

Human Dignity as the Foundation of Democratic Resilience

Strengthen democracy. Empower people. Practice dignity from the start.

How resilient is a democracy when people are unaware of their own dignity, do not dare to express their opinions, or do not see themselves as capable of making a difference in society? **Democratic resilience begins with the individual.** It needs citizens who are aware of their own worth, can express their opinions freely, respect other perspectives, think critically and take responsibility for our shared life in society. The associations *Liebevoll ICH* in Germany and *Würdevoll Menschen* in Austria address precisely this. Their shared vision is to bring human dignity back into greater public awareness and establish it as the foundation of respectful, peaceful and democratic coexistence.

Democracy needs people who are aware of their dignity

A vibrant democracy depends on more than institutions, laws and political structures. It depends on people who see themselves as equal members of society, exercise their rights and actively participate in democratic processes. Those who recognise their own dignity can learn to stand up for their convictions without demeaning others. Those who see themselves as valuable can meet others as equals, accept differences and remain respectful even when opinions differ. A strong sense of dignity can help people to critically resist manipulation and exclusion, resolve conflicts constructively and avoid being exploited by others out of fear, dependency or a need for recognition.

Democratic resilience requires people who are strong within, exercise independent judgement and see themselves as active citizens. It develops where people experience that their voices matter, their rights are respected and they also bear responsibility for the rights and dignity of others.

Dignity education begins in childhood

The association *Liebevoll ICH* trains children and educational professionals to become Dignity Ambassadors. The aim is not merely to teach respect for one's own dignity and the dignity of others in theory, but to make it something people can experience in everyday life.

Children should learn from an early age:

- **I am valuable.** My worth does not depend on achievement, conformity or the approval of others.
- **My voice matters.** I am allowed to express my opinion, ask questions and stand up for my needs and boundaries.

- **You are valuable too.** Other people have the same dignity, even if they think, feel or live differently from me.
- **We share responsibility.** Freedom also means respecting the rights of others and resolving conflicts without demeaning others or using violence.

These experiences provide important foundations for children to develop self-confidence, empathy, sound judgement and the ability to act democratically. Educational professionals play a key role. They create environments in which children experience participation, make their voices heard and learn that different opinions are respected. In this way, democracy can begin in everyday interactions, even in early childhood education centres and schools.

Our vision: Dignity as an integral part of democratic education in Europe

We want to establish the concept of Dignity Ambassadors throughout Germany and, in the long term, develop it further across national borders. Our aim is to strengthen dignity education as an essential element of democratic education in educational institutions. Democratic resilience cannot be fostered solely by teaching political knowledge. People also need to experience that they can make a difference, that their opinions are heard and that they can handle conflicts independently, critically and respectfully. This requires educational environments in which children and adults experience self-efficacy, take responsibility and put fundamental democratic values into practice. Dignity education can make an important contribution to this – from early childhood into adulthood. We see this as an opportunity to strengthen democratic culture at its roots: in people, in their attitudes towards themselves and in their relationships with others.

A shared European mission

Respect for human dignity connects people across national, cultural and social boundaries. It is a central point of reference for a Europe founded on freedom, equality, participation and mutual respect. Through our work, we want to help ensure that people not only live in a democracy, but also see themselves as independent, responsible citizens who can actively shape and protect that democracy.

Our goal is a society in which people know their dignity, use their voices, respect the dignity of others and take democratic responsibility. Democracy comes alive wherever people participate. It becomes more resilient when people think independently, respect different perspectives and work together to uphold the rights of all. Dignity is not an optional addition to democracy. It is one of its human foundations. Let us work together to ensure that this foundation is strengthened from the very beginning – for children, for future generations and for a resilient, vibrant democracy in Europe.