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## **BAZAAR: INFORMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING AND EXCHANGE AT MARKET PLACES**

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### **Introduction**

The main aim of the European Research & Development project 'Bazaar: Learning and Exchange at the Market Place' (<http://www.bazaarproject.eu><sup>1</sup>) is to promote language learning and at the same time the exchange experiences, knowledge and ideas amongst adult learners with a migrant background in daily settings. The educational approach is based on the key concepts of learner centricity; informal learning; learning embedded in everyday contexts; social inclusion, community and citizenship. By these means Bazaar tries:

- To empower individuals, to promote social interaction and enhance intercultural dialogue at community level;
- To relate to societal needs, to promote social dialogue and social inclusion of migrants and to encourage their civic engagement;
- To trigger the motivation to learn amongst the migrant population in the partner countries, especially those often excluded from education e.g. older men and women;
- To design and to test learning activities, methods and materials that are sustainable and replicable.

Bazaar uses the term 'Market Place' in both ways, literally and metaphorically:

- As a concrete space where people naturally meet and interact;
- As a place used to facilitate communication, cooperation, intercultural awareness and a ground of mediation to resolve possible resolve conflicts;
- As a concrete learning environment that sustains the integrity of all learners as they attain relevant educational success;
- As a place of ideas and as a place to apply creative thinking;
- As a learning facilitator.

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<sup>1</sup> This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The concepts of Bazaar have been tested in diverse learning environments in Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

## **Bazaar within the Changing Dynamics of Learning**

### ***Formal, Non-formal & Informal Learning***

In the field of developing language competences for migrants, formal learning plays a role, if proof of minimal language competences is a legal condition e.g. for the permission to stay, to work, to have a right for social support, to be allowed to claim for citizenship. Those legal regulations traditionally need formal accredited institutions to deliver the compulsory language competences in a sufficiently standardized way.

Non-formal learning can be found, for example, in voluntarily taken language courses, based on codified curricula and learning methods, materials and related certification schemes. They seem to be offered mostly in the countries of origin, under rules set by the big national institutions which have a legal responsibility for the respective language as a 'foreign language'.

Informal learning occurs most frequently when migrants experience or suffer from serious limitations in their basic needs (ranging from hunger to social contacts and life perspectives). Motivated by physical and social survival, they search for and identify every means to improve their communication competences. In many cases these are completely unconscious: from nonverbal signal systems, body language expressions and using words without any grammar or with the most rudimentary construction. This behaviour is consistently observed in migrants starting to survive in a foreign language environment without any local language competences acquired in formal or non-formal learning.

As a consequence Bazaar needs wide ranging definitions of learning and learning materials. This means employing learning resources of whatever origin as they are used in informal processes by supportive persons such as parents, sisters and brothers, other relatives, neighbours, peers of all types, volunteers etc. They are also used when supporting any type of bridging between formal and informal learning. In Bazaar these resources and tools of informal language learning are extended to everyone involved in the process i.e. the Bazaar marketplace. Contextualized classical media is used as a language learning resource.

### ***Lifelong Learning***

Language learning in the compulsory schooling is not sufficient for the needs of 21st century globalised societies. This is of particular true for migrants: language competences and support for social inclusion needs learning 'from cradle to grave' in order to provide equal opportunities for all EU citizens irrespective of age, gender, place of living, socio-economic and educational status and cultural background. As a consequence this needs measures to increase substantially the national language competences of subgroups like elderly migrants under intensive care or living in sheltered homes, mostly with special needs and mental

disorders. Bazaar needs to pay also some attention to language competence challenges caused by the processes of demographic change.

### ***Life-Wide Learning***

Life-wide learning implies that learning processes are no longer regarded as restricted to one role in the life of citizens (e.g. as a professional; as a parent) or related to citizenship, values or beliefs, but relevant for all roles, including transfer between and synergies amongst those roles as well as increased coherence between them.

The metaphor of markets highlighted in Bazaar almost automatically includes such a life-wide learning perspective encompassing basic needs, social contacts, leisure and entertaining elements, professional development, volunteer commitment and so on. In the past learning resources were scarce and costly. Language learning needed to be organized in activities, predominantly or even completely for learning outcomes to be 'stocked' for future use: they were not structured for immediate use in everyday life.

With accessibility to 'all knowledge of the world' for anybody anytime anywhere, learning resources and learning opportunities became and will continue to become an integral part of all human activities. As all activities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are in permanent flux (i.e. economic, technological, demographical, cultural, conditions for life, housing, mobility etc), human activities not only allow learning integrated into, but demand permanent and immanent learning processes.

### ***Life-Embedded Learning***

Paraphrasing a term from technology (i.e. 'embedding' ICT functionalities into almost all technical devices in the nearby future), the term Life-Embedded Learning (LEL) is increasingly used. LEL means learning processes that are functionally integrated into all our activities. They are informal and sometimes intended, but also frequently not intended. However, they always produce learning outcomes that can be assessed. For example, more and more people learn a lot preparing for, during and after a consultation with a doctor on their health problems. By undertaking this procedure they are becoming 'competent patients' in a cooperative process maintaining and improving their health in a mutually beneficial partnership.

### ***Life-Relevant Learning***

By merging the strands of lifelong, life-wide and life-embedded learning into Life-Relevant Learning (LRL), the implicit processes and outcomes will become more relevant for an individual. The empirical evidence of the last decades demonstrates that the relevance of learning and its outcomes is by far the most important factor for learning success. When expected learning outcomes are sufficiently relevant for an individual, she or he will find adequate and accessible ways to achieve these outcomes. The contributions of didactic concepts, preparation of learning material and learning pathways seem to have marginal impact on learning outcomes. The almost ubiquitous availability of learning resources 'at your

fingertips' puts the focus on the motivation of the individual. We have to select only a few priorities, even though we are confronted with an almost infinite choice of learning opportunities. It may not be not always fully recognised today, but personal priority decisions become more and more central.

Lifelong, life-wide, life-embedded equals life-relevant learning or  $LL + LW + LE = LRL$  as a 'formula'. Life-relevant learning has the societal potential to convert learning as a privilege for some into learning as a human right for mankind. This human right has to and will include the Bazaar target group of disadvantaged migrants. Bazaar will paradigmatically refer to learning resources, learning practices, learning environments and the underlying learning cultures as an interpretation of the richness of our learning marketplace metaphor.

## **The Bazaar Language Learning Programme**

### ***Framework***

Proposed and launched in 2001 by Council of Europe "to achieve greater unity among its members by the adaptation of common action in the cultural field", Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) aims at improving language learning in accordance with certain general measures. Namely these measures have been set out to include the following:

- To deal with the business of everyday life in another country;
- To exchange information and ideas with young people and adults speaking a different language and to communicate their thoughts and feelings;
- To attain a wider and a deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other people's and of their cultural heritage;
- To promote, encourage and support the efforts of teachers and learners at all levels to apply to their own situation by basing language teaching and learning on the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of the learners; by defining realistic objectives as clearly as possible; by developing appropriate methods and materials; by developing suitable forms and instruments for the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Bazaar has adopted the above aims and objectives and applied them to its everyday migrant cultures and communities. The project aimed to raise the awareness of our migrant learners' current knowledge of their target culture and language

### ***Objectives***

The language learning programme proposed by Bazaar therefore comprises four dimensions:

- Global – introducing the participants to all competence areas of the target language, namely, linguistic competence, socio-linguistic competence and pragmatic competence leading to general communicative competence;
- Modular – improving learners' language competences in a bazaar setting for particular purpose;
- Weighted – focusing on acquiring language skills in certain directions and proficiency levels;

- Partial – taking a teaching responsibility only for certain activities and skills in line with the particular bazaar settings existing in the project partner countries.

### **Methodology**

In order to fulfil the project's ambitious objectives, the language learning programme of Bazaar has been designed to be realistic, comprehensive, authentic, transparent and coherent. In this context comprehensive means that specifying a pre-set range of language knowledge, skills and use as much as possible. By realistic, we mean a down-to-earth approach adapting the slice of real life situations in its teaching, activities and materials. By authentic, we mean utilizing real life materials that the learners might encounter in their daily life. By transparent, we mean that the information to be presented is clearly designed and explicit in order to achieve co-constructed and foreseeable outcomes. As for the coherence, we mean the programmes have orderly and contradiction-free internal structures. The design of the programme has been arranged in a manner that it is multi-purpose, flexible, open, dynamic, user-friendly and non-dogmatic:

- Its multi-purpose design provides an easily-applicable structure for the full variety of purposes involved in the planning and provision of facilities for language learning as far as communication skills and target culture literacy.
- Its flexibility provides an adaptable platform to use the programme in different circumstances.
- Its open nature serves us with its capability of further extensions and refinements.
- Its dynamic design enables a continuous evolution and modifications in response to experience in its use.
- As it is very user-friendly in its design, it is readily understandable and applicable by the trainers and the learners.

Being non-dogmatic, the programme adopts an eclectic mode and it is not restricted to any linguistic or educational theories of practices.

The Bazaar Learning programme offers 40 to 60 hours of training in an informal learning environment. Considering the social and psychological barriers of the prospective immigrant participants non-threatening learning and supportive environment have been created to facilitate the learning and to encourage a social ambience to embrace them. For this very reason, Bazaar involves peer trainers from the target immigrant groups to support the socialization process and to avoid communication break downs.

The language skills, specifically receptive, productive and interactive skills, to be attained in the programme have been specified as A1 and A2 according to CEF. The reason for this is that the participants are expected to be total or false beginners in the target foreign languages and, for the feasibility purposes, these levels are the outmost levels to be attained by basic users. The teaching materials and activities essentially reflect real life use and are communicative in nature to the extent that they require learners to comprehend, negotiate and express meaning in order to achieve a communicative goals such as ordering, bargaining, marketing, labelling, asking for appointment, obtaining health services etc.

By the same token, the tasks to be utilized involve creative, skill based, problem solving, routine transactions, performing a role in a communicative act, taking part in a discussion, planning a course of action, reading and replying to a message, carrying out banking transaction, functioning in government offices. In summary, the programme aims at equipping the participants with the skills required to function in personal, public and occupational domains in real life.

The project proposes a flexible series of piloting steps in which the content is arranged and compiled according to the needs of the practitioners and the learners. The piloting has been structured so that it is familiar to the various bazaar contexts in the partner countries and so would obtain relevant data for stakeholders who would benefit from the outcomes of the project. The piloting steps include the following:

- Step 1. Identifying the learning context;
- Step 2. Identifying the learners;
- Step 3. Conducting needs analyses;
- Step 4. Responding to the needs through the organisation of the learning objectives;
- Step 5. Involving peer leaders, trainers and coaches and having an exchanging workshop to prepare an action plan;
- Step 6. Development of learning materials;
- Step 7. Carrying out the activities with the target group;
- Step 8. Follow-up evaluation, reporting and documenting.

### ***Learning Materials***

In the material development, Bazaar followed a consistent and real life-based approach equipping the learners with the skills required to function in linguistic, social and cultural contexts. In this approach, the competencies related with receptive, productive and interactive skills at A1 and A2 levels have been considered in the development of materials. The topics referred to in these materials and the related learning activities cover the ones encountered frequently in their daily life such as: Personal details/experiences; Work; Education and training; Housing; Family and friends; Health, care and well being; Transport; Weather; Buying goods; Leisure; and the Host society.

The learning activities may include communicative tasks that learners are required to tackle in order to deal with the situations in real life context such as communicating with a landlord about a house repair to be done, or negotiating with a supplier for a purchase. In these activities, the learners are asked to engage with a wide range of text types such as the following: Advertisements; Public signs and notices; Lists; Timetables; Forms; Records; Diagrams; Letters, emails and other correspondence; Notes; Leaflets; Sets of instructions; Simple narratives; Simplified newspaper or magazine articles.

### **Language Learning Activities**

Bazaar language activities are contextualized within particular situations in which social life is organized. Within this scope, the activities involve the performance of tasks which are not solely language activities. In realising these tasks, the learners' communicative competence is activated. The communicative competence has the following components:

- Linguistic competence;
- Sociolinguistic competence;
- Pragmatic competence.

The term 'communicative competence' refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of rules, sounds and vocabulary, as well as his/her social knowledge about how and when to use this knowledge appropriately. In order to deal with the social dimension of language use, additional to the linguistic knowledge, one has to be competent in using communication strategies that vary from one culture to another. Linguistic markers of social relations such as use and choice of greetings, or politeness conventions are frequent sources of inter-cultural misunderstandings.

Similarly, competence in use of interaction strategies, such as the ability to use a suitable phrase to take turns during a conversation, is a requirement for the successful performance of communicative functions. Keeping these in mind, Bazaar learning activities are structured in a way that asks learners to carry out communicative tasks engaging learners in language activities and communication strategies at the same time. In the selection of such tasks, the context in which learners are being prepared to operate is considered. The following - 'Communication at Shops/Markets/Bazaars' illustrates language-using tasks learners may be required to tackle in order to deal with the situations which might arise in their daily life.

In addition to real life tasks as exemplified above, the Bazaar training programme also includes some other kinds of tasks that are pedagogic in nature. The aim of such tasks is language acquisition in particular. This type of language activity offers the de-contextualized practice of target language forms and orthographic knowledge for handling the writing system of the language in focus.

### **Results of the Bazaar Pilots**

In the last year five hosting countries of Bazaar conducted their piloting, which represents the heart of the project, the concrete product of the "learner – centred" and "informal learning" innovative approach of Bazaar.

*Bulgaria* signed a cooperation agreement with the State Agency for Refugees and then worked in Sofia with a group of 19 refugees recently arrived in Bulgaria and with little or no Bulgarian. Since most of them wanted to stay in the country and to find a job, the activities' aim was to give a basic knowledge of Bulgarian. At the end of the piloting all learners were able to manage a basic conversation and they were ready to come in contact with the hosting society in a deeper way.

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*Germany* is still running a piloting exercise in Erlangen with very particular features and aims, called “MediCourse for Refugees”. It is addressed to chronically ill refugees, pregnant women and parents of small children who have a pressing need to learn German so they can communicate with the physician and the medical staff and follow the rules of conduct in relation to their disease.

*Italy* held three pilots from October 2013 to October 2014 in Perugia, involving three different target groups: Moroccan women, Ukrainian caregivers and a group of migrants of mixed origins. All the participants had in common that they haven’t received was no previous formal education in Italian. The pilots generally started in a market square and then took place in indoor locations. The feedback from the participants was positive, inasmuch as some of them decided to keep on studying Italian in formal courses.

*Portugal* held its piloting in one of the most multicultural squares of Lisbon in the month of August 2014. Portuguese trainers were generally young students of language and came from foreign communities; they had very long sessions on Saturday afternoon and they worked especially with young Chinese women who wanted to start their own business or had it already and needed to improve their basic skills in Portuguese.

The *United Kingdom* experienced a really interesting piloting in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire with a group of Pakistani immigrant women with little or no English. Helped by a peer mentor from the Pakistani community, these women were gradually taken from their ‘comfort zones’ into new informal situations of life and English use and they carried out the learning activities in such as the staffroom of their children’s school, a local supermarket, the library and a gymnasium.

## **Lessons Learnt & Recommendations**

When designing the piloting activities of Bazaar the project partners asked themselves: “What factors could cause language training for our migrant communities to fail?”

Those organising the language learning need to appreciate that failure may result from:

- Focus on formal learning and teacher-centred training cultures;
- Not taking account of learners’ perspective/learners’ orientation;
- Inadequate methodologies / knowledge / intermediates;
- Deficiency of skills related to this kind of engagement (‘cultural arrogance’);
- Lack of resources for customizing learning materials and dealing with diversity (e.g. learning styles, cultural differences etc.).

External factors, often societal, may also contribute to the failure of language learning under the Bazaar approach. The following aspects were highlighted:

- Cultural bias, racism and xenophobia;
- Lack of cooperation with local partners and authorities;



- Characteristics of the target groups: previous educational experiences, resilience/self-reliance;
- Resistance to cultural integration (perceived as ‘acculturation’);
- Inadequate funding;
- Social exclusion /marginalisation (lack of inclusive culture in the hosting society).

The experiences and reports from the national ‘Bazaars’ around Europe indicate that it is possible to avoid the possible pitfalls and threats highlighted above by adopting the following processes:

- Meet the people where they are, meet and interact e.g. on the street, in shopping malls, on the marketplace. Create and use the borderless classroom!
- Undertake intensive user needs analyses and stakeholder/community consultations when planning the activities. Listen to their voice!
  - But don’t expect that learners express their needs easily! Sometimes you need to encourage them and try to dig deeper;
  - Take different interests and requirements of individuals and communities into account;
  - Build on existing skills and competences of participants;
  - Language skills within one group should not differ too much. This avoids frustrations and promotes a more stable learning process within the group.
- Build and secure cooperation and partnerships with local stakeholders, actors, organisations, institutions etc.
- Become acquainted with and respect the cultural differences that support language learning in particular and social inclusion in general.
- Encourage informal and collaborative peer learning rooted in daily life settings around life relevant topics.
- Arrange for suitable, comfortable, safe and learner-friendly learning environments.
- Build understanding and trust amongst leaders, peers, trainers, learners and surrounding actors (e.g. children of the learners).
- Involve community leaders and peers in promoting language learning:
  - Engage intermediaries i.e. peer tutors, mentors, coaches (mostly volunteers) in explaining and conducting language learning ...
  - ... however, ensure coaching and/or training of peer tutors, mentors, coaches before engaging them in the learning activities.
- Flexibility and focus on the learners are key, so make sure they are there in the:
  - Learning arrangements;
  - Syllabus;
  - Adaptable and customisable learning materials;
  - Learning processes;
  - Timing of activities;
  - Organisation of the groups.

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- Learning objects, materials and processes need to be rooted in real life contexts and needs:
  - Development of tailor-made learning solutions by all involved in the learning process (User Generated Content);
  - The learning process is a mutual activity undertaken in partnership by peer mentors, trainers and learners.
- Encourage intergenerational approaches i.e. young family members and friends can help older learners, not only in acquiring language competences, but also with emotional support and motivation.
- Hard-to-reach learners such as migrants need more motivation and encouragement than other groups:
  - Provide effective feedback and support to learners.
- Language learning and 'learning-to-learn' goes often hand in hand:
  - Perceive language learning as a 'bridge' to more and deeper learning activities.
- Social engagement processes between trainers and learners might easily go beyond language teaching and learning:
  - Expect and try to integrate 'external' aspects (e.g. problems in daily life) into the learning process.