quality includes parents and some aspects of the school environment, however it models the relationship among those stakeholders rather exclusively along some kind of professional principal and agent relationships (Eder et al. 2002, 23-24). Schools, their principals (the public, the administration, the parents) and their customers (enterprises, receiving institutions) are seen as a rather closed system, without mentioning the community, or the not directly involved public spheres and actors.

Social partnership has also an important role in the education and training system, particularly in the sector of apprenticeship training (Mayer/Lassnigg/Unger 2000).⁴

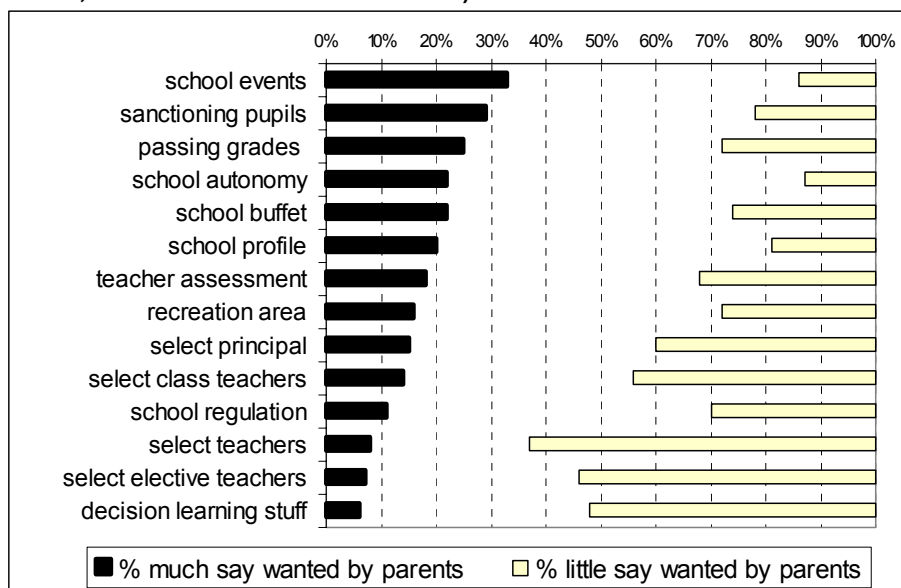
Some basic facts about the parents' wishes about decision making can be presented from a study in the 1990s (Eder 1998)⁵ and from the monitoring survey. The wishes of parents for participation in decision making has been observed by various areas for decision making. First of all, the data show that the proportion of parents who want "little" say is in most areas bigger than the proportion who want much say (average 33% vs. 18%) – there are only three fields where the wish for much participation is clearly more frequent than the wish for little participation: school events, school autonomy, and sanctioning pupils; and there are three more fields where those two categories are by and large equal: school profile, passing grades, and school buffet. Those are the six areas where "much say" is wished most frequently by 20% to 33% of parents. Different types of areas are included, as practical issues (school events and buffet), disciplinary and instructional issues (sanctions and passing grades), and also more elaborate issues about school development (autonomy and profile). Less participation is wished in the more operational areas of staff policy (selection and assessment of teachers and principals) and more professional matters (school regulation and learning stuff).

³ Eder F et al., eds. (2002) *Qualitätsentwicklung und Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen*. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag.

⁴ Mayer K / Lassnigg L / Unger M (2000) *Social Dialogue on Training. Case Study Austria*. IHS, research report commissioned by CEDEFOP. Vienna (http://www.equi.at/en_fs_projekte.htm > qualification > download report).

⁵ Eder F (1998) *Schule und Demokratie*. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag.

Figure 21: Parents' wishes for participation in decision making (% much/little say wanted by parents; scale 1 = "little" to 4 = "much")

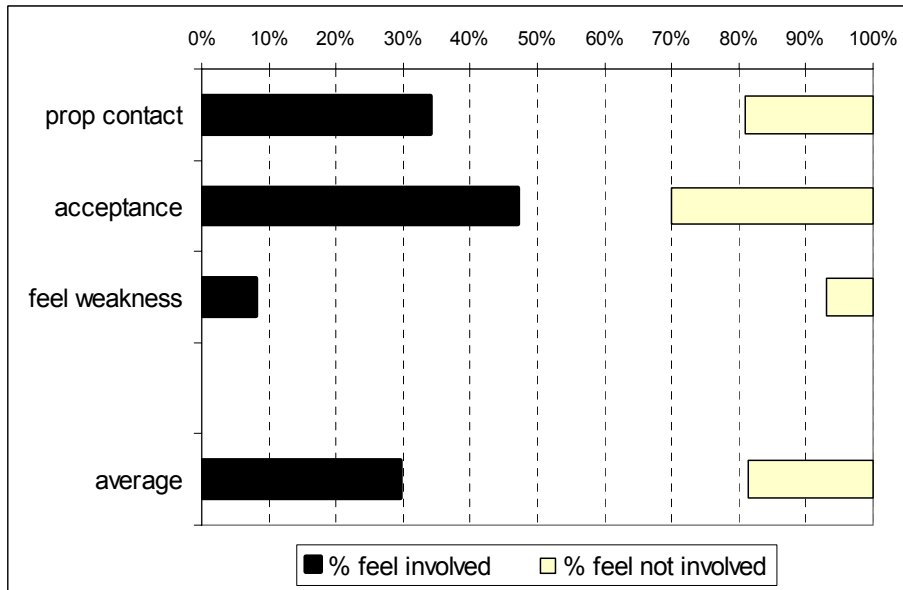


Source: Eder 1998, 95.

The information about the extent to which parents actually feel themselves to be included in decision making has been studied by more complex scales about "propensity for contacts" from school, "acceptance of parents' involvement" and "feelings of weakness vis a vis the school" (Eder 1998, 79-89). Rather abstract measures have been obtained for this question, so we can try to give orders of magnitude. The measures have been simplified in order to get rough magnitudes for the feeling of parents about their involvement in school matters. Taking that method, about 30% of parents feel quite strongly involved, about 20% feel rather clearly not involved. Those measures can be taken as rather exclusive. About half of parents are between those extremes.

There are also some differences according to the scales which are interesting. Acceptance seems to be rather polarised, feelings of weakness are strongly expressed only by small proportions of parents at both poles.

Figure 22: Parents assessment of involvement (rough orders of magnitude)*

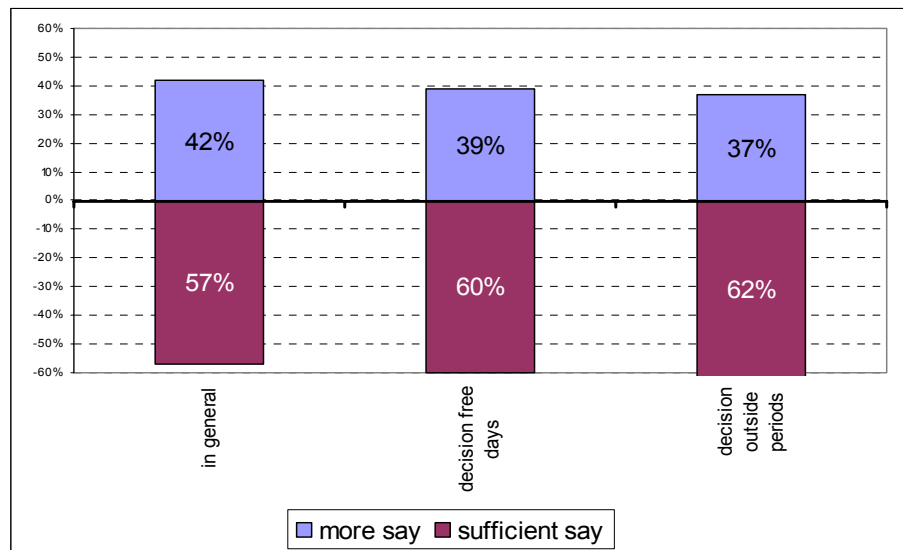


* The measures were obtained by taking the extreme categories (fully agree; do absolutely not agree) of "least selective"(a = maximum involved) and the "most selective"(b = maximum not involved) item from each scale. *Propensity for contact*: (a): If parents have problems, they may contact school or principal without negative expectations; (b): If you do not care persistently, you do not know anything about school matters. *Acceptance*: (a): School is eager to keep parents out; (b): Contact with parents is only asked for in case there are problems; *Feeling of weakness*: (a) Many parents do not criticise because they fear shortcomings for their child; (b) Pressure on meetings with parents is so strong that parents hesitate to tell their opinion.

Source: Eder 1998, 80-86

From the monitoring survey we can obtain additional information about more relative relations. First, do parents wish more say in school matters? We can see that the majority does feel sufficient participation in general, as well as concerning more specific practical matters. Those are similar to the area of school events, which was the most frequent wish for participation in the above survey.

Figure 23: Do parents wish more say in school partnership? (%)



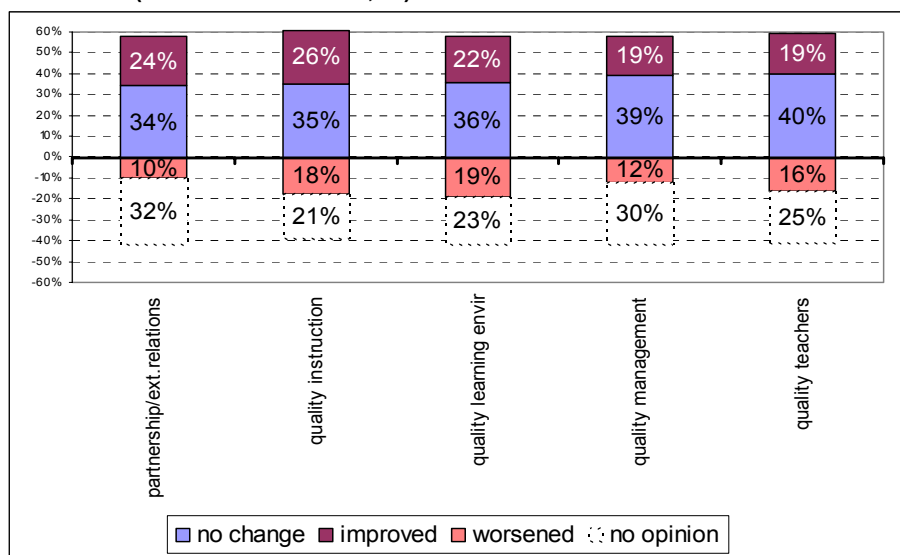
Source: Education Monitoring 1999 (IFES 1999, 52)

We have also to admit that about 40% of parents have expressed the wish to have more say in school matters in the monitoring survey 1999. This is a quite high proportion, which signals some unmet demand.

In the monitoring survey the parents' assessment of the change of some quality dimensions is also observed. One of those dimensions is partnership and external relations of schools. We can see that about one quarter, which is the second highest rating as compared to the other quality dimensions, felt improvement in 2003, and the proportion of parents who felt a worsening is the lowest. We can also see that the proportion of parents who gave no opinion is the highest in partnership matters with almost one third of respondents. This indicates that parents are frequently insecure about what to think about that matter (the proportion of no opinion rating is also high in the quality of management, which is consistent with the above finding that a high proportion of parents does not wish much say in managements matters like selection and assessment of teachers and principals).

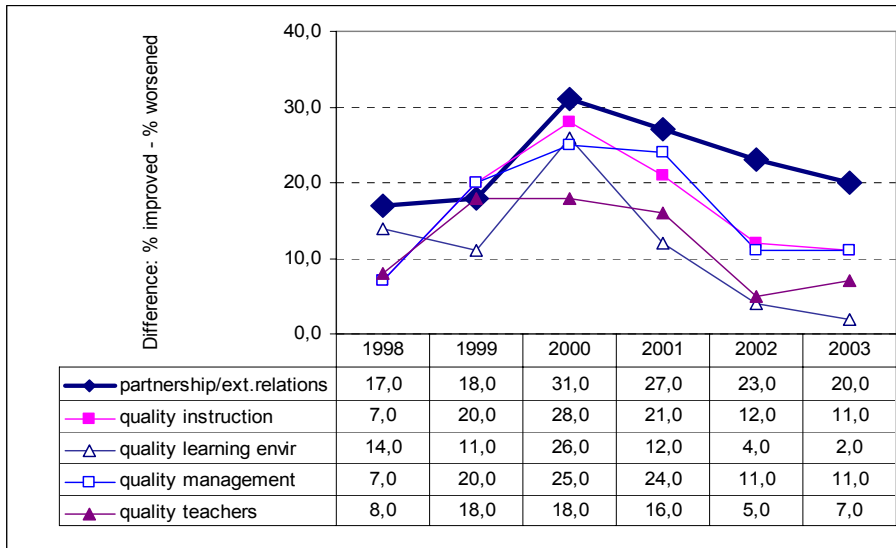
About the rating of the change of quality at those dimensions also time series data between 1998 and 2003 are available. There we can see a quite favourable assessment of the development of the quality of partnership as compared to the other dimensions in that period. The difference of improvement and worsening ratings is the best in every year except 1999, when four of the five dimensions were rated very similarly.

Figure 24: Parents' assessment of the change in quality of partnership as compared to other dimensions (cross-section 2003, %)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 42)

Figure 25: Parents' assessment of the change in quality of partnership as compared to other dimensions (time series 1998-2003, %)



Source: Education Monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 43)

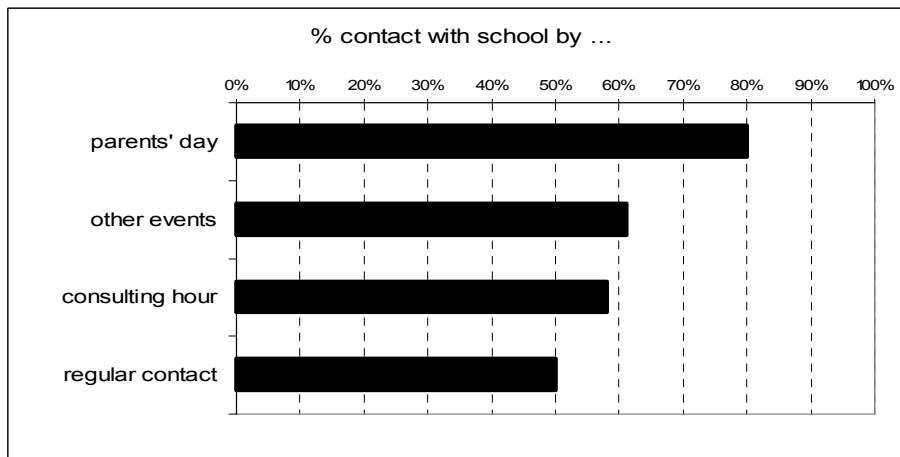
3.1. Level of involvement of parents

The level of involvement of parents was observed in the study by Eder 1998. The items can be differentiated to day-to-day involvement and participation in more formal governance of schools.

3.1.1. Day-to-day involvement

About 50% of parents at secondary school level report regular contacts with teachers, 80% visit the parents' information day which takes place once per semester.

Figure 26: Parents' day-to-day involvement (% involved)



Source: Eder 1998, 91.

Contacts among parents are very much concentrated: less than 30% of parents know more than half of the other parents, more than 50% know none or very few of other parents of their class.

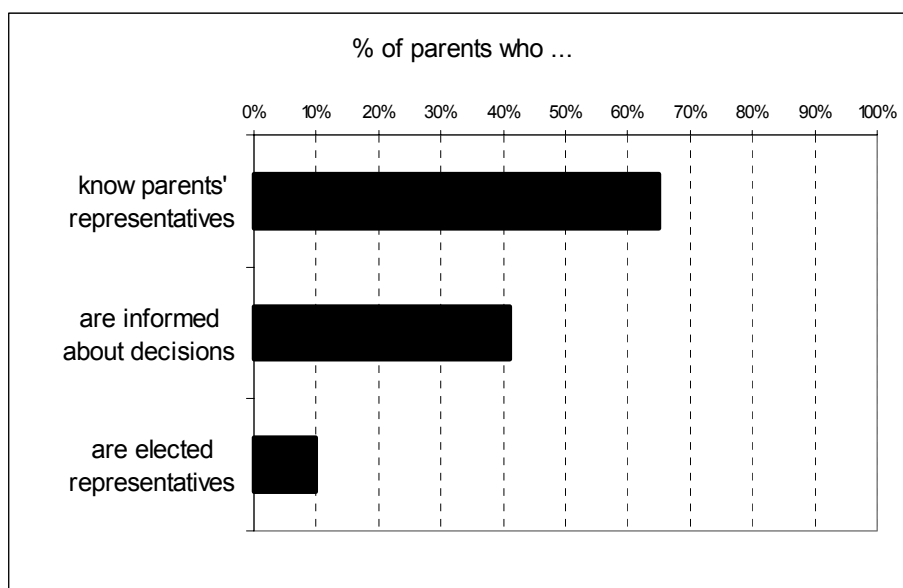
The intensity of contacts is higher at lower secondary level than on upper secondary level, and that difference seems to be deliberate: parents see less contact more reasonable at higher grades, about 15% report that they are only seeking contact if there are problems.

3.1.2. Governance of schools

The participation of parents in the governance of school is legally regulated and clearly implemented on an overall basis. The parents in every class elect their representatives, schools also have a bipartite (lower levels) or tripartite (upper levels) body comprised by parents, pupils (at upper level) and teachers chaired by the principal with regulated responsibilities, where elected representatives of the “school partners” are delegated. In parallel the parents also run their community on a “private” basis, which is informally related to formal school partnership.

According to the study of Eder 1998 about two fifth to two thirds of parents at secondary level are basically informed about the issues of formal partnership. 10% in the sample are themselves elected representatives which points to some overrepresentation of more interested or more active parents in the study.⁶

Figure 27: Parents’ access to formal partnership (% involved)



Source: Eder 1998, 91.

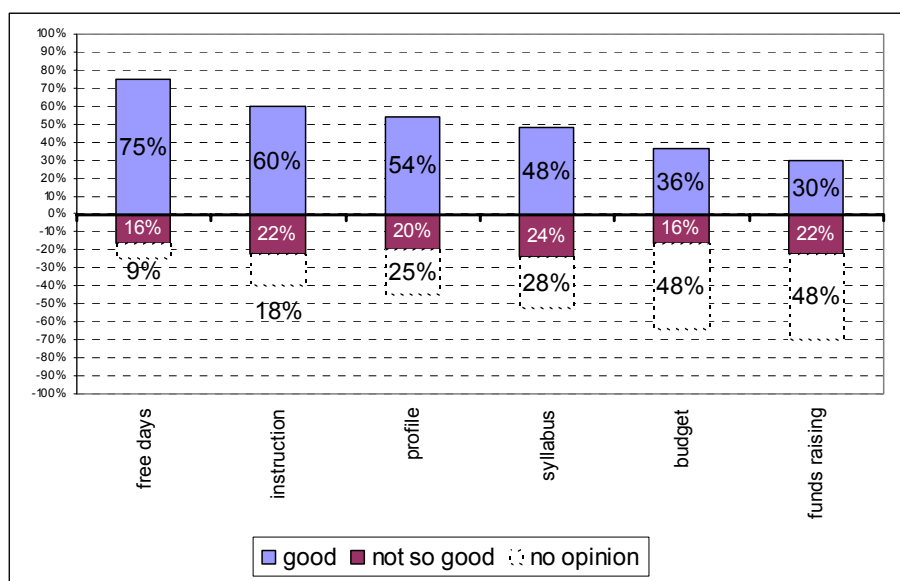
⁶ If we assume that each class elects one representative, and there are 25-30 pupils per class, then about 3-4% of parents should hold that post, if we add the deputy representative, we arrive at 6-8%.

There seems to be a marked difference in access to information, participation, and decision making between parents' representatives and parents themselves. Due to a study about the implementation of school autonomy measures⁷ which have to pass the co-determination bodies of schools (Specht 1997,⁸ see also Eder 1998, 32-34), parents' representatives feel quite informed and respected, and to some extent have taken initiative towards decisions, however, the wider group of parents are markedly less involved in those activities. Schools differ in terms of their information and participation practices: in about half of schools which have decided autonomy measures, parents were informed in advance. According to a survey among involved parents' representatives, about 30% of parents had the chance of influencing the decisions about autonomy measures.

Those figures to some extent resemble the observed patterns about involvement and also about the demand for involvement which were reported above.

The monitoring survey has observed an assessment of the implementation of the autonomy measures among parents. Dissatisfaction varies between 16% and 24%, a main finding is the proportion of parents who do not hold an opinion which is particularly high in financial matters with about half of respondents, and also rather high with the more professional issues (around one quarter). Allocation of free days is positive for three quarters and about 90% of parents also hold an opinion about that issue.

Figure 28: Satisfaction of parents with the implementation of school autonomy measures (%)



Source: Education monitoring 2003 (IFES 2003, 54)

⁷ Autonomy measures are about allocation of 5 free days per year, development of a profile, instructional questions, a reshuffling of a certain proportion of the schedules of the teaching subjects according to rather clear overall regulations, allocation of budget, and raising of additional funds.

⁸ Specht W (1997) Autonomie und Innovationsklima an Schulen. Rezeption und Wirkungen der Schulautonomie an Hauptschulen und allgemeinbildenden höheren Schulen. Forschungsberichte (Arbeitsberichte der Reihe II) Nr. 26, BMUK/ZSE II, Graz.

3.2. Pattern of involvement of parents

The study of Eder 1998 has also analysed differences of parents' participation and involvement according to their educational background and the achievement level of their child. Both dimensions were tested for the different scales of involvement, contact and wishes for participation.

The effects are not very marked. The educational background of parents (no upper level secondary education, upper level secondary education, higher education) matters at two dimensions of the wish for involvement: school life and pupils interests. That means that at central dimensions of involvement the parents with lower background do not feel unequally treated. The same holds for the achievement dimension, where only the scale which deals directly with this issue has shown significant differences.

Figure 29: Summary of results about effects of background characteristics on parents' involvement, contact, and wishes for participation

	Education of parents	Achievement level of child
Involvement		
Propensity of contact by school	No difference	No difference
Acceptance of contact by school	No difference	No difference
Feeling of weakness in contacts	No difference	No difference
Contact		
Realised contact	No difference	No difference
Deliberation about reasonable contact	No difference	No difference
Wishes for involvement		
School life (events, buffet, recreation)	<i>Parents with low education, and with higher education have wishes for more involvement than parents with medium education</i>	No difference
School development (profile, autonomy, regulation)	No difference	No difference
Pupils interests (discipline, passing grades)	<i>Parents with low education have wishes for more involvement than parents with medium education and with higher education</i>	<i>Parents with pupils with low or medium level achievement have wishes for more involvement than those with pupils with high level achievement</i>
School management (staff, marking)	No difference	No difference

Source: Eder 1998, 80-98.

4. Pupil Choices and Values

Questions:

- 4.1 What do young people think about their schooling – its relevance and quality? What is known about what motivates them to study, in particular the balance between intrinsic interest and seeking extrinsic reward? How do the views of young people match with the views of others, including their parents and teachers, about what is important in education?
- 4.2 What are the rates of absenteeism from compulsory school and how does this vary from the beginning of the primary cycle to the end of the lower secondary cycle? What are the characteristics of those who are most persistently absent? Is there evidence about boredom among the young?
- 4.3 What is the room for students and their parents to choose different programmes of study, and how far are these primarily in the hands of schools and the education authorities? How far do young people participate in the decision-making of schools? Is anything known about such influence or participation by young people in any of different types of schools referred to in 5.1?

4.1. Young people's thinking about schooling

The opinion of pupils/students is observed in the monitoring survey, however, only a small number is included in the sample and their results are not presented systematically in the report but only as contrast to the population and the parents in the text. Frequently no difference is reported between pupils and other groups. Some points can be mentioned:

- Overall satisfaction is similar to the population, with average values a bit lower (2003: 2,0 vs. 1,9; 2002: 2,2 vs. 2,0; IFES 2003, 9-11).
- Coping of school with challenges is rated more favourable by pupils/students at the dimensions of gender equality, information about drugs, integration of migrants, support of disabled colleagues, and support of gifted colleagues. Less favourable are the ratings of reduction of teaching staff and support of less able colleagues (IFES 2003, 29). The rating is not entirely stable in time, in 2002 also the integration of difficult colleagues, and the support of gifted and of disabled colleagues was rated less favourable (IFES 2002, 35). In 2001 particularly the reduction of staff and the support of difficult colleagues was rated less favourable by pupils/students (IFES 2002, 43).
- Reduction of teaching staff is a priority of pupils/students at several occasions.
- The most important quality criteria from the point of view of children are the substantial and social competences of teachers and individualisation of teaching in the spontaneous observation. Other very important criteria are modern instructional methods, technical equipment and diversity of subjects (IFES 2003, 37, 40).

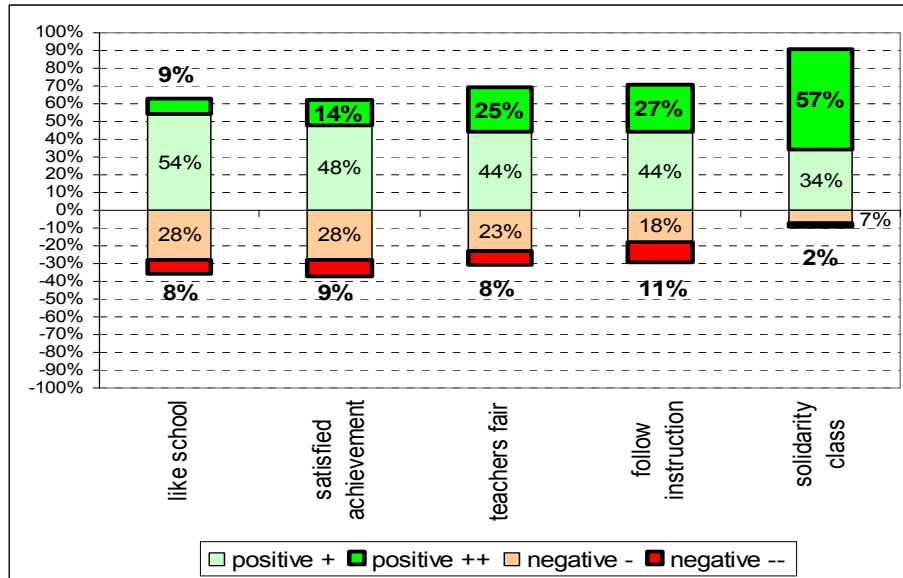
The PISA study of 2000 included observations of the opinion of 14/15-years old pupils about general dimensions of schooling. Very positive are the feelings of solidarity with classmates and colleagues, at the other dimensions about 30% of pupils are not satisfied, about 60-70% are satisfied with their schooling environment: they like to go to school (with a small proportion of 9% very much), are satisfied with their achievement and their teachers' fairness, and can follow instruction most of the time.

A rather stable proportion of 8-11% of pupils have rated the very negative categories at those items.

The overall assessment of satisfaction by the pupils in the different schooling areas resembles very much to the overall rating of the population shown in chapter 1. Vocational colleges are rated best, the accompanying schools of apprenticeship training are rated worst, the academic secondary schools and the vocational schools are rated at a similar level in between (the compulsory schools in PISA represent a specific selection of pupils and are therefore not comparable).

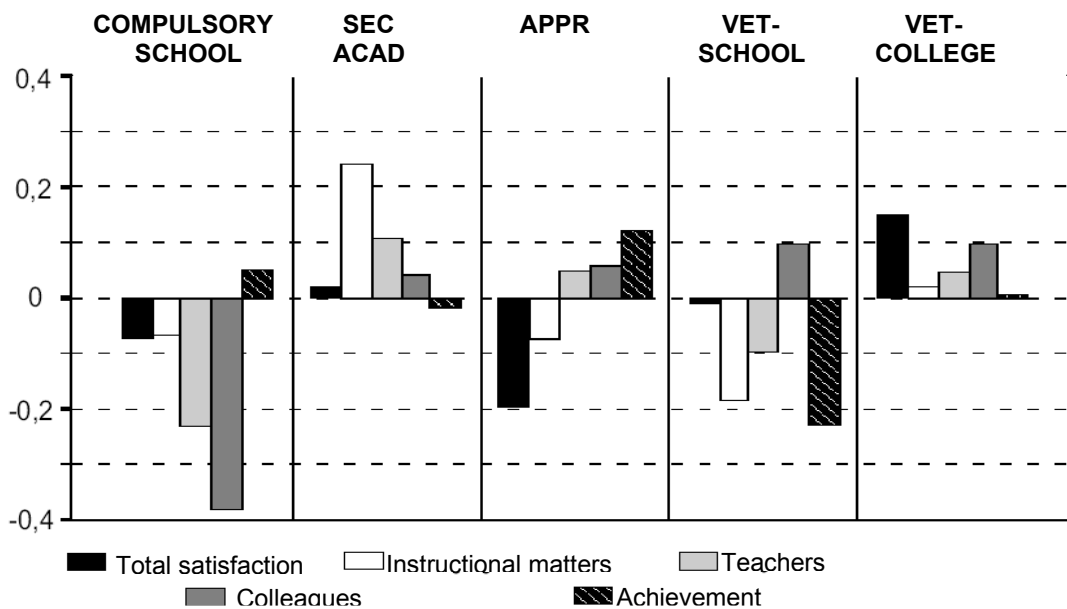
The specific dimensions vary between the areas, however, we can see that the upper level schools are rated positively at most dimensions, whereas the lower level schools differ, only integration with classmates or colleagues is positive in all schools except compulsory school (where this is the worst dimension).

Figure 30: Pupils assessment of school environment from the Austrian PISA+ survey (% overall)



Source: PISA+ (Eder/Wallner-Paschon 2002, Fig.1)⁹

Figure 31: Pupils assessment of school environment from the Austrian PISA+ survey (Scores per school area)

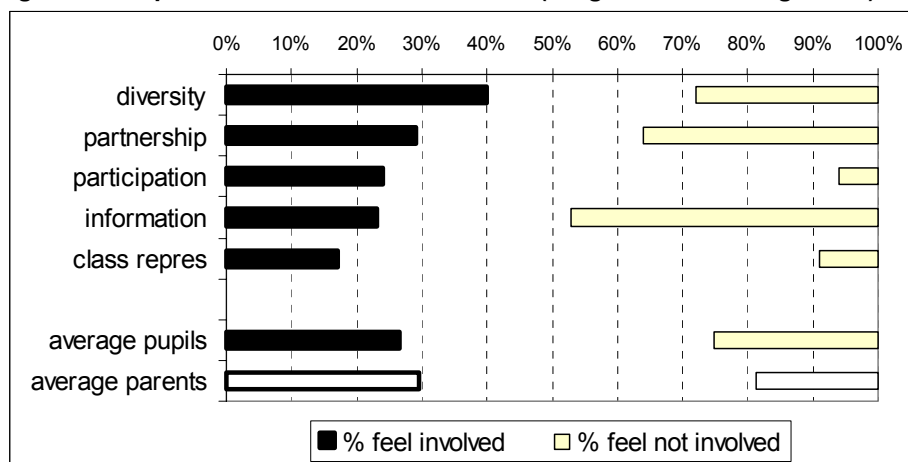


Source: PISA+ (Eder/Wallner-Paschon 2002, Fig.2)

⁹ Eder, F. & Wallner-Paschon, C. (2002). Die Schule als Lebenswelt von Jugendlichen. In: C. Wallner-Paschon & G. Haider (Hrsg.), PISA Plus 2000. Thematische Analysen nationaler Projekte. (73-76). Innsbruck: StudienVerlag.

The study by Eder 1998 has also observed several aspects of the opinion of pupils at secondary level about their schools. If we take the measures comparable, then parents feel slightly more involved in school matters than pupils. Information is the worst dimension for pupils, where almost half of respondents have given a negative response to the respective item.

Figure 32: Pupils assessment of involvement (rough orders of magnitude)*



* The measures were obtained by taking the extreme categories (fully agree; do absolutely not agree) of “least selective”(a = maximum involved) and the “most selective”(b = maximum not involved) item from each scale. *Diversity*: (a): Teachers are happy about many different opinions in discussions; (b): Discussions are frequently cancelled in order to continue instruction. *Partnership*: (a): Pupils are consulted in every important issue concerning their class; (b): In case of different opinion that of the teacher wins in every case; *Participation*: (a) Pupils cooperate frequently during instruction; (b) School decides often about regulations without asking the pupils; *Information*: (a) Teachers are eager to inform pupils timely about all important issues; (b) Pupils are informed ex post factum if a change of a class teacher is implemented; *Class representation*: (a) Class representatives are doing much business, but have little influence on teachers; (b) Teachers hold class representatives responsible in case of misbehaviour of colleagues.

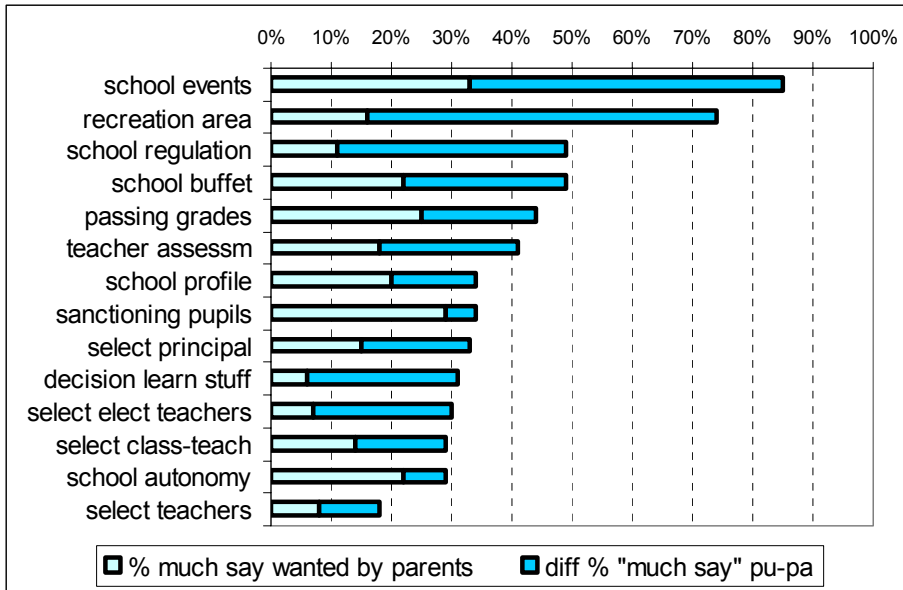
Source: Eder 1998, 47-57.

We can also compare the pupils’ wishes about participation with the parents’ view. On average, pupils wish “much say” markedly more frequent than parents (41% as compared to 18%). Pupils want to have “much say” clearly in matters which concern their every day life: a majority of more than 70% to 80% mention the organisation of school events and the shaping of their recreation area; about 40% to 50% mention school regulation, the school buffet, influence on passing grades for colleagues at risk, and teacher assessment. The more organisational or management and school policy related items, as selecting staff, decisions about learning stuff, including the decisions about disciplinary measures, were mentioned by about one third of pupils or less.

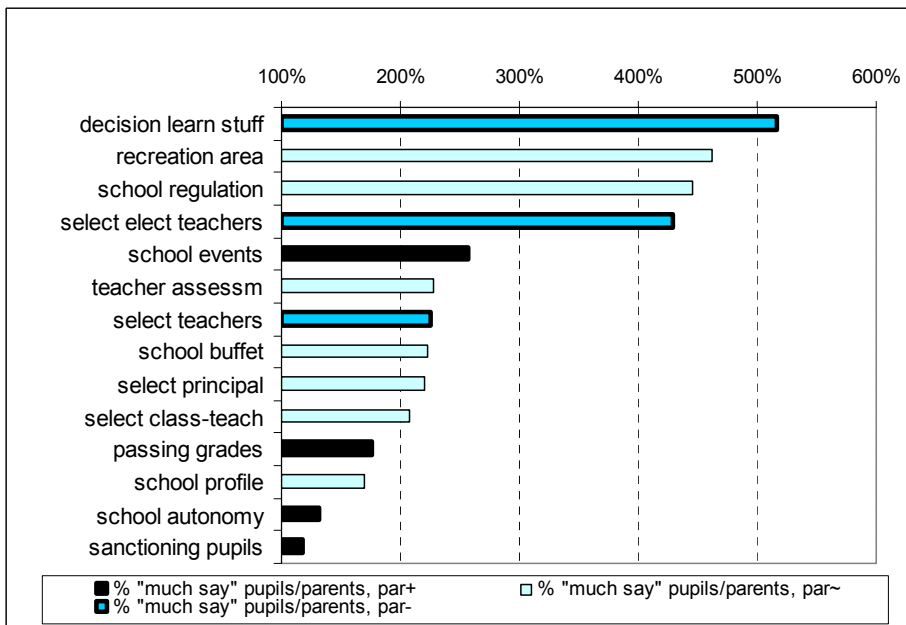
Directly compared to the parents’ views, the preferences of pupils are to some extent different. Both groups are interested in much say in decisions about school events and passing grades. Pupils are strongly interested in the shaping of their recreation areas and school regulation, without parents having a strong preference in those items. Pupils are also more strongly interested in having say about learning stuff and the selection of teachers for their electives than parents, however with a only medium interest on pupils’ side. Parents are interested in having say about sanctioning pupils and in decision about school autonomy, without much interest of pupils in those issues.

Figure 33: Pupils' wishes for participation in decision making, as compared to parents' wishes (% much say wanted by respondents; scale 1 = "little" to 4 = "much")

a) overall bar: % much say wanted by pupils (sum of parents + difference pupils-parents; ordering by pupils opinion)



b) ratio of pupils' wishes to parents' wishes (% "much say" pupils/% "much say" parents)



Source: Eder 1998, 70, selected items.

4.2. Absenteeism

There are no data or studies about absenteeism, however, regulations for the enforcement of school attendance are rather clear, and seem also to be implemented by the authorities.

The measures about the 14-15-years old pupils from the PISA observation, who do not like at all to go to school could be seen as a measure for pupils at risk for absenteeism and boredom.

4.3 Students' and parents room for choice

4.3.1. Room for choice

There is clearly much room for choice in the Austrian education and training system, which differs according to the stages mentioned in chapter 1.

- demand for and provision of early childhood education and care

At this level, the room for choice differs according to the supply and quality of *Kindergarten* places. The responsibility is with regional authorities, and supply differs, e.g. between more urban and more rural regions. A much debated issue is opening time of the *Kindergarten*. A fee has to be paid.

Kindergarten is mainly for children from the age of three until compulsory schooling, and there is also a debate about supply for younger children. More recently a financial provision was amended (*Kinderbetreuungsscheck*), which offer parents a certain amount of money related to certain conditions, about which they can dispose for matters of care for their children. That money might be used for parents (mothers) staying with their children (the amount being a bit higher if also fathers take some period at home), or for models of private care (e.g., "day-care mothers", *Tagesmütter* are a quite common model, where mothers with children take some additional children for caring at home), or for institutional solutions. That model is disputed according to its incentive effects on the combination of care with employment of mothers.

- demand for and provision of education for disabled children and youth in special institutions or in an integrated way

Traditionally, there was a separate type of schools for disabled children, particularly at the level of compulsory schooling. Strongly based on the wishes of parents of disabled children, new regulations for integration into school were amended stepwise during the last decade. There are regulations which give additional resources for classes which take the integrative path, however, to some extent that path conflicts with saving policies about resource allocation which has made the room of schools for

manoeuvre with their resources to some extent smaller. Basically, there is a right for disabled children to be educated in the mainstream of primary and lower secondary schools until grade 8 and in the polytechnic school at grade 9. Parents have to apply, and a formal procedure decides about demand and possibilities. Schools have also say in the decision whether they want to set up the preconditions for integration, mainly providing a second teacher for integrative classes.

The separate schools exist in parallel to the integration model, and there is room for choice for parents at the compulsory level until grade 9. As the cohorts of integrated children reach the end of compulsory schooling, the question about follow-up at the upper secondary level becomes pressing, and solutions seem difficult.

- demand for and provision of primary education in remote rural regions

Access to primary education is basically regulated on a local matching model (*Schulsprengel*) which gives each child access to a particular school. However, there is room for choice of another school if parents (and the child) wants, and they find a school which takes them up.

Choice thus depends on the supply of accessible schools which is related to population density and opportunity for mobility. Transport cost are covered by public funds. The supply of schools at the primary level is strongly dispersed to regions with low population density. This leads to ever smaller schools in remote regions because of the demographic downturn.

Having those schools is a political priority, which has come under debate recently, on grounds of financial issues, and sharing costs between federal, regional, and local budgets. Thresholds for minimal school sizes are under debate. Recently about one quarter of primary schools do not have the full range of at least four classes (on basis of the average number of pupils per class this would be a size below 80 children in these schools). About 90% of compulsory schools are enrolling less than 300 children, a figure which was proposed as a minimum threshold.

- demand for and provision of private schooling

Different types of private schooling are available in Austria. The main type are schools run by religious holders, mainly catholic ones, which are under the public regulations (*Öffentlichkeitsrecht*), and according to agreements with the Vatican, are also publicly paid for their staff costs. About two thirds of private ("non profit") schools are run by religious organisations, thereof more than 90% by the catholic church, 5% by the protestant church, and the rest by others. Private schools are more strongly represented in Vienna, and the distribution in numbers between compulsory and post compulsory school is about 50 : 50, with some concentration at primary schools, Hauptschulen, and VET schools (Particularly some special schools in health, social services are more strongly represented as

compared to the public schools).¹⁰ During the more recent decades other types of free or alternative private schools have also developed, which follow their own pedagogical models, and are differently related to the public regulations. Some are working under public regulations, others are schools outside the public regulations (*ohne Öffentlichkeitsrecht*) or “home instruction” (*häuslicher Unterricht*), to get the official credentials pupils from those types of private schools have to pass the public examinations, access to public subsidies differs between those kinds of education. However the numbers of those free schools are quite small (less than 50 school with less than 1.000 children in total).

Information about private schooling is not very exhaustive, and validity of data is to some extent dubious, because only parts of private schooling are included. Taking the OECD data about financing (EAG 2002), the share of private schooling is considerably below the OECD average at the pre-primary level as well as on the level of schooling (including the post-compulsory levels).

According to the expectations of principals about future development, no strong increase of private schooling is to be expected in the near future.¹¹

- demand for and provision of lower and upper level programmes at lower secondary level

A crucial issue for choice is at the lower secondary level, where two types of schools exist: the academic track (AHS – Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule) and the common track (Hauptschule). The common track enrolls the majority of more than two thirds of a cohort on average in Austria. The AHS which enrolls less than one third on average is upper level, and provides access to higher education after 8 years, as well as access to the VET colleges after four years, which provide double qualification including access to higher education and upper level professional credentials. Access to AHS is selective, based on marks in primary school (which can also be compensated by an examination) The Hauptschule includes a broad range of provision, and is basically differentiated to three achievement levels, from an upper one which provides the same credentials as AHS, through a medium level with mixed opportunities, to a lower one from which it is difficult to access further opportunities, except some areas of apprenticeship training. Here pupils are allocated to the achievement levels in the main subjects after a probation period.

The choice between those tracks is a disputed field in Austrian education and training policy. There are several issues involved: first the choice between the two tracks at that early age in terms of further opportunities, second the fact that those tracks are under different regulations with different responsibilities from public bodies and different categories of teachers, third the issue of the selection regime towards the achievement levels within the Hauptschule at that early age and problems of lock-in at the lowest level. Because of demographic downturn, and the trend to the AHS, pupils' numbers in several Hauptschulen are declining to an extent that differentiation to separate groups does not pay anymore, so achievement levels are differentiated within classes. Also a model of building networks

¹⁰ Gude S (2003) Nonprofit Schulen in Österreich: Beschäftigungs- und Trägerstruktur, regionale Unterschiede. Research report. Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Abteilung für Sozialpolitik.

¹¹ Gude S (2003) Nonprofit Schulen in Österreich: Beschäftigungs- und Trägerstruktur, regionale Unterschiede. Research report. Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Abteilung für Sozialpolitik, 12-13.

between Hauptschule and AHS has been developed, in order to provide better opportunities for upward mobility at the upper secondary level.

In terms of choice the main issue is that parents and pupils tend to the AHS, leading to tensions in the other track because of the demographic downturn. To some extent different systems have evolved in urban regions with high population density and an easily accessible supply of AHS on the one hand, and in more rural regions with lower population density, where access to the more dispersed Hauptschule is easier than access to the more concentrated AHS. In Vienna the proportion of AHS is more than 50% of a cohort, in other urban regions the proportion of AHS is above 40%, however, in rural regions 80-90% of a cohort enrol in the Hauptschule. Thus in urban regions the pupils' populations of AHS and Hauptschule are separate with a mixed population in AHS and a concentration of low achieving pupils in Hauptschule. In rural regions the Hauptschule has a mixed population, including pupils at the upper level, the AHS is a bit more selective in that areas, however, there is a broad overlap between school of the two tracks. To some extent there are also regional differences according to the supply of AHS.¹²

Debates are about to what extent pupils with insufficient achievement levels choose AHS, and are thus under stress, and lowering the achievement level of the selective track. Therefore the establishment of proper selection procedures, based on assessment and consulting, is a policy issue of the government. On the other hand there is the long standing charge for merging the two tracks.

To what extent choice is influenced by school is difficult to obtain. Because of the demographic downturn, and the more recently established relationship between resources and pupils numbers, competition among school is increasing, and parents' and pupils' preferences seem to have considerable weight in that competition. So, the main factors determining choice seem to be the density and quality of supply of schools at both tracks in combination with parents' and pupils' preferences.

- demand for and provision of programmes at the 9th grade

At the 9th grade in the Austrian system the compulsory school sequence overlaps with the entrance year to upper secondary full-time schools. Apprenticeship training, however, starts one year later at the 10th grade, and a special type of school (*Polytechnischer Lehrgang*) was meant to provide a bridge for that year to pupils who want to apply for apprenticeship. In fact the practice of applying for a full-time VET programme at grade 9 also in case that an application for apprenticeship training is planned for the next year is widespread among young people. It seems even the case that one year of a full-time VET programme increases the opportunity for getting a high quality apprenticeship training offer. However, the separation of those two groups, pupils who want to change to apprenticeship, and pupils who want to continue full-time school is difficult to obtain, and in several cases not so clear in advance. Thus, that year might be for a certain group considered to be an orientation year or a selection year, and unfortunately, the selection towards apprenticeship in those cases takes place by a negative experience of failure. About one quarter to 30% of new apprentices are recruited from the 9th grade of

¹² See Schmid K (2003) Regional flow of education in Austria. Ibw-research brief No 3/2003 (Sept.)

VET schools or AHS, about 20% move directly from Hauptschule, that means that they have previously lost at least one year during their school career by repetition, and about half move from the polytechnic school which is meant to be the main path into apprenticeship.¹³

There exist in fact two steps of widespread choice of education and training programmes, the first within compulsory schooling, and the second after compulsory schooling into apprenticeship training. VET programmes at both steps are strongly differentiated to several occupational categories, and full-time school is also differentiated to the two tracks of VET-schools and VET-colleges, the latter offering university access in combination with upper level professional education and training in several trades. Beneath the VET programmes also a upper secondary level programme of the AHS is available.

The distribution of enrolment at the upper secondary level is about 20% in AHS, about 30% in the VET colleges, about 10% in VET schools, about 5% in the polytechnic school and about 35% in apprenticeship. The AHS and VET colleges are rising, the others are declining.

Entrance to the various programmes at grade 9 is related to selection procedures, which also build on the previous school achievement. Here, a strong stream from the upper achievement level of the Hauptschule to upper level secondary education exists, particularly via the VET colleges. There are signs that regional imbalances of provision of the AHS track at the lower secondary level are more or less compensated at grade 9 by entrance into upper secondary AHS or into VET colleges. About 20% of inflow into upper secondary AHS, and about 60% of inflow into VET colleges have passed their compulsory schooling at Hauptschule.¹⁴

Choice is complex at this level. On the one hand the level, and the various VET categories must be taken into account, on the other hand the selection procedures must be passed, and the appropriate offer must be available. Some special VET programmes are concentrated at a small number of locations, and regional mobility is necessary for access.

Taking into account the actual development of enrolment, there seems to be a strong preference for the VET colleges which have grown most strongly in the past. To some extent there seem even to be shortages of places in this track. In case of shortages, the school in the autonomous process of decision making may decide about criteria for the selection or queuing of pupils.

- demand for and provision of apprenticeship training places.

After compulsory schooling at grade 10 apprenticeship training starts, which formally is not related to the school based selection procedure. A change of the selection regime takes place, as the training enterprises may choose among their applicants due to their own criteria. Access to part-time apprenticeship school is compulsory, when a apprenticeship contract has been agreed between the enterprise and the parents.

¹³ Schmid K (2003) Woher kommen die LehrafängerInnen? Ibw-Mitteilungen, Sept. 2003, 1-4.

¹⁴ See Schmid K (2003) Regional flow of education in Austria. Ibw-research brief No 3/2003 (Sept.)

At grade 10 the distribution of pupils is 20% AHS, 25% VET colleges, 14% VET schools and 42% apprenticeship training.¹⁵

At this level a shortage of apprenticeship training places has evolved during the last decade, and choice is constrained by the situation on the apprenticeship market. However, more thorough analyses of that development are not available, and crucial factors are under dispute at the political and expert level.

5. Diversity in the Structure of School Systems and Influence over the Curriculum

Questions:

5.1 What formal distinctions, if any, are there between types of school distinguished in terms of such factors as ability/selectivity of the student intake, public/private, religious affiliation, or specialisation based on linguistic or curriculum grounds? What is the scale of participation in private schooling and what does “private” mean? Is “home-schooling” legal and under what conditions? Where such alternatives exist, what proportions of the child and youth cohorts are involved in each?

5.2 What are the legal/constitutional possibilities for the exercise of choice by parents and students, as regards attendance at, or foundation of, the different types of school described in 5.1, or enrolment at different public schools of the same type?

5.3 In what way, if at all, are groups representing civil society and parents involved in defining the school curriculum? Is their influence on curriculum guidelines and the contents of schooling significant?

5.4 Are values explicitly treated in curriculum guidelines and in what way? Is there explicit reference to citizenship/citizenship education? To different philosophical or religious beliefs?

5.1. Formal distinctions

5.1.1. Ability/selectivity distinctions

The Austrian system is on the one hand strongly determined by ability and selectivity distinctions, and there are also mechanisms at work which try to establish bridges between the distinct tracks on the other hand.

Distinctions start at the lower secondary level after four years of primary school, when children are approximately ten years old. Children are allocated to a upper level academic track (AHS), or to the common track, which includes achievement oriented distinctions. Upper level achievement is formally equivalent to the AHS track, and in principle transition opportunities are also in place from the common track to the academic track (those are, however, only seldom used).

Those distinctions are followed up at grade 9 and 10, where the system provides choice between three levels of upper secondary education and training: VET colleges and continuation or start of AHS,

¹⁵ See Schmid K (2003) Regional flow of education in Austria. Ibw-research brief No 3/2003 (Sept.)

VET schools, and apprenticeship. The ability distinction between VET schools and apprenticeship is not clearly determined formally, particularly because apprenticeship comprises a very wide range of different occupational categories which also differ according to ability levels. .

The articulation between lower and upper secondary school is organised by differentiated selectivity rules, which combine previous achievement with the opportunity to take examinations. As the year of transition falls within compulsory school, a strong incentive is given to start a post compulsory programme.

Figure 34: Selectivity rules from lower secondary to upper secondary programmes

Credential at lower secondary level	Admission to VET school	Admission to VET college
AHS	entitled	entitled
Hauptschule <i>with</i> group differentiation		
1 st level achievement group	entitled	entitled
2 nd level achievement group marks 1-2	entitled	entitled
2 nd level achievement group marks 3-4	entitled	examination (1 st level)
3 rd level achievement group	examination (2 nd level)	examination (1 st level)
Hauptschule <i>without</i> group differentiation		
Marks 1-2	entitled	entitled
Marks 3-4	entitled	examination (1 st level)
Polytechnische Schule	entitled to 9 th grade (repetition)	entitled to 9 th grade (repetition)
Polytechnische Schule, same subject area	examination to 10 th grade	-

Source: BMBWK

The transition to apprenticeship is due to the training enterprises' individual decision about selection. Various procedures are followed, very often the school marks are taken into account, in many cases elaborate assessment procedures are used. Procedures vary not only by enterprises but also by occupational areas, some being very selective, others taking many applicants which have previously failed during their school career. In many cases the completion of a VET school or college at the 9th grade works as a positive signal for the acquisition of a qualified apprenticeship training.

5.1.2. Public/private distinctions

Public/private distinctions do not matter very much in formal terms in the Austrian system. Private school are mainly under public regulation, and the biggest group among them (catholic ones) also get public funding for their staff costs. Ironically, some people charge the “privatisation of private schools” in Austria. The proportion is quite stable in time.

Except some “elite schools”, and some “free schools” with special programmes, there are no marked differences between private and public schools.

What is the scale of participation in private schooling and what does “private” mean?

Is “home-schooling” legal and under what conditions? Where such alternatives exist, what proportions of the child and youth cohorts are involved in each?

5.2. Possibilities for choice

In principle the Austrian territory is organised by school districts, and each child is allocated to a certain school area (*Schulsprengel*). However, if parents or pupils want to attend another school, this is also possible, given that a place in the school of choice is available. This structure holds for the different kinds of schools.

Regional differences are given according the choice of school later in the career. Primary schools are strongly dispersed in rural areas with low population density. At lower secondary level, the academic stream is more strongly available in urban areas. At the upper secondary level, the supply is more concentrated to cities, and also depends on the professional specialities (some are broadly available, some are more concentrated, sometimes only to one or very few localities).

Private schools are available rather scarcely, however, there are no signs for a strongly increasing demand. Conditions for the choice and set up of private schools differ widely, as there are different rules for public subsidies for different kinds of private schools. Most types, except the catholic ones, are rather costly for parents. Home schooling is allowed, but the subsidies pupils get normally are not paid for that type of schooling.

The allocation functions in a flexible way, and schools have room for discretion about their strategies of selecting pupils. In case that less places than applicants are available, often achievement criteria are applied.

More specific restrictions for choice hold for disabled children in case they want to be educated in an integrated way. First, an assessment must be passed, second the infrastructure at the school of choice must be appropriate. Third, there are restrictions for the continuation of an integrated education and training at the post-compulsory level except the 9th grade polytechnic school.

Restrictions of choice also hold at the apprenticeship market, as there are less training places available than applicants seeking one since the 1990s.

At the level of VET colleges, which are the programmes where demand has grown most during the last decades, also some constraints exist.

5.3. Involvement in curriculum matters

In what way, if at all, are groups representing civil society and parents involved in defining the school curriculum? Is their influence on curriculum guidelines and the contents of schooling significant?

Curriculum is a matter of law in case of the core issues, and of administrative amendments in case of the more specific issues in Austria.

The part included in law is due to the normal process of commenting in the democratic process. A broad number of stakeholders is included in a highly formalised process, including the social partners and the parents' and pupils' representative bodies.

The specifying administrative part is a highly professional process, run mainly by a selected group of experts from the subjects, the administration and the teachers.

A special case of curriculum development was the new curriculum for the lower secondary school. The case has been described in detail in the Austrian contribution to the DESECO-project.¹⁶

Apart from the curriculum constructing process, the regulations about school autonomy have given a certain room for discretion to schools, which has to be decided by the bodies of codetermination and school partnership.

5.4. Values, citizenship education, philosophy and religion

Are values explicitly treated in curriculum guidelines and in what way? Is there explicit reference to citizenship/citizenship education? To different philosophical or religious beliefs?

There is a general paragraph about the aim of schooling in the law about the organisation of schools, and there is also for each school a more specific paragraph which also points to basic values in a general sense. However, those paragraphs are often mentioned as being "formulas without a content" (*Leerformel*).

Religious education is in principle obligatory for catholic or protestant children, however, parents have also the opportunity to skip that subject for their children. As in the upper grades that is a frequent practice, there is a debate about the establishment of a broader "ethics" subject.

Civic education has been a contested field for many years, and to some extent has remained contested.¹⁷ The debate is about the establishment of a specific subject for that purpose. In the 1970s the a solution was found to establish a so called curriculum principle for civic education (Politische Bildung). That means, that civic education should be included implicitly in the instruction of all subjects. However there are also another 13 principles of this kind (e.g., environmental education, traffic education, media education). Moreover, the preparation of teachers for the implementation of that principle is only on a voluntary basis, and not formally included into teacher education which is strongly subject led.

¹⁶ See Lassnigg L., Mayer K., (2001): Definition and Selection of Key Competencies in Austria. Country Report on the BFS-OECD Project DeSeCo. IHS, Sociological series No. 53 (download: http://www.statistik.admin.ch/stat_ch/ber15/deseco/sfso_deseco_ccp_austria_19122001.pdf; extended German version IHS, Sociological series No. 52).

¹⁷ See Filzmaier P (2002) Country report: civic education in Austria. www.sowi-onlinejournal.de

From the 9th grade civic education has been included as a subject in the polytechnic school and in the part time VET school for apprentices, and combined to other subjects in the VET schools and colleges, more recently also in the AHS at grades 11 and 12 in combination with history.

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