

The Beggars Academy



Elda with her students.
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Location

Brixen/Bressanone (BZ)

Country

Italy

Short summarizing description

Many South Tyroleans find begging stressful, humiliating, even disturbing. Many fears and prejudices circulate. The assumption that a "beggar mafia" exists, makes the rounds. Most citizens do not know how to deal with this challenge. The Beggars Academy strives for small, concrete solutions around this issue. Beggars meet every Thursday in the foyer of the Free University of Bolzano in Bressanone with a volunteer of the House of Solidarity (HdS). She explains the rules of begging, gives language lessons, is the contact person for questions, problems and concerns. Afterwards the group usually goes for a coffee. This initiative seeks to facilitate the work of "beggars". The South Tyrolean population is sensitized and helped to feel better in their cities.

Key Terms

Integration, Beggars, Academy

Context and background, Which problems/challenges does your measure try to solve/cope with?

Begging is perceived as a big problem. If you ask about the main problem, it turns out that it is usually "aggressive begging" that is perceived as offensive, not "quiet begging". Even municipalities are having a hard time with the issue. The fastest answer they find is banning begging. But these bans do not show their effect: Begging does not disappear; the police are overwhelmed with the additional task; penalties issued are not fruitful and only burden additional bureaucracy. The hostile climate that this creates is not conducive either to the citizens or to the image of a hospitable holiday destination. On the other hand, the "beggars" – almost everyone from foreign countries - are at the bottom of our society. For the vast majority begging is not a choice but the only way to survive.

Which are the key objectives of your measure?

1. Take the fears of the population seriously, raise understanding, reduce fears. 2. Show sympathetic alternatives to begging prohibitions, which have a lasting positive effect on the coexistence in the city and also facilitate the work of law enforcement. 3. Position the community as an innovative, hospitable place with a heart. 4. Help the "beggars" to do their job better. Demonstrate them the laws, rules and norms of their new home. 5. Offer beggars concrete help to improve their situation.

Who are the main target groups and beneficiaries of your measure?

1. Beggars 2. The population as a whole 3. Volunteers 4. University and students 5. Police and city managers

Which actions have already been implemented and which results have been achieved so far?

1. Benchmarking: analysis of the status quo. What initiatives already exist - in South Tyrol and the world? What can we learn from it? 2. Brainstorming for the development of efficient and sympathetic measures. Subsequently, implementation of the same. 3. Contacting beggars and taking steps to build trust. 4. Developing jointly the rules for begging, which then become binding. 5. Meeting with community administrators and police. Exchange meetings with the security forces. 6. Search for volunteers who support the action. 7. Volunteers offer simple language courses that are completed by the hour. 8. Creation of a "beggar primer", an information medium for beggars and almsmen. 9. Information of all Brixner clubs of senior people. 10. Contact of the South Tyrolean advertising agencies for the development of creative, sympathetic advertising slogans for the beggars. 11. Creating forums for meeting the population on the subject of begging.

Which were the main problems and challenges you were/are facing when implementing the project and how did/do you (try to) overcome them?

1. Hostility of people against beggars. 2. Finding additional volunteers. 3. Restraint of politics to actively tackle the issue

Link to website

<http://www.hds.bz.it>

Starting date

2016-03-01

Duration

20

Regional scale

1 - local (one municipality)

Other involved partners

University of Bozen in Brixen, oew-Organization for One world

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Category 1, Managing social change

Only a few years ago there were hardly any beggars on the streets of South Tyrol. Now it the local population feels there are (too) many. Most beggars are people from Nigeria or Romania. They show us daily that our society has become more colorful. Their often obtrusive nature screams for answers - answers to questions of migration and poverty. This is social change from below. The Beggar Academy tries to contribute this change by ... - seeing beggars as people who are also part of society. - awakening comprehension for the concerns of these marginalized groups, thereby reducing aggression. - opening up public space for new groups and activities. - trying to integrate beggars into society and helping to prevent them drifting into illegality

Category 2: Integrating migrants into the local/,regional labour market

The Beggar Academy assumes that begging is a job, albeit at the lowest level. This view alone helps to perceive beggars not as a burden, but as part of society. The Beggar Academy prepares them for the job market. With a language course, it helps them acquire additional competences. The network of the volunteers and the sponsoring organization also helps to integrate the beggars step by step into the "normal" labor market.

Category 4: Supporting change in the local / ,regional dual education system

The Beggar Academy is based in the University. University professors call the voluntary employee of the Beggar Academy "colleague". The university students see the beggar students and get to know them as colleagues. Diversity becomes everyday life, normality.

Category 5, PR impact and awareness raising

Word has spread that there is a Beggar Academy in Brixen. The media keep reporting about it. In addition, there are discussions with seniors and pupils. The volunteer co-workers are repeatedly invited by communities to share their experiences. Other organizations - social services, university - show interest in the beggar academy

Category 6, Innovative dimension

The Beggar Academy is the first of its kind in South Tyrol. The target group, which is ignored by many and heavily polarized, is a unique focus. The place, the university – the alma mater of knowledge - is an extraordinary place for this kind of work. The concept based on voluntariness gives the project the character of independence.

Category 7, Transferability

The whole concept is transferable if it succeeds in finding volunteers. In South Tyrol, some communities consider to replicate the model. Places for holding the Beggar Academy are also easy to find. And the target group is big, which would also like to be accompanied.

Category 8, Embedment in a comprehensive welcoming strategy

Helping a beggar in all religions is the ultimate sign of charity and compassion. It is one of the most difficult things for human beings, to welcome begging people. Creating this is lived welcoming strategy and culture. Our society has not yet completed this step. Our society thinks like Friedrich Nietzsche: "Beggars should be abolished altogether! Verily, one is annoyed to give them, and is annoyed not to give them." For the Beggar Academy, it is important not to give up and keep going. Because constant dripping wears away the stone.