

Die Gute Zeitung

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The newspaper “Die Gute Zeitung” (The Good Newspaper) can be seen as the organ of the “Integrationshaus” (house of integration) in Vienna, which works in different fields of care and education for asylum seekers and migrants in general. The function of the journal is to inform the public about the work of the “Integrationshaus”, the situation of asylum seekers in Austria as well as to acquire donations.

With its mass circulation (1.5 million) and its “yellow press-style”, the newspaper represents a very unique approach to the issue.

Area

Media

Kind-category of project

Newspaper

Kind-category of actor

Registered association

Country

Austria

Year

1995-

5 key-words

newspaper, donations, public opinion, public relation, asylum seekers

THE PROJECT

ACTOR

Verein "Projekt Integrationshaus"

Engerthstraße 161 - 163

1020 Wien

Website: www.integrationshaus.at

Objectives

- to make situation of asylum seekers and migrants accessible to a broader public than, rather than just the “usual suspects”, who are already interested in the topic
- to oppose the (mainly negative) mainstream opinions about asylum seekers and migrants especially those which are spread by the yellow-press, with an aim to conquer prejudices
- to inform the public about the activities of “Integrationshaus”
- to find donors and to explain how the money will be used
- to give concerned people (social workers and migrants) the possibility to present themselves

Activities and Results

The “Integrationshaus” publishes its own newspaper “Die Gute Zeitung” (GZ) in two different versions. Firstly there is the “large GZ” (15 pages), which comes out once a year and secondly there is a smaller version of the GZ (4 pages), which comes out three times a year. Both papers are free of charge.

The first, the larger one, has a circulation of over 1.5 million, which reaches people normally around Christmas or at the beginning of the year. In doing so the publication is the country’s biggest newspaper, at least for one day in a year. It contains information about the work of the “Integrationshaus”, reports about the fate of asylum seekers, but also short stories and articles which deal with other social or everyday live topics. Aside from this, the appeal for donating money takes up a big part of every issue. The extraordinary high circulation is possible because of the special commercial delivering service FEIBRA, which normally supplies a lot of households in Austria with advertisement papers. In the case of the large GZ, the FEIBRA gives its service free of cost.

Unlike the large GZ, the smaller version comprises “only” 23,000 copies. Here the reader can find more concrete reports on individual projects and activities undertaken by “Integrationshaus”; for example the description of a new multilingual nursery or a flat-sharing community for young migrants. Moreover it is the place for deeper reports and background information about people whom are living in the “Integrationshaus”, for instance the story about a woman who had escaped from an African country and went a long way until she could bring her family together again. ‘Actual’ readership of the newspaper might be relatively high. This might be a result of the topical issues covered and can be seen through the direct reactions by telephone, which don’t stop even weeks after the release of the newspaper.

When and how long: structure and steps of the project

The beginning and development of the newspaper project is directly linked to the whole project of the “Integrationshaus”. The idea was formulated in the beginning of the 1990s when, as a result of the Balkan wars, a big number of asylum seekers from former Yugoslavia arrived in Austria. The situation of refugees, especially in Vienna, was said to be very bad; there was not any care for traumatised people at all.

Furthermore the political and public opinion could be characterized by an increasing and widespread feeling of resentment concerning foreigners, including some open displays of xenophobia. A peak of this development can be seen as the petition for a referendum against foreigners, initialised by the political party FPÖ 1993. According to Gabi Ecker from the “Integrationshaus” this situation forced the local politicians to react and to show Austria’s “other and better face”. So a group of people (artists, social workers, architects, jurists) managed to get support from the local government in Vienna in order to open the “Integrationshaus”. At the same time the first issue of GZ was released.

The first issue already had a circulation of 1.5 million and it has stayed at this level for over 10 years. In 2003 the “Integrationshaus” created another newspaper, the so called “little Gute Zeitung” with publishing around 20 000 copies per issue, which

was intended to complement the larger version publishing with greater frequency and exploring the issues in a more concrete fashion.

From the beginning the newspapers have reflected the development of the house itself. According to the increasing diversity of the house's projects, the newspapers have accordingly presented more topics beyond the original basic project, which was focussed on care for asylum seekers. On the other hand the GZ hasn't changed a lot in regards of the layout and structure of the newspaper. Keeping continuity and being recognizable for people is also reported as an important element of the house's conception.

Of course the GZ also reflects external political developments and consequently has intensified its tone. "The situation of refugees becomes, mainly because of legislation, more and more precarious. Thus we decided even in this media, where we really try not to be deterrent, to react with a tougher note," said Gabi Ecker.

Place and context

The average number of refugees staying in the "Integrationshaus" is around 110 people at any one time. Even though the house was founded under the impact of the situation of refugees from former Yugoslavia, the "Integrationshaus" tries to understand escape and migration not only in formal and legal categories such as asylum seeking or labour migrant. Rather they try to improve living conditions of people from foreign countries in general and to help them to develop personal qualifications, like language skills in order to have better possibilities of finding work. But the focus remains on the care of asylum seekers.

The number of requests for asylum in Austria noticeably differs from year to year:

	Requests
2000	18.284
2001	30.135
2002	39.354
2003	32.264
2004	24.634
2005	22.461

[source: www.asyl.at]

As shown by the table, the general trend tends to be decreasing like in the whole European Union.

The countries of origin also differ to a high extent every year. In 2005 a big proportion of the applicants came from former Soviet Union (4.355) (especially from Chechnya), from Serbia and Montenegro (4.403) and from different African states. The applicants in general come from all over the world.

The main problems, which asylum seekers and people working in the field of care are confronted with, and to which the newspapers bring to attention, are the legal restrictions for asylum seekers. The amendment of the asylum law 2005 comes under special criticism by NGOs and institutions like the "Integrationshaus" because of its tightening of regulations. Two issues which are singled out for special consideration are the accelerated legal proceedings and the problem of detention pending deportation. Another problem constitutes the general insufficient legal protection.

Furthermore access to the employment market also remains an ongoing problem for asylum seekers.

The background of these policies can be seen in the image of asylum seekers in public and political rhetoric, which can be characterised as a misperception whereby asylum seekers are seen as those who abuse welfare systems without urgent need.

[see:

- www.asyl.at
- <http://www.asyl.at/projekte/icf.htm#endbericht>
- www.integrationshaus.at/de/ih/index.shtml?27

It is a challenge for GZ to show that the situation in the home countries is actually dangerous, that asylum seekers in fact are not allowed to work and that the basic aid is very low.

Targets

The larger GZ is delivered to every household, which gets the advertisement package of FEIBRA. FEIBRA operates in nearly every federal state capital. Also there is a database of addresses, which receive the paper direct by mail.

The smaller GZ is only published in this way. These contacts comprise of donors, corporations, politicians and private supporters, which also serve as multipliers of the paper.

Regarding to the content and the intended readership, it might be probable that the strong association with certain well-known persons, will attract people among which they are especially popular – more likely older people than the youth.

Methodology

Besides the above already mentioned characteristics, I will also briefly highlight two techniques of the “Gute Zeitung”.

Yellow press style:

The idea was to copy, to some extent, the layout and writing style of the most widely read newspaper in Austria, “Kronenzeitung”. It was intended to give a response to the often very depreciative news concerning asylum seekers and migrants, which people can find in this newspaper. In doing so the GZ uses very short and simple headlines and tries to affect emotions, not at least by using big pictures of refugees in happy or sad moods as a kind of eye-catcher. A quintessence of these impressions can be described very often as an appeal: “We need your help. Please help us with your money!” The articles, even in cases when they are describing the background issues and dwell on topics, are written in very simple language in order that they can be understood by everybody.

Principle of publicity:

The principle of publicity is not far from the first technique. To affect the masses the GZ uses personalities like singers, writers or actors, which can elicit a wide range of sympathy in Austrian society. They pose as symbolic figures to draw attention and create acceptance. Moreover, acceptance is created by the authors, who come mainly from well established and well known Austrian newspapers and magazines, including

amongst those from the already mentioned Kronenzeitung. “People shall think, that it can’t be so bad, when they identify the writer in the GZ as someone, who usually writes in other reputable print-media,” believes Gabi Ecker. By this she means that the GZ wants to break down the barriers in the heads of people.

One can say, the principle is to use well known matters or personalities in order to overcome deep rooted beliefs held by people regarding these themes. These principles can be found in other activities of the “Integrationshaus”, too. For example the so called “Flüchtlingsball” takes place the day after the famous “Wiener Opernball”. The big cabaret event “Lachen hilft” takes place every year on the Austrian’s national holiday. In doing so, the aim is also to get as many different bases of public presence for the “Integrationshaus” as possible.

Funding:

The financing of the large GZ is based to wide extent on advertisements inside the paper. But another big part is financed through the voluntary engagement of different participants such as professional journalists, designers and a design studio.

Authors:

Large GZ: The broader public is provided with articles of popular writers, well-known journalists from other media and members of the house’s management. Moreover, you can find here short comments from famous personalities. Refugees/ migrants as writers are very rare, but the paper is not primarily intended to serve as a platform for this group.

Small GZ: According to the focus on the intra-house projects the writers stem very often from the circle of employees of the “Integrationshaus”. Sometimes you can find interviews with people living in the house.

Networks

Aside the fact that the GZ serves primarily as an organ from and for the “Integrationshaus”, especially in regards to the small version, there can be found reports about projects supported by the European Union, which are carried out mostly in cooperation with other organizations.

Another cooperative activity is the principle of mutual advertisement. The GZ allows other newspapers and magazines to launch their promotions in the paper and in return the “Integrationshaus” can make an advertisement in one of Austria’s big print media, such as the daily “Der Standard” or the weekly “Profil”. In doing so the “Integrationshaus” gains the possibility to send a short and clear message to a very broad public. It is often used as a rather provocative instrument with pieces such as “Throw your newspaper away and escape as fast as you can!”.

By means like this the “Integrationshaus” and its attitude is represented beyond their own organ.

Strengths and critiques

It is clear that the approach of the GZ seems very unusual and questionable. To follow to some extent the way of the yellow-press can be criticised of course. But the “Integrationshaus” has chosen this way deliberately in order to reach “normal people”. Simplifying the problematic is an important element in its conception. “Otherwise most of the people wouldn’t have a look at the paper at all,” argues Gabi Ecker, who is very convinced that the more intellectual magazines don’t get any attention from the broader public. Reactions of readers reveal the success of this approach. Very often it can be found there are angry or irritate persons amongst them. Probably they would not otherwise get in contact with this topic or if they did it would rather be through the common mainstream media, which as explained above often reflects the issue in an unfavourable light.

Another strength from the point of the organization is the consistency and the easily recognisable appearance of the newspaper. This is said to give the people the feeling that a positive view of refugees and migrants has a firm and regular place in the public sphere.

The main critique results logically from this conception. Mostly the articles are rather superficial. “According to the title it is easy to associate a group of do-gooders with the project,” acknowledged Gabi Ecker. So the appeal often seems to be a little bit platitudinous and without deeper reflection.

In regards to real intercultural practise, the GZ comprises mainly of the views of members of the majority in society, even though they have goodwill and helping intentions. It is also targeted at the majority. Thus the migrants’ perspective and their own voice talking about things, which don’t belong immediately to the asylum or migrant projects, is very rare in the paper. The picture of victims and not of self acting subjects remains.

Moreover the project can be criticised because of the permanent request for donations, which is one of the main elements of every issue. As content plays a secondary role, the paper can be seen to a wide extent as a means to an end.

But this leads to the complementary purpose of the paper, which has to be considered as one part of the whole project “Integrationshaus”. For within the range of the “Integrationshaus” itself, the principle of empowerment and autonomy for refugees and migrants plays an important role. The newspaper just has the function of a fund-raiser in order to enable the actual activities of the “Integrationshaus”. Given the bad situation of official and state support in this area, it seems to be legitimate to use the paper in such a way.

Moreover the idea to oppose the mainstream with its own weapons might be an interesting approach. And it cannot be denied that the GZ has an influence in mainstream society. This is proven by the enormous reactions which follows every issue.

Conclusion: what is “exportable” in the project

According to Gabi Ecker, the idea to confront people with the topic of asylum seekers and migrants without being condescending and to set a point in the medial landscape,

which speaks to people in the same language of the mainstream, should be adopted in other countries.

LINKS

www.asyl.at

The site delivers background information, statistics and comments about request for asylum in Austria.