



Introduction to and general survey of the campaign on intellectual property rights and patents of the Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH), www.oeh.ac.at/free.

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„Free People“: Campaign on Intellectual Property Rights and Patents of the Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH)¹

Intellectual property rights and patents is a difficult and multifaceted topic with growing importance – especially in the international context of the WTO and its “TRIPS”-Treaty. To deal with it in a practical manner the ÖH split it up into four parts:

1 Free Knowledge. Free People.

On the one hand this first part deals with the access to scientific knowledge for different groups of people: Students and future researchers in developed countries as well as developing countries as a whole often can't afford access to scientific knowledge. Although most scientific knowledge is publicly funded it is not publicly accessible. Initiatives like the “Berlin Declaration”² try to encourage researchers to public their work also as open access documents in the world wide web.



On the other hand in the first part the ÖH discusses the problematic developments concerning patents in general. Is it the newly established possibilities for patenting in areas like software, logic and genetics, the patents on traditional knowledge especially in developing countries or the difficulties with medical patents, for example in South Africa during the HIV-crisis, patents has to be looked very closely at. Not only from a human rights point of view.

The ÖH chose a rather provocative way to deal with the topic: “Patente töten.”/”Patents kill.” says the campaign-slogan on the poster above the campaign slogan “Free Knowledge. Free People.”

2 Free Software. Free People.

“Free software is not a matter of free beer, it is a matter of free speech.” is a famous slogan of Richard Stallman, founder of the “Free Software Foundation” (FSF) and it is also one of the reasons for the

¹ The Austrian National Union of Students – Österreichische HochschülerInnenschaft (ÖH) is the official and by federal law established representation of student interests with compulsory membership for all students at Austrian universities and art academies, for further information check out <http://www.oeh.ac.at>.

² Berlin Declaration on open access to scientific knowledge: www.zim.mpg.de/openaccess-berlin

Austrian National Union of Students to promote free software or open source software to its members, the Austrian students. With the demand on universities and governments to use free software such as Linux or Apache³ the ÖH also wants to promote the concept behind it: Free and equal access to knowledge, in the concrete case the free and equal access to source code.



Aside a poster with the Linux penguin “Tux” on it and the postulation “Pinguine auf die Uni! / Penguins into the University!” the ÖH also distributed 100.000 CDs with the Linux Version “Knoppix”⁴ to Austrian students. This special version of Linux boots directly from CD and allows users to just try Linux and a load of programs like “Open Office”, “Gimp” and more without a difficult installation procedure.

3 Free Music. Free People.

Not every student is a computer nerd. But nearly every student uses the possibility to download music from the internet. Following the opinion of the music industry represented by the so called “major labels” like Sony, Time-Warner or BMG all this downloading students are criminals that should be punished. The position of the Austrian National Union of Students is therefore a rather controversial one, as it claims the possibility of not restricted non-commercial music-exchange on the internet.



The appendent poster consequently points out that “Download gefährdet den Profit der Musikindustrie, nicht die KünstlerInnen / Download is a danger to profit of the music industry, not to artists.”

³ For Linux: www.linux.org, for Appache: www.apache.org

⁴ For Knoppix: www.knopper.net, as long as supplied a free Knoppix-CD can be ordered at www.oeh.ac.at/free.

4 Free Culture. Free People.

Intellectual property rights and their current development are finally more and more dangerous for arts and culture. Is it concerning plays, new digital arts that base on the recombination of different media or samples, copyright is more and more a barrier to the freedom of arts and culture. Famous in this context is the officially illegal Mix of two or more music tracks to a new one, called “Bastard Pop”.

Additional to a poster showing a shopping-bag of Austria’s largest supermarket company, replacing the company name “BILLA” by “Kultur / Culture” to warn that culture could become a commodity the ÖH celebrated a large “Free Culture Festival” in Vienna on 11th May 2004 with more than 3.000 participants.



Author: Leonhard Dobusch / Contact: leonhard.dobusch@oeh.ac.at