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# A Process of Two Decades: Gaining Professional Recognition in Austria

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## ABSTRACT

The following article describes Austria's long process to get a professional recognition for music therapists. Within this law, from 2009, music therapy is defined as an autonomous, scientific-artistic-creative and expressive therapy. As early as the run up to negotiations, the collaboration with universities, hospitals, the Austrian Association of Music Therapists (ÖBM) and the Ministry of Health needed to be structured very cautiously. In addition the Austrian Psychotherapy Law from 1992 was relevant to this process.

## KEYWORDS

Ministry of Health; music therapy law; professional association; psychotherapy law; collaboration

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## AN OVERVIEW OF AUSTRIAN MUSIC THERAPY

The Music Therapy Law came into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 and, following British recognition, became the second such law in Europe, closely followed by Latvia.

In contrast to British recognition, the Austrian law is exclusive for music therapists and differentiates them into two categories, including a minimum of 200 hours of self-experience (Bachelor's and Master's degree) as well as 60 hours (respectively 30 hours for each) of ethics in music therapy: the "fully responsible" and the "jointly responsible" music therapist. Both categories correspond to the Bologna structure of Bachelor's and Master's. At the same time, the

Austrian law provides criteria for the recognition of European music therapists who want to work in Austria and, therefore, it is in line with Europe and equivalent to the European Music Therapist Register (EMTR) of the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC).

This article can only provide an insight into Austria's recognition process and, as we know, music therapy communities in each country, as well as each current recognition process, have its own dynamic. Nevertheless, it seems not to be a coincidence that those two countries with the oldest training courses of Europe (London 1958 / Vienna 1959) became the first ones to succeed in being protected by law. At least every country has its own conditions!

- ❑ The beginnings of clinical practice of music therapy in Austria are closely related to an early academic institutionalisation. More than 55 years ago, in 1959, the first training course in music therapy was established at the former Academy of Music and Performing Arts (today: University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna).
- ❑ Today, three training courses exist: University of Arts Graz in cooperation with the Medical University, Graz; IMC University of Applied Sciences, Krems; and University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Training courses in Graz and Vienna have a psychotherapeutic approach. The approaches from Krems originate from, among others, the field of social and cultural anthropology.
- ❑ In 1979 the Austrian Professional Association of Music Therapists (ÖBM, Österreichischer Berufsverband der MusiktherapeutInnen) was founded.
- ❑ In 1985, shortly after the foundation of the ÖBM, a number of working groups started with their preparations for music therapy law.
- ❑ At the beginning of June 2008, the Austrian Music Therapy Law (Musiktherapiegesetz – MuthG) was passed by Parliament.
- ❑ The law forms the basis for the framework of training regulations (Ausbildungsverordnungen) and provides specifications of occupational duties.

**Table 1: An overview of Austrian music therapy**

## ACADEMIC TRAINING AND PROXIMITY TO MINISTRIES

Austria's first and for a long time only training course was placed right from the very beginning at (the former) Academy of Music and Performing Arts, nowadays University of Music and Performing Arts. This intra-academic start was helpful and made collaboration with the Ministry easier. The proximity between the university and the ministry provided good reasons: if students are trained with public money, why not protect their profession?

## INFLUENCED BY THE PSYCHOTHERAPY LAW

When Austria's process of recognition began in 1985 – shortly after the foundation of the Austrian Association of Music Therapists (ÖBM) – various board meetings and working groups took place, with continuing efforts and much frustration. The recognition of psychotherapy in Austria in 1990 (the law came into effect 1991) was relevant to music therapy because, thereafter, music therapy

received the status of a “source profession” alongside, for example, medicine and psychology. It was the first time that our profession was mentioned in a publicly available document.

At the same time, the Ministry of Health started to make separate laws for various other health professions, and because Austria only had 100-130 trained music therapists, we were of little importance to the Ministry.

## A LAW WITHOUT ART THERAPISTS

In this context, a relevant question was raised as to whether regulation could work in conjunction with art therapy. In my opinion, the answer is “no”. In Austria, art therapy training courses, as well as their professional associations were not equivalent to those of music therapy. This probably is very different in other European countries. At that time, Austrian art therapy was not unified and was structurally weak (but not substantially weak). There were too many different institutions and training courses with diverging background orientations and no coordinated training regulations. The homogeneity of the Austrian music therapy scene and their professional representatives seem to have had a real impact on the negotiations with the ministry who advocated plans for a law exclusive for music therapy.

Finally, music therapy ended up with a law similar to the Psychotherapy Law. Before the law came into effect in 2009, the Ministry of Health was trying to help the art therapy umbrella organisation. Due to disagreements among some art therapy associations, the Ministry decided not to place music therapy and art therapy under the same law.

## NEGOTIATIONS AND IMPORTANT DISCUSSIONS

There was a long, previous history in preparation for the Austrian Music Therapy Law that was deeply connected with the university's teaching team as well as the ÖBM. When in 1991 the Austrian Psychotherapy Law came into effect, most music therapists in the university's teaching team had a double qualification: being both a music therapist as well as psychotherapist. For this reason many colleagues were in favour of music therapy having a place and forming a part of psychotherapy, although as a separate method within the Psychotherapy Law.

Another fraction of music therapists were in favour for becoming part of the “Austrian Health Care Profession Conference”, which is also a group

of healthcare professions recognised by the Ministry. This discussion took place during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was clear that those with a double qualification of psychotherapist and music therapist (some would call themselves “psychotherapeutically oriented music therapists”) did not want to be part of the Health Care Profession Conference and those who were only trained “music” therapists were not allowed to be part of the Psychotherapy Law.

This period of discussion and conflict was probably important: should we find a position inside the healthcare system or should we find our own and unique identity? The most important effect of this dilemma was the vision to look for a common identity: not being separated into two types of music therapists, but working for one law for all Austrian music therapists.

## IT TAKES TIME AND COLLABORATION

There has been constant effort for more than two decades, with the Austrian Music Therapy Law now to be seen as a result of close collaboration between many people and institutions. After one of the very first meetings with all involved training courses and the ÖBM, a competent and helpful lawyer from the Ministry of Health made clear that the only way a law would be enacted would be by “acting in unison and speaking with one voice”. This was probably the most important piece of advice during the whole process. A long and consequent series of dialogues commenced which are documented in a series of publications. These represent the past and current development of the profession in Austria (Fitzthum 2003, 2009; Fitzthum & Gruber 2003; Geretsegger 2012; Halmer-Stein, Schmoelz, Oberegelsbacher & Gathmann 1993; Mössler 2008a, 2011; Tucek 2014).

## GOOD ARGUMENTS AND SUPPORT FROM EVERYWHERE

The following phase was probably the most important one. The Ministry’s lawyers, representatives from the two training courses and the ÖBM representatives worked with the support of prominent physicians and scientists. Many colleagues and students from all training courses collected approximately 16,000 signatures which underlined the importance of our profession inside the health system.

At the same time, the professional association, as a fixed partner in this procedure, had the important task to look for reliable data about our profession. This was challenging work. Being asked to make a cost-oriented calculation for the Parliament, the professional association could prove that no more costs would arise for the Ministry because all Austrian music therapists were already working and being paid!

But, back to reality, there was a lot of disappointment when new elections disrupted the process of recognition. When finally it became clear that the draft law would go to Parliament, Austrian music therapists had to contact all political parties. This happened with the help of very ambitious colleagues and students from all Austrian training programmes. Finally, on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2008, after 23 years, the Music Therapy Law was passed by Parliament. It was the last plenary session in Parliament before the summer recess and before the next general election! So, we were there at just the right time and... we were lucky, too!

“Within the Music Therapy Law, music therapy is defined as an autonomous, scientific-artistic-creative and expressive therapeutic approach. It is the conscious and intentional treatment of people suffering from emotional, somatic, mental or social behaviour disorders and diseases, by employing musical media within a therapeutic relationship between one or more clients and one or more therapists with the following aims:

- to prevent, reduce or remove symptoms;
- to change behaviours or attitudes in need of treatment;
- to support and maintain or to restore the clients’ development, maturation and health.

Music therapy is indicated in the fields of health prevention, treatment of acute and chronic diseases, rehabilitation, encouragement of social competences including supervision, as well as training and research”.

**Table 2: Definition of music therapy (cited from the Austrian Music Therapy Law (MuthG), translated by Mössler 2008b)**

## SUMMARY OF AUSTRIA’S MOST IMPORTANT PRE-CONDITIONS

- 1) In the period of preliminary work, Austrian training courses were well established, for example, the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna was established in 1959.
- 2) We were successful in bridging the different approaches to music therapy. During that period

we had only two different forms of music therapy.

- 3) Austria's Psychotherapy Law that came into effect in 1991, formed a formal and content related legal basis and was helpful in building a common identity for music therapists.
- 4) Austria's professional association (ÖBM) was the only one at that time, and, thanks to its tradition, some colleagues were involved from the very beginning and have constantly incorporated the younger ones.
- 5) Being asked to make a cost-oriented calculation for the Parliament, music therapy could prove no increase in cost.
- 6) On request, Austria's famous physicians and scientists gave intensive support.
- 7) Highly skilled jurists from the Ministry gave important support with their professional knowledge – they had also launched the Psychotherapy Law years before.
- 8) We were there at the right time and... we were lucky!

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