



Challenges and strategies of partners in diversity management

Graz Wirtschaft, Bildungshaus Schloss St. Martin, RRA LUR

Activity T1 Development of Strategies

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RRA LUR



Department for Economic and Tourism Development in Graz

Department for Economic and Tourism Development in Graz is the interface between enterprises and companies in Graz and the public administration. Our mission is to let companies and enterprises perform their activities and to help them with their work related to public administration. The focus of the Department is to support people to get self-employed and start their own business so they can create new jobs.

The Department created an active support for young entrepreneurs and self-employed people by funding the rents during the critical first three years. Companies that are founded in the field of creativity, ecology, tourism, biotechnology and life science can ask for support and get the funding for the first three years: 50% of the rent the first year with the maximum amount of 250€ per month, 40% the second year - 200€ per month, 20% the third year - 100€ per month. Co-working spaces are funded the first year and crowd funding initiatives are supported to help young entrepreneurs to get enough money for realizing their ideas.

As the unemployment rate of migrants is higher than the unemployment rate of Austrian citizens, we try to give migrant entrepreneurs the support they may need:

1. For minimizing the failure rate of self-employed migrants, the Department pays the translation fees of the consultation meetings offered by the Chamber of commerce, recommended to anyone that wants to start a business and get well prepared for the challenges of entrepreneurship. The information about this service is spread via NGOs, the Unit of integration of the City of Graz and the Antidiscrimination Unit of the Styrian government.
2. The Department published a brochure in different languages (Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Russian, English and Turkish), that informs migrants which steps to undertake in order to get self-employed, where useful information can be obtained and which formal requirements are necessary.

Identification of challenges

In the year 2015 many people from different countries came to Graz due to different reasons: war, economic destabilisation in their home countries, political prosecution etc. We were faced with the fact that many people wanted to work and live in Graz, but often did not have the appropriate education and formation that was necessary to be allowed to work in Austria. As the great number of refugees who want to enter the Austrian job market is new for the Department for Economic and Tourism Development, there is a continuous need to get informed about working possibilities for migrants, asylum seekers and accepted refugees.

Other persisting challenges include:

1. On the one hand, it is necessary to prepare asylum-seekers for the integration in the work process, on the other hand they are not allowed to work.
2. Many people coming from Syria and Afghanistan came with their families and are interested in entering the work life as soon as their political status is clear. Most of them have children and want to earn money as soon as possible, so they cannot afford a long education or vocational training.
3. The importance of learning German and the provision of affordable courses. In 2016 the offer of language courses was much reduced and it took a couple of months until language courses could be held for refugees, but they are still insufficient.
4. Many new arrivals are not aware of the fact that for being able to work in Austria an education is very often necessary. Moreover, even if people had worked in their profession for many years in their home country, they are not allowed to do so in Austria before their formation is validated with the passing of a test that proves the abilities of a person.

Development of strategies

1. In the survey we organised within the “Urban Diversity” project we saw that many young entrepreneurs that could use our funding had no information about it, others don’t work in the fields that we subsidize. Therefore, one of the main future goals for our Department is to reach all entrepreneurs. Furthermore, we believe it is especially important to encourage young migrants to achieve a better/appropriate education and

to get self-employed in the fields that allow them to receive financial support from our Department. Every third Thursday we organise in cooperation with a co-working space an event where young entrepreneurs can pitch and meet other young entrepreneurs. With our cooperation partner, we agreed on trying to find and invite more migrant entrepreneurs to include them in these kind of events in the future.

2. For minimizing the failure rate of self-employed migrants, our Department pays the translation fees of the consultation meetings at the Chamber of commerce. Anyone that wants to start a business should get this consultation to be well prepared for the challenges of entrepreneurship. Our strategy is to continue with this service and to inform more institutions, associations of different migrant groups about this possibility. We want to meet these associations and give them this information and ask them to spread it within their communities.
3. We keep a close cooperation with NGOs that are also responsible for the language courses for migrants. We ask them to spread the information about the possibility to start a business and to inform people that for some kind of business there is no formation demanded.
4. A brochure in different languages (Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Russian, English and Turkish) with all necessary information for getting self-employed is already in all offices that are consulted by potential new entrepreneurs (Chamber of Commerce, Unit of the City of Graz where you have to register the new business). During the Urban Diversity cooperation with Slovenia, the brochure will be adapted and published in Slovenian language too and distributed in Slovenia and Austria. Generally, Slovenian citizens permanently living in Austria have perfect knowledge of German language, but there are many people from Slovenia that migrate daily or occasionally for work in Austria and sometimes need to get self-employed even for a shorter time period. For this group of people, the brochure in Slovene will be of great use.
5. The Diversity Training that shall take place within the next months in the Department for Economic and Tourism Development shall raise the awareness that new entrepreneurs can also be non – Austrians.
6. Even if 10% of the owners of business are not born in Austria, the Department was not frequently consulted by this group of the population of Graz. That is a fact we want to change. Our services should be available for every entrepreneur that fulfils the necessary requirements and the information should be known by every

entrepreneur by establishing a closer co-operation with migrant communities. We want to visit them and tell them that we are also at their disposal.

Bildungshaus Schloss St. Martin

Promotion of diversity in and through Bildungshaus Schloss St. Martin is linked to specific challenges, also due to its historically grown self-image and the associated external attributions. The reflection of one's own conditions, under which an institution such as the Bildungshaus advertises the promotion of diversity, becomes the requirement for the confrontation with challenges in the society as a whole. Only then can be reacted, as a further step, to social and economic challenges in the urban area of Graz, which are accompanied by the increase of different life plans and life stories.

Bildungshaus Schloss St. Martin has always pursued the goal of addressing social inequalities in education processes, seeing education as an opportunity for self-empowerment in its almost 100 years of existence. In the founding period, this view referred to the rural, predominantly female population with the foundation in Christian imaginary of people and society. At the same time, however, there was a tendency to homogenize the target group and a certain blindness to social processes in urban areas. An active program design, which would enable a planned expansion of the target group(s) to include migrants, could not be established in this way. In awareness of this, three main obstacles to reach this goal can be observed:

1. The realization that the participants in the courses in St. Martin have a clear - above all ethnic – homogeneity.
2. The lack of accompaniment of the employees and trainers who are confronted with the increase in diversity in their professional lives.
3. The persistence of habitual patterns attributed to our educational institution from the outside.

Identification of challenges

As demonstrated by the survey in the course of the project Urban Diversity and also according to our own feedback, the challenges of promoting diversity through our educational work lie in several areas:

1. The reaching of new target groups, especially of migrants. How do we reach the implicitly excluded?
2. The development of intercultural competences. Do we have the necessary know-how to promote social diversity through our educational work?
3. Individual barriers: above all time and financial hurdles as well as linguistic barriers. How can we respond to these barriers in our program development?

Development of strategies

Bildungshaus Schloss St. Martin pursues a strategy of diversity encouragement based on two "strands". Firstly, in regard to internal organization, the institution itself, its employees and coaches/trainers: it is about all the prerequisites to promote the diversity as a team. For this purpose, different measures are set. For all employees and all trainers, there are annual training courses on diversity. The goals of these trainings are:

1. Awareness raising of the already existing diversity among employees as well as their commonalities.
2. Discussions about the project Urban Diversity, its goals, intentions and plans.
3. Interchange of positive and negative experiences people with different language, religion or origin face.
4. Especially for trainers: The teaching of pedagogical foundations and methods in order to be able to react professionally to diversity in educational settings.

In addition, successful diversity will be made tangible in the course of the study trip on the basis of concrete examples.

Secondly, there are strategies in educational work and program development. As already mentioned, Bildungshaus Schloss St. Martin is not only perceived in a specific way from the outside, but often not at all or only peripherally by those persons who are to be addressed as

a new target group (i.e. migrants). In order to expand the usual communication channels, the Bildungshaus therefore specifically seeks cooperation partners who are networked in migrant communities and can spread information in a targeted manner. These partners also contribute pedagogical skills, which they convey to the employees of St. Martin on the one hand, and in part, bring them to work as trainers themselves on the other.

In program development, specific attention is paid to avoid certain barriers due to the identified challenges:

1. Financial barrier:

A course fee is not an ethnic, but a social barrier. By providing free educational opportunities, especially in the area of family education, families with migration biography are not per se addressed, but a social mix of the participants is sought. However, together with the above-mentioned networking, reducing the financial barrier can increase the participation of migrants.

2. Time barrier:

As the research in the Urban Diversity project has shown, lack of time is often an obstacle to attend education. As far as possible, program development takes into account the fact that the program offers take place on different days and at different times. In order to make it possible to reconcile education and family obligations, program items are also designed so that the whole family can participate.

3. Linguistic barrier:

Lack of language skills often create insecurity and feelings of shame. In order to react to this, the trainers are specifically trained in the use of a target group-specific language. On the other hand, the educational offers are designed in a way that the spoken language is not the only form of expression. Especially in the creative sector, the focus is on joint work, gestures, facial expressions, imitation and creative innovation.

Following the understanding of diversity as a resource and potential, St. Martin's educational offerings do not address migrants as a target group in need of support who seek to acquire the necessary skills for an assimilating integration. On the contrary, the goal is to build on the different competencies, skills, experiences and needs that are being diversified by expanding the target groups. Part of the strategy of the education centre is thus the constant work on

our own understanding of education. An understanding that identifies and promotes, but at the same time does not lay down differences and similarities; that upholds the value of the existing and is at the same time open to change and enlargement, and that aims to enable all people to participate in education.

Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region (RRA LUR)

Suitable diversity management within organisations strengthens the economic prosperity of the organisation, improves the organisational culture, increases the life quality and social standard for its employees. The understanding, respect and promotion of diversity are even more important for organisations, which activities stretch into the international environment. Respect for diversity not only increases organisation's work efficiency and enables its employees to avoid certain obstacles and misunderstandings, but also forms an organisation into a tolerant, considerate and open actor to its international partners. Diversity has three meanings for RRA LUR. First, it represents the diversity among its employees. Secondly, RRA LUR unites 25 municipalities and communities in central Slovenia, which are very diverse. Thirdly, an important number of employees manage European projects, where they work in intercultural environment with people from several European countries and hence experience diversity.

RRA LUR currently employs 23 people, ranging between 30 and 65 years old. Gender structure is in favour of women, with 20 women and 3 men in the office. Not all employees come from the Ljubljana urban region, but have origins in different Slovenian regions. Some employees have migrant roots. The biggest heterogeneity in RRA LUR can be observed in the field of education and the field of work. The vast majority of employees holds at least a university degree, but in various fields, from social to natural sciences. This interdisciplinarity represents an important asset and is seen in practice as employees manage various projects, covering all kind of fields: from environment, food safety, local development, transport, social economy, creative industries to migrant thematic, scholarship schemes and

entrepreneurship. This wide range of educational structure increases the general knowledge of employees and raises awareness of the importance of different sectors.

Identification of challenges

1. RRA LUR wants to further elaborate the existing measures for taking advantage of the professional variety of its employees and create new ones.
2. RRA LUR constantly follows new trends and policies coming from the European and national level and strives to implement them in 25 municipalities of the region it unites. Those municipalities are diverse – regarding size, development, preferences. Since RRA LUR implements projects that comprise all municipalities, the constant challenge we are facing is to find common solutions for this diverse territory.
3. An important number of RRA LUR employees manage European projects, within which they meet people of different cultures, nationalities, races and religion. Despite the fact that all employees fluently speak English, each of them copes differently with the intercultural environment. Working in multicultural environment can cause misunderstandings or obstacles. Employees of the RRA LUR especially stressed misunderstandings among project partners in understanding the project activities at the very beginning of the projects. It usually takes a lot of energy to start the project effectively. Differences among various project partners are also seen in the dynamics of project management.

Development of strategies

Strategies on how to increase the awareness and respect of the diversity within RRALUR and its activities:

1. Awareness raising of the already existing diversity among employees and how to enhance it.
2. Regular seminars for employees with the purpose of following new trends and challenges coming from the European and national level.

- 3.Organisation of training for employees on how to deal with diversity within the region for the purpose of effective management of projects, involving different municipalities.
- 4.Organisation of lectures on diversity topics: on the intercultural differences among people and rules/habits/norms that are respected worldwide and about how to resolve the issues that arise in the multicultural environment.
- 5.Team buildings for employees, where they have the possibility to get to know each other also outside work and other people's characteristics/skills and competencies become acknowledged.
- 6.In the phase of a project writing a brainstorming of employees with various backgrounds should be promoted in order to form an integral project proposal.

Based on the assessment of the current situation it can be concluded that RRA LUR has been carrying out an inclusive and respectful diversity policy. RRA LUR is well aware of the fact that its diverse structure can lead to conflicts, but if well managed and encouraged it is a cause of an increased productivity, creativity and hence organisation's as well as individuals' growth and reputation. It is also aware that the wide spectre of different profiles of employees can cover various development topics in the central Slovenia region, follow current trends and constantly undertake new tasks in newly identified development challenges in the region and wider.