

Father's day is celebrated every year during the second weekend of June in Austria. Excursions, playing football, and reading stories are once again on the agenda next Sunday. Fathers do not want to be just weekend daddies, however assuming full responsibility for the daily well-being of a child is often curtailed. There may be financial and social barriers, or inhibitions may exist in the handling of a fragile, newborn being - with whom the mother has already bonded with emotionally and physically for nine months.

Vienna, June 5, 2008. The firm Webducation, Initiator and Coordinator of Project DAD, invited its international partners, sponsors and others interested in the project, to its Midterm-Conference in the House of Industry in Vienna. Project DAD (www.junge-vaeter.at), the free guide for fathers-to-be, is currently being expanded to the European level with the support of the eTen Programme of the European Union, which is an occasion to reflect on the work done so far and consider the future prospects and social potential of this free guide within a European context.

The project gains political backing

International guest speakers were heartily welcomed with a message by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Consumer Protection. "The demographic development in Europe and changes on the labour market require a change in the attitude of fathers . . . to more participation and responsibility in childcare," said Edeltraud Glettler, senior official of the Ministry. Among other socio-political measures taken by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, it advocates a free month for fathers (Papamonat), which Andres Hammarlind reports has existed in Sweden since 1995.

Great potential is hidden inside the father-child relationship, which is tapped into by 20 % of Swedish fathers (Anders Hammerlind, author, Sweden). At the present rate of development, however, it would take 211 years before a full 50:50 balance between fathers and mothers is achieved in childcare, even in Sweden. Hammerlind points out the necessity of making fathers aware of the possible deep relationship which can be established with their child. Because the close physical contact between father and child is more limited at the very beginning, fathers need to find a different approach to their offspring. Dads will undergo personal changes through their expression of love to their children and thus contribute to an overall societal change.

Project DAD has a European socio-political dimension

The project's approach is clear and simple: Instructing fathers-to-be how to manage the daily routine in dealing with a child in an understandable way that is especially tailored for men... It is meant to remove possible inhibitions from baby care. Father leave has an impact on society in general: Europe has too few children; Europe-wide social and economic equalization of men and women is required to encourage couples to opt for raising children.

Lukas Sedlacek (gender and family researcher, Czech Republic) is occupied in his research work with the social aspect of father leave. Taking father leave is by far not yet the socially accepted norm. Such fathers are turned into heroes, while women who work are considered uncaring mothers. This social prejudice can be altered through initiatives like the DAD Project. The web-platform will start a Community-Platform in summer 2008 to enable interchange between fathers, mothers and experts, thus encouraging a process of discussion and establishing norms.

Achievements together

With the support of the eTen Programme of the European Commission, the Austrian DAD Project was translated and adjusted for Polish, Dutch, Rumanian and Czech users and made available on the web (www.project-DAD.net). It is the explicit aim of those responsible for the project to reach all strata of society. A translation into Serbian and Turkish is thus a further aim to include Austrian families with an immigration background.

In the current phase of evaluation, all international users are being asked to participate in a study analyzing response to the digital guide. Feedback has been mainly positive and all participants agreed to use the Community platform in the future. DAD is on the way to becoming a relevant socio-political driver.

Project DAD – Hurrah, I am becoming father!

A practical guide (www.junge-vaeter.at) offers help with the daily routine of baby care. Especially tailored for fathers-to-be, the digital guide is subdivided into nine entertaining chapters, which are available online or on CD. The guide is clearly structured and understandable; each unit, introduced with a video clip, represents a theme of baby care, such as “How do I carry my baby properly” or “How do I prepare my baby’s bottle”. Konrad Koach presents the various chapters in a most “father-like” way.

The guide will be available in Austria at gynaecologists and paediatricians offices, in health centres and apothecaries. After a successful start in Austria, EU-wide implementation is being evaluated with the support of the European Commission.

The project initiator of the Austrian version, Webducation, is specialized in e-Learning solutions and heads the implementation of the project DAD on a European level (www.project-DAD.net).