

Birthing Woman to Woman – the Doula as Birth Companion

No question: pregnancy and birth is a women's issue! It therefore seems prudent, that women – true to the motto “a problem shared is a problem halved” - have been supporting each other during child birth beyond men's expertise for centuries. Along with the accomplishments of modern medicine came the partial exclusion of the (female) public: birth has been moved into hospitals and has become – with the exception of the clinical personnel - the sole affair of the parents to be. Only at the beginning of the 1990s, American researchers discovered by coincidence that women who are being mothered by a female confidant have easier births. Further studies on different continents repeatedly led to the same conclusion: the presence of other women positively influenced the birth process.

A more detailed look at history books shows that this can in no way be a coincidence. Even in the animal kingdom such indicators can be found. Dolphins and elephants gather around birthing mothers in order to protect her from curious looks and even today humans in certain societies prefer the circle of birth experienced women as the desirable framework for a birth. Derived from the Greek word “douela”, the doula as the “woman's servant” (in today's context of course no unfree girl) creates exactly that: a protected framework adjusted to the individual woman's wishes for this unique intimate moment. Often being a mother herself, the doula acts not only as emotional support for the woman - giving her the security to let go and find her power within her - but also for the father to be. She creates memories because she understands how long lasting and formative the birth experience can be for the woman, the baby and the partner and that details—however small--can make a difference in her perception of the event. In contrast to the midwife, doulas do not take on any obstetrical role in the medical sense.

One of the first modern doulas in Austria and a pioneer of the local doula movement since 1993 is Angelika Rodler, herself a mother of five. At the



young age of 24, she founded the first doula project. Since 2005 she has offered the only Austrian training for doulas. In 2006 she also founded the non for profit organization *DiA – Doulas in Austria*, open to all women who have completed the doula training and who agree to commit to the organization's Code of Ethics. Such ethics codes include among other topics that doulas will only attend to births if a midwife is present. Together they can provide optimal support to the woman – fully in line with the philosophy of Ina May Gaskin, possibly the best known midwife of our times: "If a woman doesn't look like a goddess during labor, then someone isn't treating her right."

Facts regarding the DiA – Doulas in Austria organization

The organization *DiA – Doulas in Austria* is the contact point for all parents who want doula support. Here they can find a directory of registered doulas in all of Austria: <http://doula.at/>

For all who would like to become a doula and support women around their births, the doula training is a good opportunity to learn more about women & birth culture – in Austria and worldwide. Find out more about it here: <https://doulatraining.at/>

Diverse studies and more detailed information regarding the „doula“-phenomenon can be found here: <http://doula.at/publikationen> & <http://doula.at/wissenschaft-und-forschung>

