

Wanderausstellung: "Hinter der Fassade" – 'Behind the Façade' Travelling Exhibition

Austria

2005-2014

## Taking the message to the masses

### Summary

In 2005, Austrian NGOs active in supporting victims of domestic violence decided to take their message to the masses by means of travelling exhibition. They came up with the idea of telling the story of abuse in the home by mocking up a stand to look like the interior of a flat. Visitors walk from one room to another, undergoing an immersive experience which heightens the emotional impact. On the way, they pick up an understanding of the causes of family violence, what it means in practice, what the law says, and what the sources of help are.

The exhibition has won several prizes, and has toured 29 locations all over Austria as well as being invited to events abroad. It has so far been seen by 15,000 people, many of them visiting in school groups.

The initial investment came from public sources, but the exhibition now pays its way financially by charging a fee to cities and organisations that hire it.

### Comprehensive legal framework



Austria is often taken as a role model for anti-violence legislation, and in particular for its implementation. The Federal Act on Protection against Domestic Violence entered into force in 1997.<sup>1</sup> Then, following several amendments, in 2009 a comprehensive second package of laws on violence protection was adopted.<sup>2</sup>

Most recently, in 2014, it adopted a National Action Plan on Protecting Women from Violence.<sup>3</sup> The state and its institutions acknowledge that violence against women and children is a public concern, and it provides means for concrete protection measures. As regards the policy approaches adopted, the main focus lies on prevention programmes and support for victims of violence. The former is mainly developed through awareness-raising campaigns, the latter through the establishment of men's and women's counselling centres throughout Austria.

<sup>1</sup> Logar 2005

<sup>2</sup> Initiated by the Women's Minister, Johanna Dohnal, in close cooperation with Caspar Einem, Minister of the Interior, an interministerial working group was convened, composed of staff of women's shelters, police officers, judges and lawyers. This resulted in the Federal Act on Protection Against Domestic Violence. (Federal Chancellery – Federal Minister for Women and Civil Service 2008, 12ff.)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bmbf.gv.at/ministerium/vp/2014/20140826.pdf?4ja8p5>



## **A theatre of domestic violence**

One of these awareness-raising activities was the creation of a travelling exhibition. The *Behind the Façade* exhibition was designed in 2005 with the aim of helping to end violence in the family and in society by presenting strong visual awareness-raising tools and giving detailed information on the problem of domestic violence, legislation, support facilities for victims available and how to work with perpetrators.

The exhibition was initiated by Gewaltschutzzentrum Oberösterreich (Upper Austrian Centre for Protection against Violence), with the support of the Ministry of the Interior (for investment costs) and the Ministry of Women Affairs (for the brochure). It has been shown in various places in Austria as well as in Liechtenstein and the UK as an example of best practice of a roadshow. Austrian women's shelters and counselling centres have organised Austrian locations for the exhibition.

It uses powerful visual messages as well as displaying research data on domestic violence and useful information on resources available on how to tackle the problem. The exhibition addresses the general public, and its effectiveness is shown by the fact that it has been visited by 15,000 people, mainly school pupils, in 29 different locations. It has also produced an impact at the local level through the involvement of organisations supporting victims of domestic violence and treating perpetrators. These are in fact the subjects that most frequently ask to visit for the exhibition.

The exhibition's design is innovative: it is built like a flat consisting of a kitchen, a bedroom, a children's room and a living room. The four rooms constitute the 'stage' to present the exhibition's themes: the social causes of domestic violence, its dynamics, the forms it takes, children as witnesses to domestic violence, a historical overview of Austrian legislation, and ways to seek help and find the resources that are available.

Three or four audiovisual installations enable visitors to listen to and watch the stories of eight women who were subject to domestic violence, but managed to flee from it. For example in the video *Do you know that too – true stories of home* (BiG) five girls and boys relate their experiences of witnessing domestic violence. The video *The problem is my wife* (Calle Overweg) presents working with violent offenders who beat their wives.

Finally the first steps taken to break the taboo on violence in the family are presented together with the public measures approved, for example through the Violence Protection Act.

## **Prize-winning show**

The exhibition has not been formally evaluated, and internal monitoring only registered the number of visitors and the positive feedback they gave. However a proxy for its value can be found in the fact that the exhibition has won several prizes and was selected for a roadshow in Britain. In December 2006 it won the *Green Award* in the category of women. During International Women's Day in 2007, the exhibition was shown in Vienna at the Federal Chancellery and opened by Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Minister Doris Bures. On 29th and 30th April 2008 on the occasion of the EU Equal Treatment event in Vienna, *Behind the Façade* was presented in the Parliament building. In 2009, it was presented in Glasgow and London, and in June 2010 in Vaduz, the capital of Liechtenstein.

However its impact could have been improved through the translation of the exhibition brochure into other languages (for example English and Turkish).



*Hinter der Fassade* is also financially sustainable. It covers its running costs by charging a fee of at least €4,500 to organisations or cities who ask to host it. In many cases, these fees are paid by the local authorities and governmental offices in the cities where it is displayed. There are no plans to try to raise additional funding. Its design and production were supported by ministerial funding, while national ministries also contribute to its ongoing use through for example financing the brochure. Because the exhibition is paid for directly by the organisers in various Austrian cities, the practice is considered to have a good balance between cost and result (efficiency).

### **Challenging cultural perceptions**

The exhibition is a successful way of raising awareness on domestic violence, helping people to understand its causes and consequences, and communicating practical information on victims' rights and on resources available for them, as well as information on how to work with perpetrators. All these factors contribute to gender equality, by helping to dislodge the cultural perception that domestic violence as a private problem alone.

The exhibition's audience appeal comes from its being based on victims' experiences, yet also giving a complete overview of the causes of domestic violence. The exhibition brochure is short and gives a good overview of the main issues related to domestic violence, and thus many people have had the chance to read it.

From the organiser's point of view, the construction is flexible and can be moved to different towns, thus reaching a nationwide audience. There are however some technical drawbacks. It takes two or three person-days to dismantle and rebuild, and is heavy, requiring a van to move it about.

The experience of the exhibition teaches that the 'theatrical' presentation of the issues of domestic violence by setting them in a reconstructed domestic environment is a good way to involve people emotionally. It works by involving not only the general public but also local organisations working with victims and perpetrators, thus enhancing impact in the community.

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### **Further information:**

Website: [www.hinter-der-fassade.at](http://www.hinter-der-fassade.at)

Brochure: [http://www.gewaltschutzzentrum.at/ooe/down/Fassade\\_Broschuere09.pdf](http://www.gewaltschutzzentrum.at/ooe/down/Fassade_Broschuere09.pdf)

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