



**UNESCO-Symposium:
Traditional essential medicine – Cultural heritage in an Austrian and
international context, Vienna, September 17th 2008**

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The Austrian UNESCO commission, supported by the national Ministry for Health, Family and Youth has invited to a symposium based on the UNESCO convention on "the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage" from 2003, the convention on "the protection of the World cultural and natural heritage" from 1972 and "the agreement on the protection and promotion of the diversity of the cultural forms of expression" from 2005.

Mrs. Mag. Maria Walcher (AUC/ National agency for intangible cultural heritage) led us through this wide program in a very professional way. The symposium presented a two years lasting committed workshop during which the term of "intangible cultural heritage" became a definition: it includes on one hand the "languages, clothing and customs" and on the other hand the "traditional medicine" to which we will refer to in the further text as CAM (Complementary and Alternative medicine). The task force focused on the CAM and developed a life of its own which currently led to two main requests:

The creation of a documentation centre to gather the previous knowledge and the request for an interdisciplinary research!

Symposiums' summary:

The representative of the Politics (Federal Minister Dr. A Kdolsky) asked to be excused in the opening speech.

The physicist **Prof. Dr. Herbert Pietschmann**, Vienna spoke about the „three limits to scientific knowledge“, mainly the technological limit, the methodological limit and the ontological limit (way of thinking and imagination). He opposed with very simple words the world of "science" (reproducibility, analysis, quantification, uniqueness, consistency, causal reasons) to the world of the so-called "beliefs" (unique, qualities, synthesis and networking, openness, liveliness, conflicts, volition and creativity). He defines "duty of care" (adherence to a given check-list) as opposite to "responsibility" (acting according to one's judgement, no verifiability).

He spoke furthermore about the "dialectics of difference": "DIFFERENTIATION" (involving the risk of SEPARATION) and "UNIFICATION" (involving the risk of LEVELLING). Transposed to the present situation of the CAM this would lead to a mutual productive and acknowledging relationship between both extremes.

Frau Dr. Xiaorui Zhang, Geneva, co-ordinator of the WHO (World Health Organisation) presented the current situation of the CAM and its users in Europe and worldwide (see thereto: www.who.int TM/CAM strategy for 2002-2005 and medicines strategy 2004-2007). She describes the problems arising because of "incorrect use" and "uninformed consumers". The solution proposed by the WHO consists on

“training guidelines for manual therapies” and technical support for standardization and guidelines implementation. She reminded us of the “WHO-Congress on Traditional Medicines” in Peking from 7-9 November 2008!

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Saller, Zurich, gave account of the Swiss initiative “YES – to complementary medicine” and the integration of CAM in the public health system. He pointed out that the EBM (evidence based medicine) meets only a small part of the medical care requirements and advocated an enlargement to a “Value-based medicine”. He sees quality assurance (QA) for all CAM methods and practitioners as essential – health practitioners other than medical practitioners in Switzerland, (among which 2000 naturopaths) shall in the future practice in the framework of QS after finishing their four years training.

Prof. Dr. Gustav Dobos, Essen, laid down several studies about CAM methods. He defines the term of “integrative medicine” as a combination between scientific proven CAM methods and “Mind/Body therapies” based on a “conventional medicine”. On the same time he pointed out that only 23% of the conventional medical treatments meet the EBM requirements. What about the rest?

Dr. Johannes Saukel, Dr. Reinhard Länger und Mag. Michaela Noseck from the UNESCO-research group presented their results and their current level of knowledge. Dr Länger gave a lecture at cyber speed on the difficulties met to maintain herbal medicines on the market or to introduce new ones. He announces as a possible national solution the redevelopment of the Austrian book of medicines (ÖAB). A group of experts comprising representatives of the Pharmacy and of the Ministries is already at work. Dr. Saukel from the Department of Pharmacognosy pointed out the created Phyto-Database “Volksmed”. He gathers ancient knowledge, works on herbal monographies developing thus together with the University of Vienna a national research work on medical plants.

The cultural anthropologist **Mag. Michaela Nosek** undertook tedious field research to comprehend “health in a traditional context”. Her work is based on the meaning of spirituality and local resources as living culture form. She explained the still existing significance of healers and their rituals and made clear which impact such questions like “Why me?”, “What did I do wrong?”, “What can I do?” have on an individual being.

Comments:

It was a very successful and important interdisciplinary event that shows how important communication is, when dealing with CAM! The term of “intangible cultural heritage” will be present in our mind in the next years, as to my opinion, the argument of “safeguarding” applies to naturopathy and could lead to legal action.