

# Enhancing language learning in multilingual higher education: subject classes, language classes and student life at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano\*

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## **Abstract**

Multilingual universities where different subjects are taught in different languages, as is the case at the trilingual Free University of Bozen/Bolzano (FUB), face the challenge of supporting students' language learning and use before and during their studies.

To reach this goal, a wide variety of foreign language classes has therefore to be offered by the Language Centre; furthermore, subject matter classes have to be designed in such a way that they enhance and reinforce students' language proficiency without language being an obstacle to content comprehension, especially for first year students. Language learning, however, goes way beyond classroom instruction: autonomous learning and social interaction outside the institution are vital elements for L2-L3 progress and should therefore be integrated with the uppermost consideration into a multilingual university's language planning.

Taking such issues as a starting point, the paper sketches the development of the FUB since its creation in 1997; it then focuses on the activities of an interfaculty Language Workgroup which was set up in 2004 to analyse the multilingual orientation of the university at the three levels of a) language classes offered, b) content and language integration and c) autonomous language learning and language use.

Specific measures to enhance language learning and communication taken so far, as well as initiatives to be implemented over the next academic years, will be presented and discussed; among them, a vademecum for students, semi-structured and self-organized free time activities, all of which were discussed and conceived out together with students.

## **1. Introduction**

Research and practice in multilingual universities have traditionally focused on issues such as the need to offer a wide variety of language classes - from general language to language for specific purposes, from academic writing to presentation skills in a foreign language - in order to allow students to follow multilingual studies effectively; on the other hand, specific attention has been devoted to the problem of recruiting and training teaching staff specifically able to work in multilingual environments, tackling such aspects as instructors' language proficiency in a foreign language, particularly English, and the integration of content and language learning (CLIL) in subject matter classes (see Van Leeuwen / Wilkinson, 2003; Wilkinson, 2004).

Bearing in mind that language progress, though, can take place in but also outside the classroom, a further question emerges quite clearly in the context of multilingual higher education, namely: what can a university do to improve language learning *beyond* the institutional offer of language classes and subject matter classes?

Without diminishing the importance of classroom instruction, time now seems ripe for multilingual universities to adopt a wider, holistic perspective which takes into account the whole context of student life. A first step in this direction is considering autonomous language learning and social interaction outside the institution as a vital component of the language policy an institution can adopt in order to enhance students' multilingual competence, as is argued in the following by showing concrete examples taken from the recent experience of the trilingual Free University of Bozen-Bolzano.

## **2. The Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and its language models**

Founded in 1997 as a free, state-recognized university, the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano started its academic activities in fall 1998 with the School of Economics and Management and the Faculty of Education. With an initial body of nearly 250 students, in the following years the institution experienced a rapid growth, which led not only to an increase in the courses offered by the already existing faculties<sup>1</sup>, but also to the creation of two new faculties, namely the Faculty of Computer Science in 2001 and the Faculty of Design and Art in 2002. As of the academic year 2004-2005, the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano was the study place for about 2,300 students from over 30 countries<sup>2</sup>, offering in total ten bachelor programs, three master programs, two PhD programs and three courses for professionals. The activation of further degree and master courses is planned for the near future of this still young institution.

Since the very beginning, multilingualism has been a main feature of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, together with its international orientation and teaching staff<sup>3</sup>; German and Italian, which are the two main languages spoken in South Tyrol<sup>4</sup>, are consequently used as languages of instruction in most courses,

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<sup>1</sup> An illustration of the University's first years of activity can be found in Campisi (2000).

<sup>2</sup> In the same a.y., the percentage of foreign students amounted to about 11.50%, 9.20% of which (206) were from German speaking countries. From a language distribution perspective, instead, 59.12% of the whole student body had German as the secondary school main language, 36.51% had Italian, 1.71% Ladin and 0,85% English, while other languages were represented for the remaining 1.81%. Percentages are calculated on a basis of 2,336 enrolled students, as reported by the University Press and Communication Office.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to its legal status, the University can recruit up to 70% of the teaching body from abroad.

<sup>4</sup> The area of South Tyrol is an autonomous province with a German speaking (69.15% of the whole local population) and a Ladin speaking (4.37%) minority within the Italian state (source: Astat, Volkszählung 2001); German is legally parified, and consequently used in written and

together with English as the lingua franca of scientific and professional communities worldwide.

Such an initial decision, though, has not failed to take into account the local context and the peculiar needs and regulations of the area, which is characterized by the coexistence of the Italian, the German and the Ladin language groups: this is evident in the orientation of the Faculty of Education, which, given the local school system's organization in German, Italian and Ladin schools<sup>5</sup>, offers bachelor and master courses for future Nursery, Primary and Secondary School teachers respectively in German and Italian, or, for the Ladin section, in German, Italian and Ladin. Besides that, the Faculty prepares students to work for local social and healthcare institutions in German and Italian (see table 1).

<b>Languages</b>	<b>Course offered</b>	<b>Language requirements for admission</b>
<i>monolingual courses (German; Italian)</i>	Nursery and Primary School Teachers, Secondary School Teachers (German and Italian schools)	secondary school study of Italian or German as L2 (10% of global score for admission ranking) <sup>6</sup>
<i>trilingual courses (German, Italian, Ladin)</i>	Nursery and Primary School Teachers (Ladin schools)	secondary school study of German/Italian as L2 (10% of global score for admission ranking)
<i>bilingual courses (German, Italian)</i>	Community Educators, Social Work	knowledge of L2 (Italian or German), to be certified within 1 <sup>st</sup> year

*Table 1: The Faculty of Education and its language models*

The use of German, Italian and English as languages of instruction, however, characterizes the courses offered by the School of Economics and Management, the Faculty of Design and Art and that of Computer Science, which have implemented trilingualism throughout the years opting for language models that would suit their specific needs and profile, and adapting them both on the basis of student response and in terms of language competence promotion itself (see tables 2 and 3, showing faculties' peculiarities and differences in terms of language admission requirements, the kind of support given to language development within the curriculum and the balance between the three languages of instruction).

The School of Economics and Management was the first to introduce changes to its admission policy and to language support, going from the initial students'

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spoken form in public official domains such as administration and courtrooms. For a description of the sociolinguistic situation of South Tyrol see Egger (2001); analysis of bilingualism and inter-group communication are given in Riehl (2004), Veronesi (2001, 2003), Willeit (2001), Egger (1994) and Weber Egli (1992).

<sup>5</sup> This model is legally anchored to the Second Autonomy Statute of 1972.

<sup>6</sup> This regulation does not apply to the courses for Secondary School Teachers (S.S.I.S.), which is directly linked to national laws.

obligation to demonstrate the knowledge of at least two languages of instruction prior to enrolment<sup>7</sup> to the current requirement (enforced since 2002-2003) for one language only. Past strict regulations have thus given way to softer admission requirements; nevertheless, the importance of reaching a functional trilingualism is clearly stated to students, among other things<sup>8</sup>, by the fact that the certified knowledge of all languages of instruction is a pre-condition not only to enroll in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year but also to attend classes and take exams for subject matters taught in those languages. Furthermore, since 2003-2004 the curriculum for the second and third year includes two language classes (general language and language for special purposes<sup>9</sup>), which became mandatory in 2004-2005<sup>10</sup>.

Another important aspect of such a trilingual model is the flexibility and balance of language use: this is why on the one hand subject-matter classes have only one official language, which affects also teaching and learning materials; on the other, in the context of less formal types of instructor-student interaction, such as exercises and labs held by teaching assistants, languages other than the course's official one can be and are employed. This practice not only gives students the chance to face specific content in different languages, but can also counterbalance the efforts put into learning a subject matter in a foreign language, given the fact that, depending on the students' language biography, the used languages may have the status of L1 or L2 and thus represent a more familiar linguistic basis<sup>11</sup>.

The Faculty of Design and Art, in turn, has experienced major changes in language requirements, although this has occurred by following a quite different path. Its initial three years (starting in a.y. 2002-2003) were characterized by a not rigorous 'language block' to enrolment, which meant that students, besides passing specific design admission tests, were required to know only one of the three languages of instruction; in the event they were not proficient in one or two languages, they were granted one year to follow compulsory language classes and pass the corresponding exams at the Language Centre. This model, though, resulted to be quite problematic especially for students who were beginners in

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<sup>7</sup> The knowledge of the third language had to be proved, at B1-B2 level as certified by the Language Centre, by the end of first year. If language requirements were not met, students could not continue their studies.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, since the School has a limited intake, students who can certify the knowledge of all the three or two languages are given priority in enrolment over those who can only certify one language.

<sup>9</sup> The School is currently considering offering undergraduate students an additional course in "Communication Skills" in English, as it already happens in master courses.

<sup>10</sup> When such classes were still optional, success in language learning was incentivized in that by passing the corresponding exams with a high grade (more than 25 out of 30), students received 2 extra points for their final degree thesis.

<sup>11</sup> A different model is being piloted for the degree course in "Economics and Social Sciences", which was activated in 2004-2005: in the first year, which is taught completely in English, students attend two language classes (general language in the first semester and LSP in the second); German and Italian are introduced in the second and third year as languages of instruction for subject matters, for a total of 25% of the whole curriculum.

more than one language: the fact that the degree course has a strong practical side and involves a considerable amount of time spent in labs and on design projects resulted in a study overload that clearly interfered with students' linguistic progress and study success.

In order to reach a more balanced relationship between subject matter and language learning, the Faculty has therefore introduced, starting with the academic year 2005-2006, a new regulation<sup>12</sup> which puts great emphasis on supporting students' language needs prior to enrolment.

As in the past years candidates need to be able to certify at least one of the three teaching languages before being admitted to the degree course; now, though, they can only be beginners in one of the other two, which means that if they have no knowledge of two languages they are unable to enroll. If they are beginners in one language, they have to follow a compulsory 100-hour course in the summer prior to enrolment, as well as a 120-hour follow-up course in the first semester plus a 40-hour intensive course during semester break. If they have been unable to certify the third language (but are not at beginner level), they will follow a 50-hour course in that language in the second semester, plus a summer course if needed. Consequently, they should be able to certify all three languages by the beginning of their second year.

<b>Bachelor</b>	<b>School of Economics and Management</b>	<b>Faculty of Design and Art</b>	<b>Faculty of Computer Science</b>
<i>PAST language requirements for admission</i>	knowledge of 2 languages	1 language; others to be certified by end of 1 <sup>st</sup> year	no formal requirements; (logical thinking) admission test in English
<i>PRESENT language requirements for admission</i>	at least 1 language	at least 1 language; absolute beginners only in 1 language	same
<i>Non certified languages</i>	compulsory language classes (1st year, 80-90 to 120 hours)	compulsory language classes (100+120 hours + 40 hours; 50 hours)	not compulsory "English Refresher Course" for 1 <sup>st</sup> year students (40 hours, September)
<i>2nd year enrolment and attendance of classes</i>	LAT passed	LAT passed	no language requirements
<i>Language courses within the curriculum</i>	2 language courses (2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year, 10 credits)	3 language courses (9 credits)	3 language courses (1st and 2nd year, general language, LSP, 12 credits)
<i>Language incentives</i>	none	1 credit for thesis abstract in L2 and L3	none
<i>Languages of instruction (subject matters)</i>	40% English, 35% Italian, 25% German	40% Italian; 40% German, 20% English	90% English, 5% Italian, 5% German
<i>Further aspects</i>	work with TAs in more languages	"Integrated projects" with 3 professors/3 languages	1 <sup>st</sup> year labs in English, German, Italian 2 courses in Italian or German ("General Skills") 1 course in German (3 <sup>rd</sup> year)

<sup>12</sup> The model was worked out and discussed by an internal committee composed of subject matter and language instructors, most of whom later joined the newly established interfaculty "Language Workgroup" (see below, 3.).

Table 2: Language models for bachelor courses in Bozen-Bolzano<sup>13</sup>

Besides that, students are required to take three language classes (advanced general language and LSP) during the whole period of study, and one extra credit is given if the degree thesis is provided with an abstract in the other two languages.

While subject matter classes are taught in one language, the curriculum also foresees so-called “integrated projects”, which are jointly held by three instructors dealing with theoretical and practical issues in more languages, thus reinforcing practices of multilingual communication in the classroom.

As regards the Faculty of Computer Science, English has been chosen as the main language of instruction, in order to offer local students the opportunity to practise on a daily basis what is considered as *the* language of this field, and to create an international study community by addressing foreign students both from Europe and from non-European countries.

As a result, ‘core’ subject matters are taught in English, while in the first year labs are also offered in German and Italian. Later on, that is, in the third year, students are asked to choose two “general skills” classes in Italian or German; an additional humanity course is held in German<sup>14</sup>.

Master	School of Economics and Management	Faculty of Design and Art (from 2006-2007)	Faculty of Computer Science
<i>Language requirements for admission</i>	at least 1 language	to be defined	no formal requirements
<i>Language courses within the curriculum</i>	“Communication skills” in English	to be defined	“Technical writing” in English
<i>Languages of instruction (subject matters)</i>	40% English 35% Italian 25% German	to be defined	100% English

Table 3: Language models for master courses in Bozen-Bolzano

<sup>13</sup> The bachelor course in “Logistics and Production Engineering”, which, being run in cooperation with the “Politecnico di Torino”, is not formally integrated in a faculty, has also German, Italian and English as languages of instruction; students are required to know at least one of them, while they are allowed to certify the knowledge of the other(s) by the end of their studies; furthermore, in order to sit their final degree exam, they have to pass, with merit, the *Preliminary English Test* (ESOL), or any other higher-level Cambridge certificate, and to certify not known languages at the Language Centre. In the 1<sup>st</sup> year, students have to follow a Technical English course.

<sup>14</sup> Currently the introduction of new regulations is being discussed, with the goal of offering foreign students greater opportunities to study Italian and/or German during their studies.

### 3. What do we know about ourselves? The “Language Workgroup” and its activities

After seven years of intense activity, time was felt ripe for a thorough reflection on what had been done so far to implement and support multilingualism at the Free University; also, given the smaller-scale yet constant growth of the institution, in terms of courses offered, student and teaching body, bottom-up orientations for defining the future language policy were considered of vital importance; thirdly, the growing interest for having a fine-grained analysis of communication practices from a linguistics perspective on the one hand, and for providing suitable room for interdisciplinary discussion between language experts and subject-matter experts on the other, needed to be put into practice by creating specific contexts of realization.

Consequently, in fall 2004 an interfaculty “Language Workgroup” (*Arbeitsgruppe Sprachen / Gruppo di lavoro lingue*) was established with the precise goal of analysing and enhancing multilingualism at the University; the 18-body workgroup is composed of members of the faculties (the dean and a professor from each), of the Language Centre (the director and the coordinators for English, German and Italian), of student representatives and of members of the Centre for Language Studies (the director and a researcher), which also coordinates activities as part of the three-year project “Multilingual teaching and learning at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano”<sup>15</sup>.

Given the general aim of the project to develop a specific multilingual language policy for the University, three levels have been determined to need specific focus in terms of analysis, research and concrete measures: 1) language classes offered; 2) content and language integration; 3) autonomous learning and language use outside the institution.

Thus, besides dealing with issues such as establishing a solid link between language teaching and content teaching (which is also related to different possible forms of cooperation between the Language Centre and the faculties) and providing subject matter instructors with specific instruments to deal more effectively with the peculiarities of teaching multilingual classes and/or teaching in a foreign language, the project will put great efforts into the area of extra-curricular measures and initiatives that can enhance language learning and language use, that is, communication (and socialization as its presupposition), outside the classroom.

Overcoming institutional ‘borders’, as it were, and finding new forms and new contexts for promoting multilingualism, appear to demand more attention than it would seem at first sight, given some limitations posed by the current structural and organizational profile of higher education in Europe.

The first of them pertains to the shorter duration of studies after the adoption of the Bachelors-Masters structure along the lines of the Bologna Declaration: as the first phase of higher education is concentrated in three years, students

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.languagestudies.unibz.it/sprachenkonzept.html>.

attending a multilingual university who are not already proficient in the languages of instruction will be faced with a major workload represented by the double challenge of learning conceptually *and* linguistically unfamiliar subjects (see Hellekjær / Wilkinson, 2003: 82).

If such a challenge can be better faced offering students more curricular language instruction, one should still not forget faculties' disciplinary orientation; in practice, this means that the integration of language classes and incentives into study plans can be objectively carried out only up to a certain limit and thus only partially exploited to promote students' language progress, while the attendance of non-mandatory language classes offered by the Language Centre might be less attractive for students if not connected with credit points.

Other limitations to active language use in subject-matter courses may be posed by the balance between different types of instructor-student interaction (lecture, workshop, lab) which solicit different degrees of students' intervention; by the size of classes, which may hinder collective interaction and by the type of assignments given to students, in which, depending on the subject-matter, language may play a major or a minor role.

It thus seems that the promotion of multilingualism in higher education needs to go well beyond classroom and formal instruction; such a view is clearly supported by theory and research in first and second language acquisition (see for instance Hulstijn, 2003; DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 1994), as well as by studies on language biographies (Franceschini / Miecznikowski, 2004; Adamzik / Roos, 2002), which show the relevance of unfocused and informal language learning and of individual ways of practising communication outside classroom. 'Translated' into the context of a multilingual university, this means that supporting socialization and communication among students with different languages and cultural backgrounds will not only have a positive general effect on students' lives, but will also, indirectly, have an impact on students' language proficiency, with a beneficial feed-back on classroom interaction in English, German or Italian<sup>16</sup>.

### **3.1. Analysing the current situation of multilingualism: some observations**

The first year of activities of the Language Workgroup<sup>17</sup> was devoted, as mentioned above, to the analysis of the current situation; what was needed was a detailed picture of how multilingualism is working at the Free University, in order to start developing specific measures and initiatives able to solve existing problematic areas and to reinforce current best-practices.

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<sup>16</sup> It goes without saying that communication among students is not limited to the use of English, German and Italian, but these languages (German and Italian as local official languages and English as international language) are more likely to be used as *linguae francae* among students of different nationalities.

<sup>17</sup> I would like to express my thanks to all members of the Language Workgroup, as well as to academic and administrative staff, whose involvement has been crucial for the realisation of what has been done so far within this project.

Gathering data on the perspective of the main subjects involved in teaching and learning at the University, that is, subject matter teaching staff, language instructors, students and, last but not least, administrative staff, was the first step towards such an analysis: applying an ethnographic approach, narrative interviews (Lucius-Hoene / Deppermann 2002; Schütze, 1987; Franceschini, 2003), were conducted with subject matter instructors from different faculties and with representatives of the administration, so as to gain information about language biographies, attitudes towards languages and multilingualism, and about communicative practices in the classroom, within their own and other scientific or professional communities and between faculties and administration. As regards students' perspective, needs and demands expressed by students' representatives within the Group are planned to be integrated with quantitative data coming from surveys on graduates (currently being carried on by the Careers Advisory Service of the University and to be available by the end of 2005), as well as with qualitative data which will be provided from planned research on students' language biographies.

Language instructors for English, German and Italian, in turn, were asked to give a detailed report of language classes and exams held at the Language Centre and at the faculties, so as to provide an overview of positive and problematic aspects of language learning specifically focussed on the various faculties, and thus creating a basis for interdisciplinary discussion within the Language Workgroup.

A subgroup, coordinated by the Language Centre, was also created in order to elaborate on key issues such as measuring and defining students' incoming and outgoing language competence in English, German and Italian; concrete results are expected for 2005-2006.

At the level of content and language integration, an empirical study was also needed: after having heard what subject-matter instructors reported about their communicative practices in the classroom through the above mentioned narrative interviews, therefore, an initial corpus of 10 lectures held in different languages and in different faculties was videorecorded, with the goal of pinpointing and analysing communicative (verbal and non-verbal) strategies applied by instructors in order to enhance comprehension, in particular by non-native speakers<sup>18</sup>.

Results of this study, compared with instructors comments on their own practices and integrated with new acquisitions from CLIL research, will represent a departure point for the development of language vademecum for FUB teachers, planned for a.y. 2006-2007, while for a.y. 2005-2006 a series of lectures and workshops on language and communication, with particular focus on multilingualism, are to be offered within a pedagogical series for academics organized by the Faculty of Education.

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<sup>18</sup> A preliminary analysis of videorecordings, as well as of the collected interviews, is to be found in Veronesi, D. (forthcoming).

### **3.2. Enhancing multilingualism outside the classroom: a students' perspective**

While data collection and analysis of the current situation of multilingualism had been in progress for several months, discussions within the Workgroup, as well as know-how from the Language Centre and students' elaborations on their social life both within and outside the University, reinforced once again the importance of focussing on extra-curricular measures in order to support efforts of an institutional nature and make them more effective; consequently, a subgroup<sup>19</sup> was created to develop first initiatives that could promote autonomous learning, socialization and communication outside the classroom, and that could be launched in summer and fall 2005.

The rich input provided by students and the dialogic dimension of the subgroup's work allowed the emergence of different perspectives, approaches and ideas on multilingualism, participation and self-engagement, as well as of a space for negotiation and modification of *a priori* conceptions, where frank confrontations and unexpected 'surprises' were not spared.

One of them was the different consideration given to summer language classes (which pre-enrolled students may need to attend, see above, 2.) by academic staff and by students: while the former saw them mainly in terms of language learning, the latter experienced them as important contexts of socialization for freshmen, where initial steps of long-lasting friendships could be established. Summer classes, thus, had a strong potential to become the very first environment where students of different nationalities and languages would socialize, start learning and using foreign languages and becoming acquainted with concrete multilingual communication. Realizing that such a role could be reinforced, the Language Centre put a great effort into enlarging its social programme for summer 2005, organizing and offering events like mountain hikes and town excursions, sports tournaments and biking tours through the town, barbecues and wine testing in local wineries, open-air movies and song sessions. Particular attention was also given to class schedule and locations, so that students attending different language classes could still meet during breaks.

As regards concrete measures to support autonomous language learning, the subgroup was envisioning the elaboration of a vademecum for students with the aim of providing practical suggestions and information on self-study methods and opportunities, and of increasing students' sensibility for language and communication issues. Students, in turn, were planning to prepare an informal guide for freshmen, to make their transition into university life smoother by giving practical information on the most various topics, ranging from enrolment regulations to tips on local pubs and cultural associations, from parking possibilities to notes on instructor-student interaction.

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<sup>19</sup> Composed of student representatives, the Faculty of Design and Art, members of the Language Centre and of the Centre for Language Studies.

It thus seemed fruitful to try to combine these two - apparently distant - approaches into a common booklet, written by students for students, where language aspects would be seen from a genuine students' perspective; the result of both theoretical and practical discussions and concrete research and editorial work, mostly carried out by students, for such an enterprise was a guide, called "Chaospilot", which was distributed to newly enrolled students at the beginning of a.y. 2005-2006.

Language issues are approached not only by mentioning the services offered by the Language Centre and by reminding students of language admission requirements, but also, implicitly, by presenting culturally specific information about local institutions, events and traditions in bilingual South Tyrol. Texts on different topics are not translated into the three languages, but are alternated between them. Moreover, in every section, important keywords are highlighted in the text and given correspondances in the other two languages on the side, so as to encourage students to explore reading in L2-L3 and to become acquainted with flexible trilingual written communication. Thanks to its contents and its agile format and layout, developed by the Faculty of Design and Art, the booklet was welcomed by students; comments, suggestions and constructive criticism will help to refine the next edition, to be realized for a.y. 2006-2007.

The group's intention to exploit existing places of socialization with the goal of enhancing language education in a broad sense led to the launch of further initiatives for 2005-2006: in cooperation with the University Library and the Faculty of Design and Art, a form of book-crossing called "Prendere o lasciare"<sup>20</sup> was organized in the University Coffee Shop (Unibar)<sup>21</sup> in Bolzano, where novels, short-stories, poetry and essays in any language, provided with the corresponding sticker, can be left or taken for other people to read.

Student accommodation conditions were also considered in terms of interaction and communication possibilities; with the support of the University Advisory Service, dorm managers were asked to take language issues into account when assigning rooms, so that students of different nationalities and languages could be 'mixed' throughout facilities.

Further measures are to be developed for the current and the future academic years; among them, a more direct involvement of the local community in student life (for instance, families willing to host a foreign student for a certain period of time), informal reports by Erasmus students, summer camps, initiatives for the European Day of Languages and similar.

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.unibz.it/prendereolasciare>.

<sup>21</sup> Further 'official' collecting points have been organized at the University Library in Bressanone, as well as in two local coffee shops which joined the initiative in Bolzano; along the lines of more established book-crossings, books can be left anywhere in town, thus going outside the institutional context and reaching out to any interested readers in the area.

#### 4. Final remarks

As a young institution, the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano has adopted trilingualism with great decision, exploring different models and solutions throughout the years; its profile as a smaller-scale centre of higher education, and the multilingual context in which it is active, have favoured the adoption of a flexible approach, as well as the opening up to a perspective that targets different levels which can play a role in enhancing multilingualism.

In this view, extra-curricular measures, such as the ones that have been implemented so far at the University, can gain a distinct weight within the institutional language policy, in that they enable us to consider students' language proficiency within a broader social context. By doing so, they also allow us to profit from the context itself and to mobilize different subjects active in and for the university, from students to academic services, from language and subject matter instructors to administrators. The result can be the consolidation of a process of involvement and sensibilization that affects the institution as a whole, where undeniable difficulties of reaching and practising multilingualism can be faced from different angles, whereas success by promoting it can not only be measured in formal ways but also be experienced in one's own academic and social life.

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