

Learning factories as professional and cultural orientation

In the course of the FluEQUAL project, learning factories were offered to the participants of public service work in the rural regions – those include events, workshops and qualification measures for small groups of asylum seekers. Learning factories are an essential and respective accompanying measure to public service employment. The learning factories support the asylum seeker's professional orientation and level out the path to an easier entrance into the field of public service work in the communal area. In addition to concrete tasks in the municipalities, asylum seekers get given the chance to gather further qualifications and to deepen their knowledge of their new experience. Furthermore, learning factories support the cultural orientation, by opening up the access to culture specific knowledge as well as discussing culturally specific work roles. Moreover, intercultural questions themselves can be made into a topic.

Examples for learning factories

- General topics, for example national health system, first aid
- Professional, technical and special-purpose language acquisition
- IT basics
- Basics of business economics
- Legal knowledge (employment laws / road traffic regulations)
- Basics of various professional profiles (for example tourism)
- Facilities of learning factories, organisation of workplace
- Self-organisation and occupational image
- Lore of tools
- Technical skills
- Application training
- Planning of the household
- Self-experience
- Intercultural topics
- Gender orientated topics (for example woman's health)

**“Tell it to me,
and I will
forget it.
Show it to me,
and I will
remember it.
Involve me,
and I will
understand
it.”**
Lao Tse

Multiplicity of synergy effects

In the FluEQUAL project, referees from the local municipality surroundings were hired to guide the learning factories. In this way, they came in proximate contact to the refugees living in their municipality. Through the connecting of the asylum seeker's technical Know-How, combined with the technical Know-How of the municipality collaborator about communal services, social services and the local, voluntary periphery in the shape of learning factories, many synergy effects could be achieved. This also brings a decrease in obstructions of interventions when dealing with the regional labour market. Overall, learning factories were on offer in order to provide an additional qualification related to the proffered practicum tasks. Furthermore, the learning factories were oriented along concrete work experiences and fields.

Especially women were encouraged by the FluEQUAL project to participate in qualification measures. Basic requirements of the referees were a sensitive handling of the different cultural backgrounds and the respective socialisation process of the women. Generally, a gender sensitive attitude has to be appointed when dealing with the choice of contents dealt with in the learning factories as well as their form of implementation. Possible role conflicts on side of the asylum seekers, or irritation in their periphery, were worked on in a cooperative dialogue between the asylum seekers concerned. This also gave reason to relate culture specific role expectations with local role models.

In the course of passing on contents in the various learning factories, consistent positive experience could be collected. Under consideration of the different levels of German knowledge of the participants, the

knowledge transfer had to be carried out by simple and clear use of the language. Moreover it proved necessary to group the classes together and not offer more than three or four class units per block. The range of topics, complementary to future situations, strongly challenged the art of abstract thought amongst the participants, even until the point where participants seemed to be over-challenged.

No more “lost life time”

For all frequented learning factories, participants received a written confirmation about topics, contents and duration. Constitutive for the empowerment of the target group is that the time being spent in the asylum process is not considered anymore as “lost life time”, but can be used to invest in the future, and also for the participants to be able to verify their grasping of this change, even over the boundaries of the project.

BORG1 Mittersill & FluEQUAL: A success story...

...how learning factories can be embedded in dialogue processes, in order to support asylum seekers in their cultural orientation and at the same time support openness for a living-together in the municipalities.

Several classes from the BORG Mittersill visited the exhibition “My Austria” that was part of the dialogue processes initiated by FluEQUAL in Mittersill, and also participated in school workshops. In the course of this visit to the exhibition and the Comenius² project “[totalitarianism](#)”, which has been running for a while in the BORG Mittersill, the idea of a further cooperation between the BORG Mittersill and FluEQUAL arose...

Learning factory integration and cultural exchange

Under the umbrella term “integration”, BORG Mittersill decided to contribute active “consciousness work” in shape of a learning factory with the title “integration and cultural exchange”. By means of integrated dialogue processes in egalitarian conversation situations, a sophisticated perception of the various environments and realities should be achieved, which will result in a critical examination of prejudices, concepts of the enemy and stereotypes.

In the run-up to the project, two members of the teaching staff invited the regional collaborator of FluEQUAL to present the project and the concrete work done on-site (professional orientation and public service employment especially in the region of Oberpinzgau) to the classes 7B and 8B. To finish off, there was the possibility for the students to ask questions, which they perceived sufficiently. Great interest existed in general information about asylum laws, asylum processes and benefits from primary care, as well as in life stories of the individual participants. We could sense a great information demand.

In a further step, nine asylum seekers (four women and five men) from the project FluEQUAL were invited by the students of both classes to join a learning factory in

Feedback from the participants

“I find it irresponsible that the state takes years to grant asylum! The people have to simply wait for years and are not even allowed to work!” (7B)

“I find it very important that we get information about topics like those, and that there are people who make themselves strong for the migrants.” (8B)

“After this workshop I have a greater comprehension for migrants and can think myself better in their situation. I would appreciate it if in Austria there would be more comprehension for haunted people.” (7B)

“Only few people deal with this topic, but for me it is a topic that concerns the whole world and nobody should look aside.” (8B)

“The contact to Austria's youth is so meagre; I found it great to see all this interest!” (Pascha M., Georgian Republic, asylum seeker in Austria since 2003)

“I felt very welcome and our interests aren't even all that different.” (Kristine H., Armenia, asylum seeker in Austria since 2004)

“The school, the teachers and the students are fantastic. I am sad that we can't also visit this school and learn so much.” (Georgy P., Russian Federation, asylum seeker in Austria since 2004)

¹ BORG = a state high school that leads pupils to general qualifications for university entrance

² Comenius - European Cooperation on School Education

the school. In small groups, the students made “interviews” with one or two asylum seekers. Aim was to create encountering space, in which students and asylum seekers can meet and foster cultural exchange. Accompanied with tea and cookies, a pleasant conversational atmosphere was created.

In the foreground stood the rising of consciousness towards the differences but also the similarities of both sides. An examination of the respective foreign- and self perception, as well as a targeted cutback of prejudices and fears of encounter were aims of the workshop, which also was achieved. Students and asylum seekers in the frame of this learning factory performed as autonomous protagonists.

At the end of the workshop, the students offered a guided walk through the school building to the asylum seekers, and concluded the farewell with a group photo. From subsequent talks to both sides could be concluded that both the students from 7B and 8B and the participants of the project FluEQUAL were ardent with the afternoon spend together.

This learning factory is an excellent example how active integration work can be supported and accomplished by means of cooperative, overlapping projects.