

Lifelong Learning (LLL) – What does that mean?

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The concept of LLL has in recent years become an "in" word, often used, in a very wide range of meanings, and also frequently fairly unclear in its implications.

The term "lifelong learning" can be paraphrased in one sentence: "It's never too soon or too late for learning."

Or, in more detail and more academically, it can be defined as follows: "Lifelong learning is a continuous process of knowledge acquisition by integrating knowledge and experiences in the course of formal or informal learning."

Lifelong learning is thus affected by an exchange between cultures or intercultural dialogue.

Today's conference within the framework of the "weReurope" project focuses, in particular, on learning to understand things that are foreign, different, and on overcoming borders that need not be geographical.

For Austria, however, geographical borders and the connected "looking beyond the borders" is of major importance, the reason being that Austria is a small country in Europe, but it has the largest number of neighbours, as eight different countries border Austria. Therefore, the topic of overcoming geographical borders and maintaining contact with a wide diversity of neighbouring cultures is also essential for this country, both in terms of people from the neighbouring countries coming to Austria, or Austrians going to neighbouring countries, as tourists or to work and train there.

This form of mobility has grown strongly in recent years in Austria, not least because several European programmes promote learning and working abroad. Our experience with these exchange programmes shows that this intensive contact with other cultures, mainly the joint handling of everyday life, leads to stereotypes and prejudices being seen more critically and barriers being lowered. The comparison of external image and self-image (how do I see the others, how do the others see me) opens eyes and ears.

A clear increase in work placements abroad and periods of work spent abroad can not only be identified among students in higher education but also among schoolchildren and apprentices, with a rise in the number of work placements abroad e.g. in 2007 by 15%.

Individual, practical experience of every individual with other cultures, languages, lifestyles and religions reduces fears – fears of new developments and xenophobia.