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Governing Disability in Austria: Reflections on a Changing Political Field

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Abstract: The Austrian Federal Act on the Equalization of Persons with Disabilities (BGStG), a law to facilitate equality, equal rights and opportunities for disabled people, passed the Austrian National Council (Nationalrat) in July 2005. The anti-discrimination law, which came into force at the beginning of 2006, marks the temporary peak of a long-lasting discussion on Austrian disability politics and policy. The debate on the draft and final version of the new law exemplifies the struggle of persons with disabilities against certain attitudes prevalent in the socio-political construction of disability. It also shows how disability policy in Austria has changed in recent years and how different political actors participate in shaping disability policy. This article discusses the problems concerning the actors, strategies and spaces of governing disability in Austria, as articulated in competing narratives that shape the field of disability policy.

Introduction

The political scientific research project "Disability, Identity and Politics" (project co-ordinator Herbert Gottweis), carried out by the University of Vienna's Department of Political Science, and funded by the Jubiläumsfonds of the Austrian National Bank, started in July 2004. At that time, an intensive debate was in play concerning the draft of the "Bundes-Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz" (BGStG), a law to facilitate equality, equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities. Different groups of political actors were divided over the question whether this new law was simply a "toothless" legal framework, a "historically important moment," or whether it was a merely "acceptable" compromise for the Austrian economy. These were just some of the lines of argumentation that appeared in the emotionally charged debate at the Austrian National Council on July 6, 2005.

When we started our research work, it became clear that Austrian disability policy practices could be best studied by following the debate surrounding the draft of this law and analyzing its competing discourses and narratives. The debates offered ideal insights into the relationship between disability, politics and issues of identity of persons with disabilities in Austria. This paper focuses on the preliminary findings of this research project, using data which have been collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and literature research.

Michel Foucault's considerations on power inform the macro theory of this study, comprising such relevant aspects as resistance against power relations, knowledge and governing in the context of governmentality, biopolitics, norms, and technologies of the self. From the Foucauldian perspective, the emphasis of analyzing disability policy lies in the heterogeneity of actors and strategies within the socio-political field. Therefore, this specific analysis focuses on the transformation of practices in an emerging network society, which refers to different interactions and interdependencies between a variety of political actors groups (c.f. Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1994; Foucault, 1991, 1994; Gordon, 1991, p. 7; Gottweis, 2003, p. 255; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003, p. 4; Lemke, 2001; Lemke et al., 2000; Rose and Miller, 1992; Rose 1999, p. 17).

The micro-conceptual approach encompasses an analysis of the formation of discourse and narrative. It is embedded in Foucault's considerations of discourse, in which power and knowledge are intertwined and discourses are "custodians" for or against a certain existing power-knowledge-complex. Discourses are also related to non-discursive practices and processes, and for example, political change. Therefore in Foucault's later conception of power, the aspects of discourse and language are understood as being of central importance to social processes (c.f. Bublitz et al., 1999, pp. 11-12; Fairclough, 2003, p. 50; Howarth, 2000, pp. 48-50, 77; Lorey, 1999, p. 94; Veyne, 1992, p. 28).

Narratives and practices which refer to certain discursive possibilities are seen as critical articulations of power. They construct subjectivity and position individuals or groups in the socio-political field. Policy narratives are stories or arguments within discourses. Narratives, in turn, underwrite the assumptions for policymaking in situations consisting of many unknowns and rare moments of agreement. Practices reflect certain power relations as well as resistance against those power relations. Thus, an analysis of the discursive constructions of political practices represents a central aspect of the socio-political construction of disability. According to Foucault, the main purpose for discussing power relations lies in their relationship to strategies of opposition and resistance against those power relations. Resistance against power relations concerns questions of individual status, alone and in relation to others. As Judith Butler (2001, pp. 16, 21) points out, the problem with resistance is that in the very act of opposition, the oppression as well as certain established power relations are perpetuated (c.f. Foucault, 1994, pp. 246, 259-260; Gottweis, 1998, p. 330; Gottweis, 2003, p. 254; Grossberg, 1998, cited in Corker and French, 2002, p. 1; Howarth, 2000, p. 60; Mills, 2003; Roe, 1994, p. 34; Sarasin, 2001).

These considerations are connected with concepts of participation, inclusion, equality, social justice and non-discrimination. They build a connection to the political concept of governance — understood as the outcome of interactions and interdependencies between a large number of different political actors. The concept of governance can be considered as a new field of socio-political analysis. Governance provides the basis for new political actors to participate in the process of policymaking and to influence practices. Within the power shift from government to governance, politics and policy are seen as increasingly involving exchanges amongst a range of different actor groups, while the role of certain political actors in the policymaking-process (including the state) changes (c.f. Barnes and Mercer, 2004; Miller, 2003; Oliver, 1996; Pierre, 2000, pp.1-3; Rhodes, 1997, p. 15; Rioux, 2002; Rose, 1999, pp. 15-17; Silvers et al., 1998; Stone, 2002; Young, 1990, 2000).

Prologue: From a legal framework for "invalids" to laws for persons with disabilities

To provide a basis for discussion on the draft and the final version of the BGStG, it is necessary to focus on the development of the law and its legal framework that regulates disability. This will shed light on the question of why the hegemonic discourse on disability in Austria is still based upon a more or less medical line of argumentation (see Haliti, 1997).

In Austria a "degree of disability" (Grad der Behinderung) has to be ascertained before being eligible for services and support. This "degree of disability" is derived from a decree of 1965 (Richtsatzverordnung) that sets out the principles for determining the degree and percentage of disability. It is based on the law regulating the care of persons with war injuries (Kriegsopferversorgungsgesetz) of 1957, which is still in use. The decree "Richtsatzverordnung" lists a large number of "states of suffering or illness" (Leidenszustände) and "health defects" (Gesundheitsschädigungen), which account for a reduction of work output. The decree still builds the basis for questions concerning work of persons with disabilities, which is regulated in the Austrian Employment Law for Persons with Disabilities of 1969 (Behinderteneinstellungsgesetz). The "Behindertenpass," the proof of being classified as a person with a disability, is only issued to persons whose "degree of disability" or reduction of work output is 50% or more.

It is important to note that the law regulating the care of persons with war injuries uses the word "Beschädigte" for persons with a disability. This word relates to "damage" (Beschädigung) and carries a strong negative connotation. This negative aspect of disability continued to be used in the already mentioned Employment Law for Persons with Disabilities. The original name of this law was "Invalideneinstellungsgesetz". The meaning of the word "invalids" (Invalide) also has an unpleasant taste, as it means both disabled and unable to work (Duden, 1996, p. 377). Both German words — "Beschädigte" and "Invalide" — reflect a very biased attitude towards disability, as they focus mainly on defects. It has to be added, however, that in the renamed version of the Employment Law for Persons with Disabilities the term "invalids" was substituted by "disabled" (Behinderte).

The above-mentioned legal framework uses rating terms for describing persons with disabilities, and it is restricted to persons with certain disabilities. The group affected by the law regulating the care of persons with war injuries was later on supplemented to include persons hurt in accidents. The Federal Disability Law of 1990 (Bundesbehindertengesetz), regulating the consultation (Beratung), care (Betreuung) and special help (besondere Hilfe) for persons with disabilities, marks the onset of a new perception. It uses the term "disabled" in connection with the words people/persons (behinderte Menschen), an important aspect of a changing conception of disability.

One major item of debate on the Federal Disability Law was the call for a definition of disability within this law. Despite this call, no definition was added with the argument that it would have no legal implications. The question of the definition of disability within the Austrian legal framework has been intensively discussed since 1988. In 1988 the Austrian National Council asked the Austrian government to examine the terms "disability" and "disabled person" and to standardize these terms. By order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales), the Austrian Committee for Social Work (Österreichisches Komitee für Soziale Arbeit) organized a symposium in the same year with the aim to achieve a standardized definition of disability. However, no consensus was reached (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, 1993).

In December of 1992, the concept of the Austrian government concerning disability policy in Austria (Behindertenkonzept der Bundesregierung) was presented. It contained two definitions of disability which included social dimensions. Without discussing these definitions in detail, it can be said that the main aspect of defining disability was still based upon a medical line of argumentation. It stressed defect and the impossibility for persons with disabilities to participate in social life in a self-determined way (for the exact definitions see: Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, 1993).

What becomes obvious is that despite the fact that language regarding disability issues had changed over the years, disability was/is still not understood as being socially constructed. Instead, discussions about disability keep referring to the medical model. The arguments focus on the medical, individualizing aspect of disability for developing practices concerning disability policy. In contrast, the social model approach to disability would include the social construction of disability. Applying the social model would, therefore, initiate a discussion on the importance of the disabling societal context. The social construction approach makes it possible to analyze several important aspects concerning disability policy. For example, it facilitates the discussion of the formation and the impact of certain perceptions of norms. And it emphasizes questions of accessibility and barriers as fundamental aspects of deconstructing disability (c.f. Corker and French, 2002, pp. 2-4; Hermes and Köbsell, 2003, p. 7; Hirschberg, 2003, pp. 13-16; Tervooren, 2003, p. 417; Thomas, 2002, pp. 39-40; Waldschmidt, 2003, pp. 12-14; Wendell, 1996, pp. 45, 55-56; Wolbring, 2003).

In summary, the historical development of Austrian disability policy shows the hegemony of discourse from a medical perspective over one regarding societal causes of disability. All this emerged from a strong discursive connection between disability, health and illness. This discursive relation brings in the medical narrative of "abnormality" and, thus, questions concerning norms and power. In a Foucauldian sense, norms have to be analyzed as strategies of power. Via norms, power has an effect on the body. Therefore, norms are directly connected with a focus on the medical aspects of disability. Norms and the discussion of the borders of the "normal" and the "abnormal" both individualize and enable comparisons. The borders of the "normal" are defined by declaring certain skills and characteristics as representing the norm and excluding all deviations as "abnormal" (c.f. Bohn, 2003, pp. 40-41; Corker and French, 2002, p. 4; Duden and Zimmermann, 2000; Ewald, 1991, p. 168; Foucault 1994, p. 259; Somers, 1994, cited in Thomas 2002, p. 50).

A turning point in the Austrian perception of disability was marked with the revision and amendment of Article 7 of the Austrian Constitution (Österreichische Bundesverfassung) in 1997, which now forbids discrimination against persons with disabilities. In practice, however, discrimination continues in several important spheres of life. With no further regulations for achieving the goals of Article 7 of the Austrian Constitution, namely to stop or at least to reduce discrimination against persons with disabilities (Forum Gleichstellung, 2002), the target was missed. In a new attempt to better the implementation of Article 7 (Ladstätter, 2004), disability groups in Austria started to work on a law for equality, equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in the late nineties.

Changing the everyday life of persons with disabilities or just a toothless law?

Similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the long sought-for Austrian law aims to outlaw discrimination against persons with disabilities in several spheres, such as transport, the built environment, employment, and communication means. In this context, the inclusion of the BGStG into the program of the Austrian government (Regierungsprogramm) was seen as an important step towards the achievement of equality of persons with disabilities. Several Austrian disability rights groups called for a law which would be strong enough to both enable the enforcement of the rights of persons with disabilities and cause a change of perspective within society (c.f. Barnes and Mercer, 2004, p. 119; Caritas, 2003, 2003a; Forum Gleichstellung, 2002, 2003b; Ladstätter, 2003).

During the election campaign for the Austrian National Council in the fall of 2002, all political parties utilized the plan for the BGStG as a central theme. In February of 2003 a platform of civil rights activists of the Austrian disability rights movement was established, named "Action Article 7" (Bewegung Artikel 7). This platform asked for a law of equal rights for persons with disabilities and the setting up of a working group within the Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt). At the same time, the above-mentioned "Regierungsprogramm" was formulated. In March of 2003 the parliament decided to appoint this working group, which also consisted of experts from disability groups. The following May, the first meeting of this group took place, and already in June, the "Forum Equalization" (Forum Gleichstellung) presented a draft of the BGStG to the working group. This Forum was an amalgamation of experts in disability rights, which was established in March 2002 at the initiative of the umbrella organization of Austrian disability groups (Österreichische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Rehabilitation, ÖAR). The draft version of the Forum provided the basis for the working paper of the group. In October 2003 it was announced by the Social Ministry (currently called the Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection) that this draft would be considered in the formulation of the official draft. Despite previous agreements to the contrary, the ministry did not invite disability groups to participate in the further formulation of the draft of the law. In addition, the ministry stressed that it would drop all parts of the text which would be unlikely to be implemented. Nevertheless, in November 2003 the Forum Gleichstellung submitted another revision of the draft for the BGStG. Demanding clear legislation and enforcement competence, representatives of the Austrian disability rights movement presented standards for a new constitution to the "Österreich-Konvent", a convention for the revision of the Austrian Constitution in December 2003 (c.f. Forum Gleichstellung, 2003, 2003a; Krispl, 2002, 2003; Ladstätter, 2003a).

In whole, the year 2003 was marked by several political activities centering on a new law and questions of anti-discrimination regarding persons with disabilities in Austria. In January of 2004, the Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection submitted a draft of the BGStG for pre-assessment (Vorbegutachtungsphase). In March, the Forum Gleichstellung (2005) presented its position on this draft. The Forum's criticism focused on several points of the draft and concluded with the opinion that this draft did not yet promote equal opportunities and rights for persons with disabilities. They argued that it did not create or change regulations and competences between the spheres of the Austrian Federal Government (Bund) and the Austrian Länder. Another point of criticized that the draft did not stipulate regulations for the transitional period. Finally, the draft version used the word "equal treatment" (Gleichbehandlung) instead of "equality" (Gleichstellung). The argument was that "equality" would involve — in a legal and political sense — many more aspects than would "equal treatment". The Forum's statement stressed the initial planned involvement of those affected by the law: this could only be guaranteed by discussing all pertinent issues with the abovementioned working group (Forum Gleichstellung, 2004).

During the next stage, the ministry submitted a draft for the assessment (Begutachtungsentwurf) of the BGStG in July of 2004. The Forum Gleichstellung again commented on that draft in a statement issued the following September, repeating the above-mentioned arguments. It was stressed that the proposed draft was still no law for equality, equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in Austria. In addition, it was emphasized that the items of the program of the Austrian government had not been integrated into the draft version. During the fall and winter of 2004, the draft was changed to such an extent that the Austrian disability movement put up a united front against this version. Nevertheless, from the beginning of December onwards there were three (unsuccessful) governmental attempts to bring the draft version to the ministerial conference (Ministerrat). The year 2004 ended without a BGStG, but with a rejection of the existing draft along a wide front by Austrian disability groups (c.f. Forum Gleichstellung, 2004a, 2005).

The beginning of 2005 brought two new drafts for the BGStG with yet another deterioration in content of the originally planned law, in particular concerning questions of legal actions. Nevertheless, the draft version passed the ministerial conference and arrived at the Austrian National Council in March 2005. In the hope of enabling a change of the draft version at the last moment, the "Austrian Alliance for Rights of People with Disabilities" (Aktionsbündnis Österreich für Behindertenrechte) formulated several proposals for a revision. Yet, by the end of June 2005 it was clear that not even an expert hearing of disability rights activists in the constitution committee (Verfassungsausschuss) of the Austrian National Council could enforce a change of the text, instead all suggestions were turned down. Still, the Ministry of Social Security argued in this context that the new law would indeed comprise all spheres of everyday life of persons with disabilities. It was stressed that the law would be more than a mere implementation of Directive 2000/78/EC of the Council of the European Union, a framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of disability. On July 6, 2005 the BGStG passed the Austrian National Council as a part of a larger package concerning disability policy (c.f. Council Directive, 2000; Forum Gleichstellung, 2005; Ladstätter, 2005b; Parlament Österreich, 2005, 2005a, 2005b).

While the government and ministry were obviously satisfied with the final version, people from the disability rights movement were more than disappointed. Many feared that the law would bring no important changes for everyday life of persons with disabilities, as formulated by the Green parliamentarian HaidImayr. On the other hand, pride about a law which is able to withstand international comparison was formulated by the Minister of Economics and Labor, Bartenstein. Despite the clear criticism and disappointment about wasted possibilities and chances, it must be noted that the BGStG had high symbolic value: it represented a crucial point for future efforts towards equality and equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in Austria (c.f. Die Presse, 2005; Der Standard, 2005; Grüne, 2005; Ladstätter, 2005a, 2005c, 2005d).

Documenting this chronology of events during the last few years was necessary in order to illuminate the political dealings in this respect. On the one hand it demonstrates the situation in the recent past as well as the noticeable progress in the field of disability policy in Austria. On the other hand, the development also shows how competing, long-established discourses and narratives affected the debates.

For the question of political participation of certain actor groups it is important to look at the relationship between all involved groups within the process of negotiation, which sheds light on changes in the structure and configuration of relevant political groups. Therefore, the emphasis must center on the process of involvement and political participation itself. Another possible venue are the intentions of different relevant political groups (e.g. disability rights groups, policy makers, etc.). Regarding the problem of pre-existing structures, the question is how certain groups enter this process and in which positions. This concerns, for example, the assessment of certain knowledge and degrees of possible deliberation. It depends to a certain amount on how one group — already involved (as, e.g., governmental actors) — thinks the other groups will act on or react to a particular political action.

Policymaking on the issue of disability in Austria can be described as a hierarchical relationship between certain actor groups within the process of negotiation: disability rights groups were invited by the government and the ministry in order to participate in the development of the BGStG. This rather hierarchical access to political participation is of importance, as the involved groups represent specific perceptions and attitudes towards disability. The above-mentioned statement by the ministry, which states that the ministry will drop all parts of the text which they think could not be carried through has to be considered once again. It seems clear that to adhere to already established perceptions and concepts of disability makes new ways of policymaking very difficult, which, in turn, has important implications on implementing disability policy. The question arises, then, whether the governmental actors underestimated the importance of a strong law or whether they deliberately did not want to bring a change to the prevalent discourse.

Examining the intentions of different relevant actor groups refers to the practices that constitute concepts of disability, and which, in turn, impact the practices. Hierarchical structures and limitations of participation, for example concerning the rejection of suggestions of improvement, are discernable. In addition, the government does not use the possibility to change the societal perception on disability by putting through a strong BGStG. Nevertheless, the struggle against certain versions of the draft is an important point of resistance against hegemonic power relations. This participation has led to a more intensive debate about the question of what disability is and in this way caused a discussion of the social construction of disability.

The question of how disability is defined leads back to competing discourses and narratives on disability. At the same time it brings different concepts of autonomy, equality and independence into play, which are based on competing lines of argumentation. During the discussion regarding various versions of the law, different lines of argumentation based upon different understandings of disability collide. The same applies to the debate in the Austrian National Council on July 6, 2005, when the BGStG passed the Austrian National Council. As Imrie (2004, p. 289) points out, discourses of disability "are characterized by a myriad of competing and often conflicting viewpoints on the nature and the determinants of disability." The clash of narratives in the context of competing discourses is in fact about the nature of disability, regarding questions of the social construction of disability (Wendell, 1996, pp. 35, 45).

One small step for a buggy, one giant leap for a wheelchair: Separating coalitions and lines of argumentation

One of the main aspects concerning conflicting viewpoints evidenced in the discussions about the BGStG refers to certain narratives of barriers in the context of medical or societal causes of disability. These different understandings are associated with a strong discursive connection between disability, health and illness. The debates surrounding the BGStG show that the argumentation of some actor groups often ends with the deployment of a "real barrier" narrative (for example, explicit barriers such as steps). It is of course important to reduce those barriers, as eliminating them is a strong indicator for the changing perceptions of disability. However, those "real or explicit barriers" do not include "social and implicit barriers" (for example, negative societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities). Removing these "social barriers" is an important step towards reconsidering current disability policy in the sense of non-discrimination and equality. In disabling persons from participation in society, "implicit barriers" include, of course, explicit barriers as well.

It can be stated that the BGStG led to a re-examination of the disabled subject, as the participating disability groups used the "social barrier-narrative." These groups started to build a basis for a new formulation of practices concerning disability policy in Austria as exemplified by the debate surrounding the definition of disability and the attempt by the group defined as being affected by the benefits of an anti-discrimination measure to abandon deficit-oriented definitions.

Communities of interpretation were built around the above-mentioned two narratives concerning explicit and implicit barriers, which Hajer (2003, p. 102) paraphrases as discourse coalitions. These communities of interpretation emphasized certain lines of argumentation in Austrian disability policy. In order to build a strong argumentative front against competing discourses and narratives it was important to concentrate on commonalities between arguments that allowed for the construction of coalitions around a specific topic. Unfortunately, Austria provides a rather perfect example for illustrating what a failure to create coalitions— whether deliberately by certain actor groups or not — can cause, as exemplified by the case surrounding the "Talent," a train for local public transport.

For many years, several parts of society — ranging from persons with disabilities to persons with strollers to elderly people — have demanded accessible and barrier-free trains. To achieve this aim they formed a clear coalition, connecting the needs of persons with disabilities with those of other groups of society. This coalition did not argue with the deficit-based model surrounding persons affected by non-accessible trains, but focused on the "implicit barrier narrative." It stressed the societal context and responsibility to eliminate access barriers, and, in doing so, united different groups within society that had various problems when utilizing public transport. Finally, some years ago the "Talent" was put into service and was proclaimed a barrier-free and accessible means of transportation. The coalition broke apart, however, when the new train proved a model case for the dangers of omitting the social aspect of disability from consideration. At present, persons with strollers and elderly people are able to enter the train, yet persons who use wheelchairs are still confronted with a severe obstacle. While seemingly implementing social responsibility for all groups of users, the train in fact fails to focus on a general barrier-free access. In effect, the accessibility problem is reduced to individual bodily deficits of persons with disabilities. The "Talent" facilitates entering the train for the first two groups, but not for the third one (see e.g. ÖAR, 2004, 2004a). Yes, there is just one "small step" left, but it represents an insurmountable obstacle for persons with disabilities. Therefore, the "Talent" exemplifies the disconnection between the "social barrier narrative" and the "real barrier narrative".

Concerning the question of a "strong" law for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, the disability groups participating in the debate used mainly the same narratives. But the coalitions of argumentation between several disability activists as well as some disability groups fell apart temporarily during the debates on the BGStG (e.g. the ÖAR vs. other disability groups such as the Austrian Independent Living Center "Bizeps," or the former activist Huainigg vs. a phalanx of disability groups and activists). The discrepancies in the interpretation were based upon the question of "reasonable" and implementable formulations of the law. The context for these varying perceptions of "strength" of this law was influenced by the question of the importance of removing "implicit barriers" in addition to "explicit barriers." Governmental actor groups shaped the break-up of the coalition concerning the formulation of the text of the law. A stronger focus on "implicit barriers," therefore, could have brought about a more radical change to the prevalent discourse on disability in Austria.

Conclusion

This article discussed some of the main discourses and narratives concerning disability politics and policy in Austria in its socio-political context and tried to set out the connection between different lines of argumentation and power relations in this political field. Competing discourses and narratives were presented in relationship to the political actor groups using them. The debates surrounding the BGStG provided the possibility of illustrating how disability policy in Austria has changed. To date, various political actors participate in shaping the field of disability policy, using different narratives on disability. These narratives are formulated against the background of specific discursive possibilities, which are shaped by a certain prevalent understanding of disability. Therefore, the discourse on disability in Austria has to be analyzed as being embedded in the discussion of the socio-political construction of disability.

An analysis of the current situation surrounding Austrian disability policy shows hegemonic hierarchical structures and limitations of participation for persons with disabilities. But at the same time it becomes obvious that the political involvement of disability groups into the discussion of the BGStG can be seen as an important point of resistance against hegemonic power relations and unquestioned practices. Governing can be understood as structuring the field of possible action of others and as "action upon action." These positive effects of power build the possibility to formulate resistance against power relations. Sometimes the outcome of these efforts may be seen as ambivalent, but it is nevertheless an encouraging discussion and political action by disability groups. Participation prompted a more intensive debate about the definition of disability and in this way led to a discussion of the social construction of disability (c.f. Foucault, 1976, p. 109; Foucault, 1994, p. 255; Rose, 1999, p.4).

The participation of disability groups in shaping Austrian disability policy has not made enormous progress. In addition, the development is not that strong when compared with other countries with a longer history of involvement of disability groups. Nevertheless, a change is noticeable. This change refers to new strategies and spaces of governing disability in Austria. These strategies facilitate political action as well as resistance of persons with disabilities against long-established and unquestioned practices concerning disability policy. And this may have important effects on future practices on disability policy in Austria.

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