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ZFHE – Looking back 36 Years

Abstract

The journal known today as the Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung (Journal for Higher Education Development) was founded in 1977 as a newsletter of the ÖGHD (Austrian Society for Didactics in Higher Education). Over the years it has undergone quite a few changes, which makes for an interesting story. Many of these changes reflect the technological developments which have changed publishing over the last four decades. But even more important in making the journal what it is today were the different talents and interests of those responsible for its content and appearance over the years.

Keywords

ZSfHD, Zeitschrift für Hochschuldidaktik, ÖGHD, Austrian Society for Didactics in Higher Education, ZFHE

ZFHE – Ein Blick zurück auf 36 Jahre

Zusammenfassung

Die heutige Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung wurde 1977 als Newsletter der ÖGHD (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik) gegründet und hatte eine sehr wechselvolle und – wenn man so zurückblickt – auch einigermaßen aufregende Geschichte. Diese spiegelt im wesentlichen die technische Entwicklung wider, die sich im Publikationswesen während dieser fast vier Jahrzehnte abwickelte. Nicht zuletzt korrespondiert sie aber auch mit den Stärken und Interessen der jeweils handelnden Personen, ohne die „die Zeitschrift“ nicht das geworden wäre, was sie heute ist.

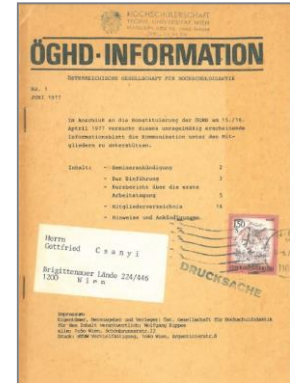
Schlüsselwörter

ZSfHD, Zeitschrift für Hochschuldidaktik, ÖGHD, Österreichische Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik, ZFHE

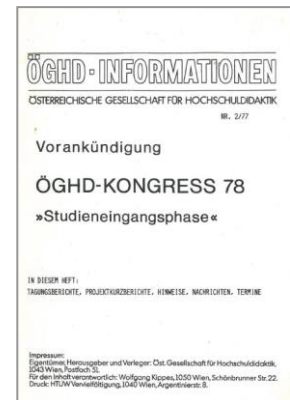
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1977-1978: The very beginnings

In April 1977, the ÖGHGD (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik / Austrian Society for Didactics in Higher Education) was founded as a scientific association. The kick-off meeting took place at the Vienna University of Technology where Wolfgang Kippes, one of the early promoters, was working as an assistant professor. The future ZFHE (Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung / Journal for Higher Education Development) had its start as a newsletter entitled “ÖGHGD INFORMATION” (June 1977). This was a rather informal publication, much like a student magazine. No wonder, because the Hochschülerschaft (Student Union) at the Vienna University of Technology was an important partner in the production and distribution of the journal. Fortunately, the layout was changed significantly beginning with the second issue in September 1977.



In the first years, ÖGHGD itself was the publisher of the journal and thus responsible for all aspects of production and distribution. To be eligible for a ministry subsidy as a scholarly publication and to benefit from reduced postal rates, four issues had to be produced every year. This proved rather difficult but could be circumvented by publishing once a year a “double-issue.”



Wolfgang Kippes, the first secretary of ÖGHGD, was responsible for the content of its newsletter until 1979. During the first two years the individual contributions were mainly internal papers, project and conference reports, as well as political arguments, for instance addressing concerns regarding the orientation phase of the first academic year (Studieneingangsphase).

1979-1983: First step to professionalization

The next developmental step of the journal was renaming it to ZSfHD (Zeitschrift für Hochschuldidaktik) combined with a new layout with the first issue of 1979. In addition, a clear topical and organizational structure was applied. Now each issue had – and still has – a central topic and a specific editor who is a recognized expert in this field. In 1979, ZSfHD began to be a scientific journal, albeit still at a low level.

With the last issue of this year (1979/3-4) the responsible person in the newsroom also changed: Herbert Altrichter replaced Wolfgang Kippes, becoming the first editor in chief of ZSfHD and staying for the next decade.



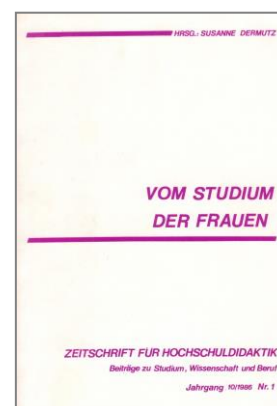
The most discussed topics in this period were: didactic questions and staff development in higher education (still an ongoing self-reflection), distance education, and teacher training and staff development (in general). Thematic specialties of the beginning 80s were: the academic labour market and the topical issue of gender mainstreaming, and – for almost the last time – tutorials, which had dominated the first years of the journal.

1984-1988: From grey to white

In 1984, ZSfHD received a face-lift, which was possible because we were able to use new production technologies. The layout of the cover was modernized, its background was changed from grey to white, and coloured fonts helped to distinguish individual issues. The rest remained as it was before. Everything was still written with a typewriter (that at least had a “golf ball” type element) and offset printed by the student union at the Vienna University of Technology, where it all had begun.

The topics dealt with during these years were rather heterogeneous: four issues were dedicated to specific groups of students – women, disabled persons, unemployed academics, and employed students. Two issues dealt with university development from both historical and reform-oriented perspectives. Specific didactic problems of academic education were also addressed: for the last time until now, *specialist tutorials* and *media didactics* (in a traditional, non-virtual sense).

One article even envisioned one of the main topics of the last ten years: “On the way to the artificial teacher.” Four key buzzwords of this decade were incorporated into relevant titles: (science for) *peace*, (pedagogical) *utopias*, *ecological* (learning at universities) and *qualitative* (research). Finally, two issues were dedicated to specific subject matters: foreign languages and – for the first time – medical education.



1989-1993: Colour and computer

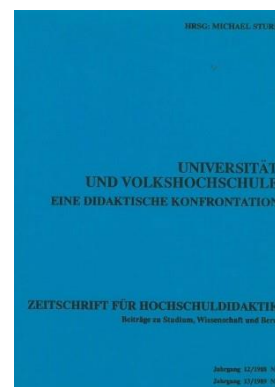
At the turn of 1988/89², ZSfHD became coloured – at least the cover pages. And, even more important, the typewriter was retired and replaced by a personal computer. This was a real revolution for both the office and the production because authors could now submit their papers on a floppy disc. It was no longer necessary to re-type each contribution, and the tasks of the secretary slowly changed from

² This was the only double issue spanning two calendar years, which resulted in significant problems with the subsidy.

typing to correcting and layout. This had the consequence that the person who had done all the typing since the beginning of the journal was released in the middle of this period³ and the editor took over all the production work. The latter had already changed with the technological advance. Gottfried Csanyi took over the tasks of Herbert Altrichter as chief editor of the journal in 1989.

Thematic priorities of these years were: international comparisons and developments (higher education, teaching and learning, the American university system, distance learning), future developments (profiles of engineers, teacher education), academic socialisation (personality development, helping students to become researchers), and the beginning of the quality discussion at Austrian universities (evaluation vs. feedback).

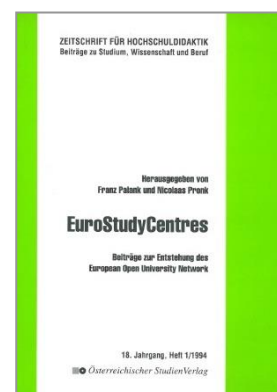
Two issues were dedicated to specific subject matters: education and technical subjects. And, for the first time, technologically enhanced learning came into the focus with the title “Computer in academic teaching”.



1994-2000: Last step of professionalization

A new editorial board brought about the next significant change with Richard März as chairman. He was elected “Obmann” of ÖGHHD and thus also assumed responsibility for ZSfHD. ÖGHHD, which owned ZSfHD, decided to transfer the production of the journal to a professional publisher, the Studienverlag (Innsbruck) in 1994. As a result, both the appearance and the whole production process of the journal were changed.

Initially, Richard März’s responsibility was limited to financial aspects, while Gottfried Csanyi kept full editorial control. But this changed rather quickly as the two also began cooperating on a professional level. This led for instance to the *Graz Conferences on Medical Education*, a yearly event that started in 1995 and was documented four times in ZSfHE issues: 1996/1-2, 1997/3, 1998/4, and 1999/2.



The journal also published other issues that focused on Medical Education: “Kommunikation, Lernmittel, Evaluation” (1996/3-4), an issue covering various educational projects of the Medical Faculty of the University of Vienna, “Problem-based Learning” (1997/1; the first issue for the most part in English), and two issues on the “Use of Computers in Medical Education” (1999/4 and 2000/1). This focus was perceived by some as unfortunate, but it was mandated by the increasing

³ This happened simultaneously with her graduation and employment at the study center where the ZSfHD had its informal office.

difficulty in recruiting suitable guest editors for the journal. This led to our one explicit foray into university politics: Issue 2000/4 published papers dealing with the then raging Austrian debate on university reform. We dared broach such a hot topic only because we were able to recruit two guest editors who stood on opposite sides of the debate.

The age of electronic publishing also dawned on ZSfHD during this period. A few issues were made accessible online on the ÖGHHD website in a simple html format.



2001-2003: Crisis? What Crisis?

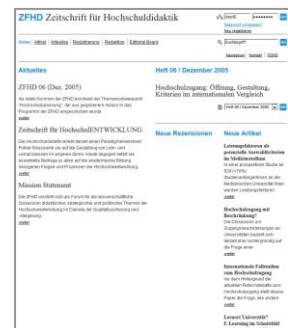
From 2001 to 2003, ZSfHD was not published. This was a period of crisis not only for the journal but for the whole university system in Austria. Laws were changed, universities became independent (from the ministry), they were forced to design new administrative structures as well as new curricula, and they had to face increasing competition from the emerging universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen).

These developments had a strong impact on the journal. Recruiting suitable guest editors, which had already been a problem for some years, became even more difficult. This was magnified by the paucity of authors who were willing to invest time without corresponding financial compensation. Thus it was hard, and finally impossible, to complete four issues each year. And the publishing house was unable to help, for instance by intensifying public relations efforts. Hence the ÖGHHD board terminated the contract with the Studienverlag and decided to start over with an online magazine that it published itself. But this proved to be much more difficult than we had envisaged.

2004-2005: ZFHD online

After an intensive period of conceptualizing, developing and organizing, ZSfHD was re-launched as the online magazine ZFHD in September 2004. Until the end of 2005 it was published using “epoint,” a largely unknown content management system. The first layout was designed by Andrea Riegl and Ulf Harr.

Ilona Herbst and Klaus Rapf, supporting Richard März and Gottfried S. Csanyi – all of them board members of ÖGHHD – mainly drove the preparation of the new online magazine. Thus except for the mode of publication little seemed to have changed. Even the Graz conference was covered one more time: issue 1 contained the abstracts of the 2004 conference.



But behind the scene, a real change was in the making. With not so subtle prodding from the ministry – the grant giver – Gottfried Csanyi set out to recruit an international editorial board. After a preparatory meeting in September 2004, the

official kick-off meeting took place in November 2004 in Dortmund (Germany). From the old crew only Richard März remained as chairman of the editorial board and Gottfried Csanyi as editor. The rest of the editorial board was new, with members from Germany and Switzerland ensuring that in future the journal would lose its Austrian focus and instead become a publication of – and for – the German-speaking countries in Europe. There would also be a shift in the focus of the content, and to signal this change the publication would receive a new name. But it took some time for all these changes to be realized, so that a total of 6 issues of ZFHD continued to be published until December 2005.

2006-2009: ZFHE – powered by ÖGHD

January 2006 saw the formal inauguration of the current online journal ZFHE, and the first issue came out in March. Thus from 2006 to the present, ZFHE exists as an online journal but it developed in several steps to reach its current status.

Initially, ÖGHD retained ownership of the name and the journal, which meant in practice that it was responsible for financing publication. Since the journal itself generated no revenue, and as old-style academics we were happy with such a construction, the organization itself had to fund the undertaking. But the membership base and our other activities were never able to support the entire cost of publication; we were always dependent on help by the ministry – old-style academics, as noted. But the changes in the laws governing Austrian universities also meant that the ministry had less and less money for such activities and they were (rightfully) rapidly losing confidence in ÖGHD's ability to ever become self-sustaining.



Thus Forum Neue Medien Austria, represented by Doris Carstensen, entered the scene and rapidly took charge. The positive effect was soon felt, and in the end it was an easy decision for ÖGHD to hand over ownership of ZFHE to fnm-austria.

Since 2010: ZFHE – powered by fnm-austria

The formal steps of the handover took place in 2009. Doris Carstensen took over the chair of the editorial board, and in December fnm-austria assumed control of the ZFHE domain, thus completing the transfer.

Gottfried Csanyi stayed on as editor until March 2011 (when Michael Raunig took over the position) and Richard März resigned his position on the editorial board in 2012.

But on the whole, it was a remarkably smooth transition and we are happy to support ZFHE also in future, albeit from the sidelines.



Acknowledgments

We want to express our gratitude to Bil Fulton (Webster University Vienna, retired), a long-time supporter of ÖGHd and contributor to ZSfHD for proof-reading the article. We also appreciate the support of Bruno Bauer in making the library of the Medical University of Vienna the home of all print versions of ZSfHD and the willingness of fmn-austria to incorporate the online versions of ZFHD in their online ZFHE archive. A very special thanks goes to Felicitas Pflichter of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, without whose unwavering yet always critical support there would have been no ZSfHD, ZFHD or ZFHE.

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