

# Intercultural Offers at Pilot Libraries in Vorarlberg, Austria

(Project: “Libraries for ALL – Intercultural”)

Since September 2009 *okay.zusammen leben*, in cooperation with the libraries of Lustenau and Götzis, is looking into the following issue within the EU-project *Libraries for ALL – Intercultural* (European Strategy for Multicultural Education - ESME): How can local libraries contribute to the integration of immigrants and to somebody’s sensible dealings with the arising variety of languages and cultural backgrounds?

Until the summer of 2010 *okay.zusammen leben* will develop several projects and put them into practice together with the two pilot libraries and the *Advisory Board – Intercultural* (including officials in charge of communal integration, as well as protagonists who have a migrational background and work with migrants themselves, e.g. by teaching their native language, as interpreters, or cultural activists, etc.). This process generates interculturality itself because migrants bring their planning and realization skills into the individual projects and activities.

*okay.zusammen leben* hereby acts as a national competence centre for integration issues in Vorarlberg and connects this project with other integration projects and programs throughout the region. In order to link the project internationally, *okay.zusammen leben* as the leading partner cooperates with partner organisations located in three countries of the EU: the ‘Stadtbücherei Frankfurt am Main’ (Germany), the ‘Immigrant-institutet Borås’ (Sweden), and the ‘Multiculturni centrum Praha’ (Czech Republic).

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The foundation of the library as an intercultural site bases upon the self-conception that it is not “only” a place that lends books. Moreover, the library also plays an important role in the citizens’ generally defined supply of information. Libraries are open to all citizens but often migrants, as a target group, do not encounter the essential supplies to meet their specific needs, because they represent a new social group in our society which is slowly but surely considered an audience to social and educational institutions.

Taking this insight as an initial point and thinking about the special situation and needs of migrants in Vorarlberg, employees of both libraries, *okay.zusammen leben*, and members of the *Advisory Board* started to develop specific supplies. The migrants as well as the so-called majority society can benefit from these supplies.

In doing so, the media inventory in languages of the biggest migrant groups of Vorarlberg plays a decisive role. The two libraries in cooperation with members of the *Advisory Board* who have a migrational background develop it. Therefore, an external competence group has been created to compile media lists in the Turkish, the Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, and the Spanish language. According to the lists, the pilot libraries purchase the linguistic media. These lists will be made available to other libraries later on.

In addition to their actual thematic function, other activities, mostly of a temporary nature, have already been realised and should attract the migrants’ attention to the new supplies offered by the libraries. Hence, the Götzis library started in fall 2009 the project “German for breakfast” with the objective of facilitating the acquisition of the national language to women with migrational background. The project is about an informal breakfast on the premises of the Götzis library. Numerous women from

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different nations such as Turkey, Russia, Bolivia, or Chechenia read and talked about German texts after an initial round of introductions and breakfast. Each breakfast meeting has another focus depending on the language level of the women. The texts to be read and discussed are about Vorarlberg, the municipality of Götzis, and the habits and traditions in Vorarlberg. Within the breakfast these women have the opportunity to learn about the peculiarities of their new home and, at the same time, to improve their language skills. Furthermore, since fall break of 2009 the Götzis library offers a *Turkish a.m. reading* for children between the ages of 4-6. A native Turkish teacher reads out of Turkish picture books and shows the parents how 'correct' reading to children works by taking advantage of the brochure "*Sprich mit mir und hör mir zu*" (English: Talk to me and listen to me) which was designed by and is available from *okay.zusammen leben*. A prime example for synergetic effects, as the aim of such projects, is the cooperation of the Götzis library with other institutions, such as SUPRO Vorarlberg (preventatives against addiction – Maria Ebene Foundation). Thus, the result of this collaboration was a presentation and follow-up discussion of the movie *Anababa – Me and my family*. The short movie has been produced under the supervision of SUPRO and with active participation of Turkish migrant kids. Its presentation brought many migrants with Turkish roots to the library where they were shown the new supplies.

The Lustenau library also created and realised some temporary and permanent projects besides establishing media supplies in Turkish, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. For example, the library homepage has been translated into several languages already. Multilingualism anyway is one of the main foci among the employees as they are planning to offer at least three multilingual library tours for migrants. The goal is, on the one hand, to show migrants the foreign-language media supplies and, on the other hand, to approach the target group to the library in general. As the employees of the Lustenau library want to put together a multilingual

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compilation of highly relevant picture books, translation projects have been taken into account. In doing so, special attention will be drawn to high quality illustrations, and these picture books will be bilingual. The migrants haven't disregarded the matter of studying the German language, which is evident when we look at the Lustenau library project of purchasing media supplies in German as a foreign language.

There will also be temporary activities the majority society can benefit from. In this process, two bilingual evening lectures (one of them in the Götzis library) on Latin American cultures like the Mayas and Aztecs have been realised in German and Spanish. These lectures were planned in cooperation with the association *Tierra Madura* in Götzis. *Tierra Madura* is a socio-cultural initiative of Latin Americans and Austrians residing in Vorarlberg and encourages the intercultural exchange with Hispanic cultures.

In addition, both libraries designed a multilingual information brochure. The Lustenau library also collaborates with other institutions; specific teamwork has been established with their local secondary school (pupils presented books from Turkey), and with resident integration activists (a project funded by the municipality: *Women's Table in Lustenau* for women with a Turkish migrational background; earlier, it was located in the mosque, but now it's the library in order to facilitate the focus group passing the threshold of the library). To the *Women's Table in Lustenau* experts also get invited to talk about different topics.

The strategy of sensitising the focus group is bearing fruit already as the following project-feedback that *okay.zusammen leben* received from the Götzis library shows us:

*One afternoon, three persons with Turkish roots – a boy about 7 years of age and his parents – were standing at the door and curiously but*

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*cautiously looking into the library. I approached and welcomed them. The father was apparently relieved and started talking: My son was desperate to come here. He received that slip of paper at school and didn't stop begging until we came here!*

*Dornbirn, December 2009*

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GD Bildung und Kultur

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