

District Language Day

A celebration of the wealth of languages in Vienna's third district Landstraße on the European Day of Languages, 26 September, entitled „Landstraßer Sprachentag“ at the district Adult Education Centre (VHS Landstraße).

„I can speak Armenian!“ „I can speak Hungarian!“ „I can speak Russian!“ Primary school children of the third district of Vienna exchange languages. For some of them it is a new experience. All of a sudden their first language, ignored so far, is appreciated. The „Landstraßer Sprachentag“ made it possible.

Just in one of the district's primary schools some 40 languages are spoken. The value of this abundance of communicative resources has to be honored, the further development of the language abilities has to be encouraged. That is why the Commission on Integration of the third district together with the district Adult Education Centre, the municipal counseling service for district residents called Gebietsbetreuung and the Municipal Department on Integration and Diversity organized the District Language Day with the support of the Commission on Culture of the third district.

School children of the whole district were invited and took part with great enthusiasm. Not only could they present their own first languages but they could also get glimpses of additional languages and cultures from far away. Dr. Espérance Bulayumi told them fables from Africa. Exotic languages such as Nepali, Luganda spoken in Uganda or Kassonkhé spoken in Mali and domestic languages such as Croatian as spoken in the Austrian Province Burgenland were introduced. An author of books for adolescents read from one of his books which prompted them to continue to read themselves right away. Joking with members of the association of police and Africans called „Fair and sensitive“ and getting a taste of the languages from Nigeria Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa was also great fun. The children were fascinated by the crash course in Austrian gesture language with the deaf Member of Parliament Helene Jarmer.

Students of the commercial highschool Sacré Cœur held highly entertaining exemplary school units in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Turkish for the younger ones. Having themselves, among others, Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish and Filipino roots they managed to convey not only languages but also self-confidence to children with a first language other than German. At the same time the commercial highschool students demonstrated that a solid knowledge of ones mother tongue is an important prerequisite for successfully learning German.

The diversity of languages in Vienna and in its third district has invaluable potentials. These have to be utilized. Children should feel proud of being able to speak more than one language. With such accomplishments they will be in great demand at the labour market. The association of female migrants LEFÖ presented the results of a survey on multilingualism in Vienna. 80% of the multilingual interviewees confirmed that their language skills constitute a definite advantage in their professional life. Therefore, the promotion of children's multilingualism is a necessity. The District Language Day was meant to contribute to it and will be repeated next year.