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LANGUAGE CAFÉS IN BERLIN AS AN EXAMPLE OF INFORMAL EDUCATION

Mastering a foreign language is a «must-have» in today's multicultural world. These questions have been raised for centuries, and people continue to seek opportunities and solutions to address this issue. Educational tourism is one way to achieve this goal: the aim of travel is to improve language skills and immerse oneself in the cultural surroundings of native speakers of the target language. There are different definitions of the term «educational tourism»; modern researchers often use the term «academic tourism» instead. Traveling to another country can be not only a thoroughly thought-out idea for educational development, but also a forced or necessitated action for a refugee and an international worker. Being in a new country, this person is trying to adapt as quickly as possible, and mastering a new language is essential. They try all available forms of learning (formal or informal ones). In our research, we would like to highlight some aspects of informal education, particularly focusing on the analysis of language cafes' performance, trends, and peculiarities of their work.

The idea of using a catering venue as an appropriate place for education has long historical roots. The researcher M. Cengiz Yildiz draws attention to the fact that after gaining people's tastes, coffeehouses became a perfect place for sharing thoughts and discussions: «When it appeared it was a place for drink coffee but in fact it became a place for chatting and sharing problems with other people» [1, p. 1364]. This tradition thrived in Europe and reached the UK: «In 17th and 18th century England, coffeehouses were also popular places for people from all walks of life to go and meet, chat, gossip and have fun, whilst enjoying the latest fashion, a drink newly arrived in Europe from Turkey – coffee... Unlike public houses, no alcohol was served, and women were excluded. Each coffeehouse had a particular clientele, usually defined by occupation, interest or attitude, such as Tories and Whigs, traders and merchants, poets and authors, and men of fashion and leisure... polite conversation led to reasoned and sober debate on matters of politics, science, literature and poetry, commerce and religion, so much so that London coffeehouses became known as 'penny universities', as that was

the price of a cup of coffee. Influential patrons included Samuel Pepys, John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Isaac Newton» [2].

In the XX–XXI century, this approach returned. Nowadays, many public organizations and educational institutions are coming back to such practice, aiming to help their students or newcomers to the country to improve their language skills. The initiative is supported by the European Union (these projects are appearing as a promising part of the adaptation process for refugees, digital nomads, international workers, and students). We focused on the performance of language cafes in Berlin. After the analysis, we concluded that there are more than 20 language cafes operating in Berlin. More than half of them have been working for over five years. Six of them have been working for more than ten years. For example, «The Open Language Cafés are spaces for learning languages in a relaxed and semi-structured environment. Rather than being a traditional language school with a teacher and a student, it allows people to interact casually over a cup of tea or coffee and snacks. Participants are encouraged to converse freely on their topics of interest in smaller groups adjusted to their level of fluency. Competent speaker volunteers are on hand to provide guidance and more targeted learning for those who desire it» [3]. The vast majority of venues offer three languages to master, such as English, German, and Arabic, for instance: «While the German language café has been very useful for newcomers to Berlin, the English language café addressed particular needs in our community» [3]. The trend for mastering Arabic is relatively new; many language cafes have started this course since the 2020s. In our opinion, this can be attributed to the increasing need to communicate with Arabic-speaking representatives of Berlin's population. Additionally, there are German courses specifically designed for women. As we can see, this educational service segment is evolving to meet the community's needs. The curriculum of language cafes is flexible; participants are able to impact it, adding the topics that they are interested in. The dominant form of interaction is pair work. There are no language assessment activities included in such cafes' work.

Therefore, the history of language cafes is long, and these venues have been widely known in Europe since the seventeenth century. These days, language cafes in Berlin are an essential part of informal language education. The top three languages offered for study are English, German, and Arabic. Many of them are organized by university communities, local communities, or refugee assistance centers.

References

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