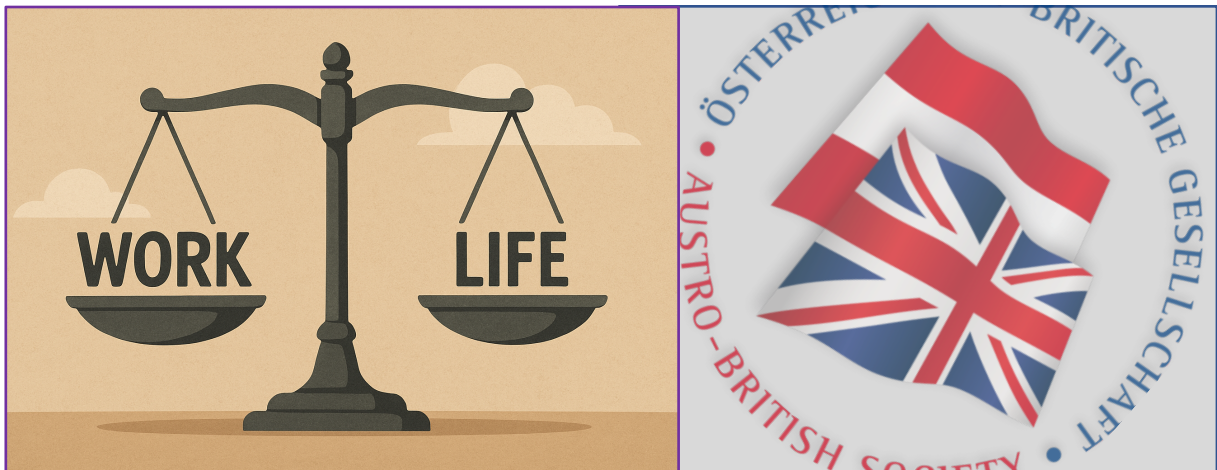


Working and Living Culture | A Question Of Origin?

by Jochen Ressel



I constantly meet fascinating people in Vienna. Most of them are not originally from Vienna, the centuries-old melting pot of cultures where Germanic, Romanic, Slavic and Magyar influences have come together to create an extraordinary cultural wealth. Many of the people I work with and am in contact with, like myself, are not from Vienna, but from all over Austria, 'from the countryside' as they say here. We come from small villages that we left behind because the mindset, attitudes, prejudices, opportunities and prospects there often did not extend beyond the proverbial 'kitchen cupboard'.

We wanted to explore the world – convinced that the world was waiting for us. And we did not want to fail, but to prove – not least to the people back home – what we are capable of. Very few of us come from wealthy families; we did not inherit anything, but earned every fountain pen, every watch, every smart suit, every tie pin, every cufflink and every frying pan in our kitchens ourselves. But what our parents gave us was far more valuable than material things could ever be: they gave us self-belief, combined with humility, and enabled us to get a proper, even superior education – often making personal sacrifices so that we as their children could have a better life. And they taught us that nothing comes from nothing. We worked hard – very hard – and sometimes we also had a bit of luck. People skills were not something my parents taught me, at least not in my case. I often put my trust in the wrong people, both privately and professionally, in people who initially inspired and impressed me but who, in the long run, turned out to be unreliable, dishonest, malicious and even deceitful.

But with our basic equipment of confidence and fighting spirit, it was always up to us to overcome the difficulties. Last but not least, this confidence also came from the belief in the power above, in transcendental energies, which was imparted to us and made tangible, which we harnessed for ourselves and which meant that no mountain was too high and no abyss too deep for us to overcome. I wasn't always successful – I made mistakes, as many of us did, and, looking back, there are many things I would do differently. Søren Kierkegaard once said that life can only be lived forwards, but understood backwards.

However, once you have learned to look back analytically, without regret or anger, you see failure and mistakes as opportunities for further development, as a mission to do things differently and better in the future. From my experiences, from my successes and failures, from forgiving ourselves and others, from working on and for our lives, we achieve a life in balance.

I'm not sure if the term 'work-life balance,' which is so trendy today, means what I have described above. It seems to me that younger people in particular separate 'work' from 'life' – 'work' is the drudgery, the need to achieve something, but you just accept that if it is necessary in order to devote the rest of your time – as much of your daily life as possible – to 'life', to what is beautiful and pleasant, to leisure. But our 'work', both professionally and as human beings in continuous development, must be a balance between these two concepts, which are inseparable. Only this 'how we live is our work on our balance' has nothing to do with doing only as much as is necessary at the moment.

Taking responsibility only when the consequences of minimal decisions have no major consequences is a commitment to stagnation. Working to live and living to work are not contradictions that need to be kept in balance – everything is always in balance and we bear the consequences of our actions – and, incidentally, also those of our omissions. It is precisely these omissions that have brought our society into a precarious situation – decisions and reforms that have not been made and a failure to recognise the need for action on a very personal level. As a result, the state is financially in a critical position and Europe has fallen intellectually and technologically behind other economies. The problems of our society as a whole also includes the moral, spiritual, cultural and religious decline that can be observed on a daily basis.

Who, if not us, and when, if not now, can change this? It is up to us, those who can already look back on a certain span of life, to give today's young people the confidence that our parents gave us, namely that the world is waiting for them to master the challenges that lie ahead of us all right now. But also that there is a lot to learn, that mistakes will happen, and that there is therefore no reason for arrogance. And it is up to those who are now embarking on their lives and beginning to shape them. This will not be possible from the comfort of a hammock – it requires effort, hard work, a willingness to take responsibility and the courage to bear the consequences – and ultimately it means leading a happy life that has meaning and brings joy.

The ABS is looking forward to receiving your views and comments!

About the author



Jochen Ressel is the Secretary-General of the Austro-British Society. He worked for several years for a UK company, including time at its HQ in London. He currently serves as Head of Communications and Fundraising for the Sovereign Order of Malta – Grand Priory of Austria – and oversees communications for the Embassy of the Order of Malta to the Republic of Austria. In addition to his professional duties, he volunteers for the Austrian MALTESER Relief Corps, engaging in various social, medical, and disaster relief services. In the course of his career, he has regularly been asked for his input on social and geo-political developments in the light of history.

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