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## **TOURISM, COMPETENCES AND PROJECTS AT THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL BAD GLEICHENBERG**

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### **Abstract**

Bad Gleichenberg, the oldest spa of the province of Styria in Austria, was founded in 1830. Even the Romans used the healing water. Health tourism has always been an important economic factor for the region. The Vocational School for Tourism has been located in Bad Gleichenberg since 1955. Until now 43.156 students got educated and started their career in tourism.

Since 1995 the south east of Styria has been part of a regional development strategy in social, educational, economic and ecological aspects called the Styrian Volcanic Region. The regional strategy of the Styrian Volcanic Region is creating a new frame by enhancing the regional collaboration of municipalities and enterprises.

The bases for the research were interviews conducted with the five biggest enterprises in a structured interview line. This led to the creation of a research questionnaire where 100 companies were interviewed. The Styrian Volcanic Region was analyzed according to competences that company owners and company managers expect from students of regional Vocational Schools.

A highlight of the research is the implementation and evaluation of a healthy eating project at the Vocational School Bad Gleichenberg. The evaluation shows the importance of competences oriented innovative lessons at schools. The economy needs well trained apprentices equipped with certain competences and skills.

### **Keywords**

competences, health, apprentices, regional management and vocational school

### **JEL Classification**

A 20, I 25

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### **Introduction**

Bad Gleichenberg, the oldest spa of Styria, has 5.336 inhabitants and lies in the Styrian Volcanic Region. Tourism industry has always been an important economic factor for Bad Gleichenberg. The employees get trained at regional schools. 1911 persons studied tourism in Bad Gleichenberg in 2017. There are the Vocational School for Tourism (1305 students), the Tourism School (261 students) and the University of Applied Science and Health Tourism (345 students). (Statistic Austria, 2017)

According to Ober (2017) it is to be said that the whole size of the Styrian Volcanic Region accommodates about 86.000 inhabitants. The region has border with Slovenia and Hungary. The economy of the future depends on the success of the rural people to cope with the

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competition, development and qualification of economy, tourism and agriculture as well as the area of policy of transport. This includes the improvements within the agricultural sector, concerning the structure of agrarian products and also the promotion of a sustainable as well as ecological agriculture in general.

A competence oriented education of students in the Styrian Volcanic Region plays an important role and supports the economy.



**Fig. no. 1 Research Scope**

*Source: author*

**The Austrian education of apprentices**

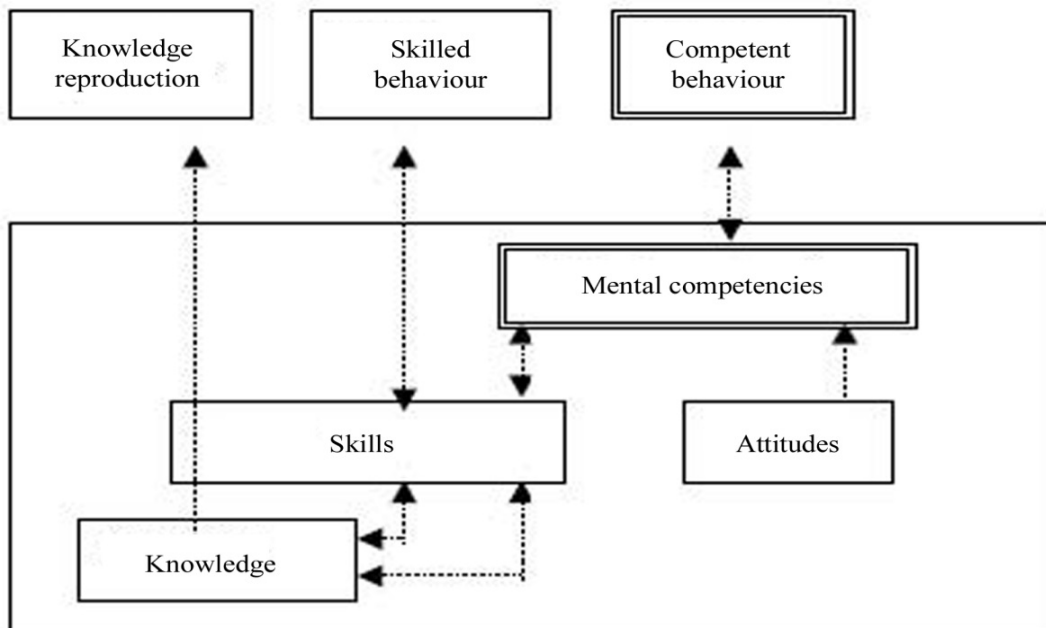
According to Lentsch (1995) knowledge and skills of the employees are investments in the future and are the foundation of the Austrian economy. According to BMUKK (1997) the apprenticeship training is dual based. Tourism apprentices work 9 months in companies, have 1 month vacation and get 2 months educated at Vocational Schools for Tourism. In 2017 15% of all Austrian tourism apprentices attended the Vocational School for Tourism Bad Gleichenberg. The dual education system implies practice-oriented training and the input of theoretical trade related knowledge. The practical training is covered from companies and the theoretical key competences are in focus of Vocational Schools. According to Lentsch (1995) the company based training is regulated on the one hand by the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labor. On the other hand the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture have the responsibility for the pedagogical education. According to the WKO (2017) there are 40.000 companies and 120.000 apprentices in Austria and 10% of them are educated in tourism industry. Competence oriented lessons will get implemented at Vocational Schools in September 2018.

**Theoretical aspects on competences**

According to Gnahs (2010) the Latin word *competencia* is the basis and means meeting. The adjective *competens* is translated as appropriate. The conception „competence“ is today on wave of prosperity and is used in many aspects of activity, flexibility, knowledge and ecommerce.

According to Westera (2001) different possibilities of acting can be derived. The range knowledge allows only the skills and qualifications can load to a qualified behavior for example at the well trained activities. Just the influences of attitudes in combination of

mental competences enable to think in a complex way and react in not standardized situation in a competent way.



**Fig. no. 2 Competences**

*Source: author based on Westera*

According to Fritz (2012) the success of education depends on motivated teachers with a view to the future and changing of learning culture. There is also taken notice that a division for apprentices exist between vocational school (20% of entire time of education) and education at enterprises (80% of apprenticeship). Creation of competence oriented teaching comprises interaction, knowledge and skills.

### Methodology

In order to increase the quality numerous methods have been used. The observation, the interview, the questionnaire and the discourse analysis helped to improve the research. The basis for the questionnaire was carried out with the five biggest enterprises in a structured interview line with evaluation of the sample answers. The answers can be categorized in five groups. The vocational training is the identification mark of Bad Gleichenberg and is analyzed according what competences company owners expect from regional Vocational Schools. In May 2016 telephone interviews were conducted following a structured questionnaire. The focus here was on a deeper analysis of competences at Vocational Schools. The research results show which skills and competences are expected by company owners. As a result of the research a competence oriented project with a group of 50 students was implemented in June 2016 at the Vocational School Bad Gleichenberg.

### Case study

The implementation of one competence oriented project took place at the Vocational School for Tourism. The process can be described as following:

The competence oriented project idea and incubation process started in May 2016. In June 2016 students of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Vocational School for tourism studied the healthy eating habits and vocabulary in the English language in different methodical and pedagogical

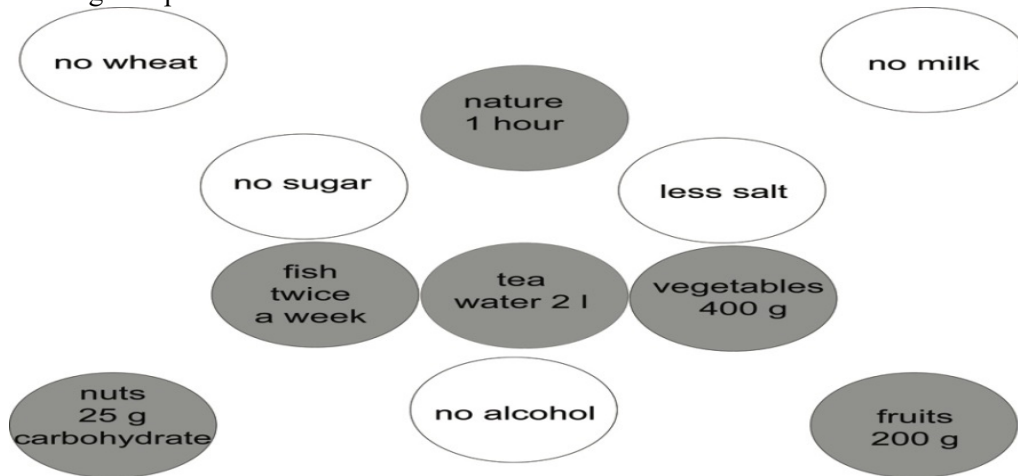
ways. According to the Harvard Business School and Harvard Medical Center (2016) 50 students were studying the healthy eating pyramid and food plate. The evaluation shows how different students have access to new vocabulary in English language.

For the incubation process it was an advantage that the students had been familiar with the topic from their professional working experience.

According to Dunst (2018) a case study of 2993 shows that students between 15 to 25 years of age that every 10<sup>th</sup> student is vegetarian and 90 % are buying only organic food in Austria. Furthermore, the healthy eating plate and healthy eating pyramid are lesson topics in their first year of education at the Vocational School for Tourism. Healthy eating plays an important economical factor in Bad Gleichenberg and in the Styrian Volcanic Region. For this reason students were developing a new so called “A” diet plan.

The implementation of the new created healthy eating plate started in June 2016. Three adults started with the “A” diet plan and the evaluation of the project was in January 2018.

During the incubation process the students developed their own “A” healthy eating plan which got implemented and evaluated.



**Fig. no. 3 “A” healthy eating plan**

Source: author

According to Gujel (2002) it is very important besides the eating and drinking habits to spend enough time in nature. No wheat, no sugar, less salt, vegetables, fruits and fish are on the “A” diet plan. Enough water and tea is also very important.

**Results**

Bad Gleichenberg, a small village in the Styrian Volcanic Region, is a center of worldwide tourism education. There are the Vocational school for Tourism, the Tourism schools with qualification for University entrance and the University of Applied Sciences with studies for Dietetics and Nutrition, Health Management in Tourism Occupational Therapy. Tourism industry plays an important economical factor in Bad Gleichenberg and in Austria. Statistics of overnight stays show an increase of overnight stays in Bad Gleichenberg and in Austria.

**Table no. 1 Research of overnight stays in Bad Gleichenberg**

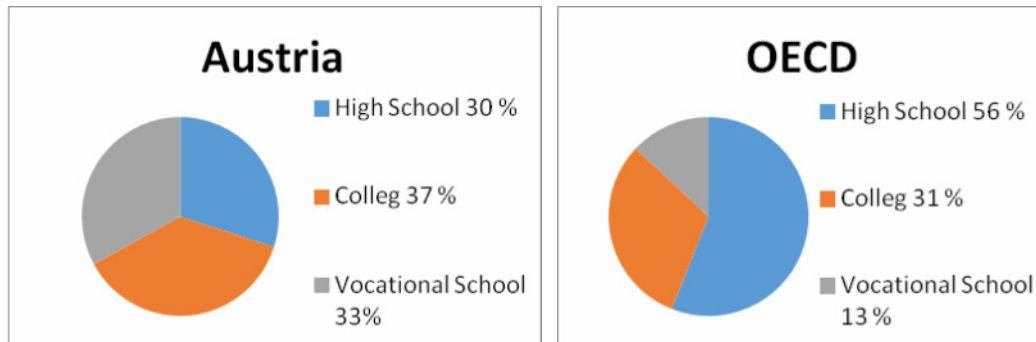
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
overnights Bad Gleichenberg	298.008	303.985	297.433	303.694	312.606

Source: author based on Statistic Austria

**Table no. 2 Research of overnight stays in Austria**

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Million	121,4	126,7	124,3	124,9	126,0	131,0	132,6	131,9	135,2	140,9	144,0

Source: author based on Statistic Austria



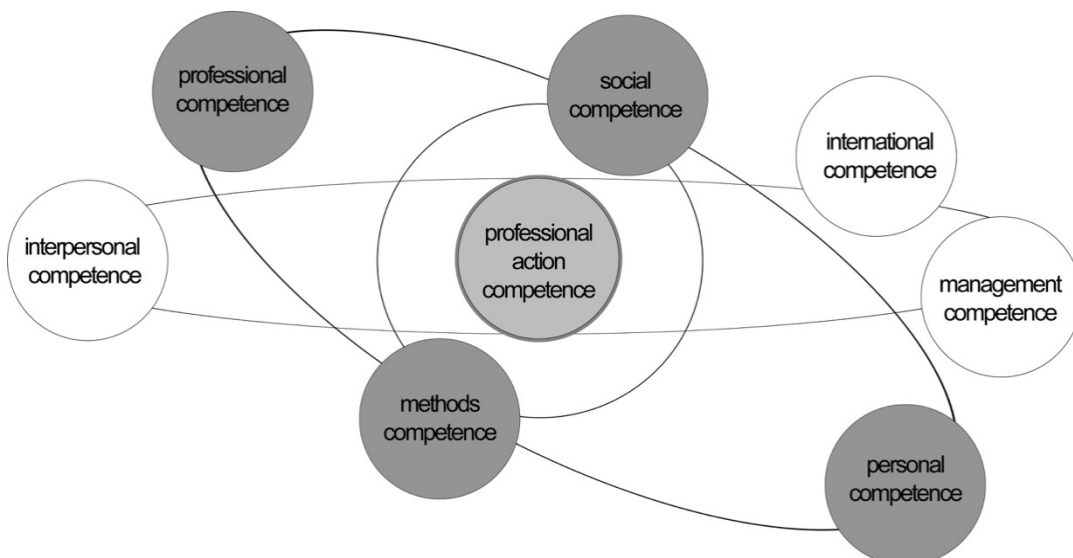
**Fig. no. 4 Research of education in Austria compared to OECD**

Source: author based on OECD

Within the community of Bad Gleichenberg 40 % of the inhabitants attended Vocational Schools.

The evaluation of competences shows that out of 100 companies in the Styrian Volcanic Region consider the following competences as the most important for students. 95% of the companies expect competences according to Fenz (2012).

In addition 89% of the company owners demand interpersonal competences, 30% international competences and 94% management competences.



**Fig. no. 5 research on competences**

Source: author based on Fenz

Besides the regional supply of human resources, the interviewed firms were also asked whether they receive support from regional educational institutions. 85 % of the interviewed answered the question with a clear yes, which means that enterprises benefit from the educational institutions in the region.

The evaluation of the healthy eating project shows the following competences like languages (English), entrepreneurship, social, interpersonal and professional. According to Thaler (2014) different ways of motivation are important for studying a language. Intrinsic motivation like the joy of speaking but also the extrinsic motivation or factors like good grades are important factors.

According to the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (2017) 87% of the Styrian Companies expect simple understanding of English language. But one third of the enterprises want apprentices with fluent English language skills. The developed “A” eating model got implemented in June 2016 with three adults. In January 2018 they were evaluated concerning their weight loss in kilogram:

**Table no. 3 research on “A” diet implementation**

	06/2016	12/2016	06/2017	01/2018	weight loss
Petra, 40 years, 174 cm	113	95	85	80	33 kg
Astrid, 45 years, 172 cm	102	90	85	79	23 kg
Richard, 49 years, 170 cm	113	100	95	89	24 kg

*Source: author*

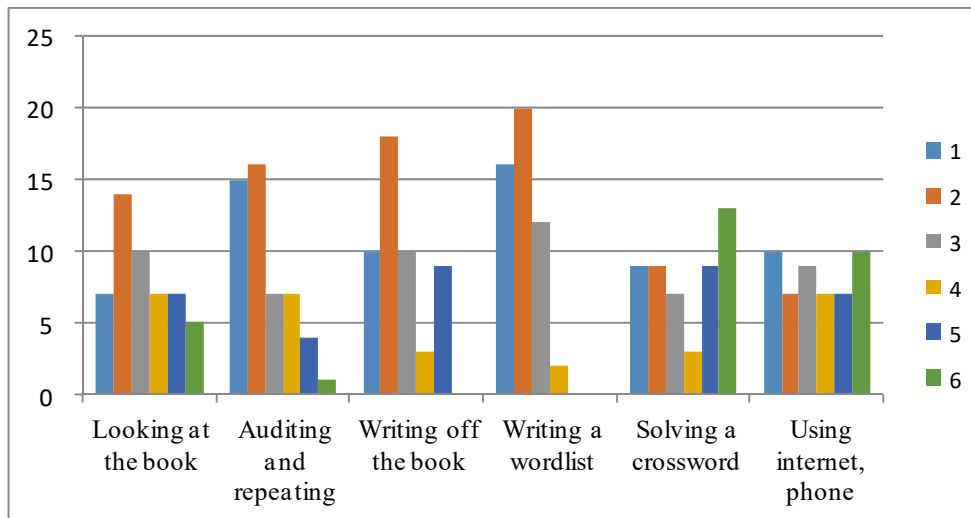
50 students studied vocabulary for the healthy eating project in different ways. The student got questionnaires for the evaluation. The data collection was anonymously and the students were between 15 to 25 years old. The research took place under the supervision of the English teachers:

**Table no. 4 research on methodology**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Looking at the book	7	14	10	7	7	5
Auditing and repeating	15	16	7	7	4	1
Writing off the book	10	18	10	3	9	0
Writing a wordlist	16	20	12	2	0	0
Solving a crossword	9	9	7	3	9	13
Using phone, internet	10	7	9	7	7	10

*Source: author*

Student’s evaluation shows grades from one (the best) to six. Auditing and repeating and writing a wordlist received the best grades from the 50 students.



**Fig. no. 6 research on vocabulary skills**

*Source: author*

The case study shows how the environment impacts on the process of implementation and reflects on job creation and new companies play an important economic role. Students are creative, motivated and show a high level of commitment during the process of planning, incubation, implementation and evaluation.

Tools to support the economic point of view are necessary for them. Learning by doing is a future challenge for teachers. Motivation and innovation by teachers are necessary to reach long-term results. Increased energy input and perseverance lead to positive feedback.

According to Thiel (2014) research-oriented teaching can be evaluated concerning methodological, communicational skills and content knowledge. The research and evaluation of this competence oriented project and the economic surroundings are reflecting on current scientific knowledge. The relationship between innovative teaching and learning research influences student's learning.

### Conclusions

The practical significance of this paper is to be seen in the fact that the Bad Gleichenberg Region created very innovative regional collaboration among enterprises and collective learning. Improvement within the regional network of regional actors guarantees further success. Furthermore, the research shows that competences acquired at school are fundamental for future employers. This means that competences need to be trained in local schools and high schools like in Bad Gleichenberg. The competence oriented project and research at the Vocational School show the importance of competences at schools for the economic future. Following key competences like social, cultural expression, communication in foreign languages, professional and entrepreneurship are presented within the project.

The result of the research of 100 companies in the Styrian Volcanic Region should be the evidence of a further successful economy and innovation within the region. This research result is also proved by statistics of the Austrian handbook of expansion (2017). It shows that the most expanding companies in Austria are found in the tourism sector (3rd ranking) followed by clothes and beverages. Tourism education in Bad Gleichenberg is not only famous within the region but has a worldwide reputation.

The education of future employees is reflected by competences trained at schools and is mirrored by the motivation of teachers. In view of these findings the implementation of

competence oriented lessons will start in September 2018 at the Vocational School Bad Gleichenberg.

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