

Ferienakademie

A slightly scientific approach

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Abstract—This paper analyses the monotonically increasing popularity of Ferienakademie and validates the interest it garners from multitudes of students each year. By looking at the key aspects of Ferienakademie, the authors show that the success of this programme results from an optimum combination of courses, excursions into stunning landscapes, sport, and a multitude of cultural and social activities. By the conclusion of this paper, the authors hope that the reader is convinced of the significance of Ferienakademie, and chooses to take up this great opportunity.

Index Terms—Ferienakademie, Courses, Hikes, Kaiserschmarrn, Fun

I. INTRODUCTION

Every year since 1984, motivated students from Munich, Erlangen and Stuttgart gather in a hidden valley far away at the Ferienakademie in Sarntal. While in the beginning it started with only three courses, the academy this year is providing a total of twelve. The program and activities themselves have evolved over the years.

In this paper, we want to look at the reason why talented students are willing to give up their well-earned holidays to lock themselves up in South Tyrol. What are the reasons for the great success of Ferienakademie and why should you definitely go there? Of course, as it should be in a research paper, answers to these questions are based on objective studies, observations and research.

For doing so, we look at the different methods used to attract gifted students, at their application and finally at the conclusion.

II. METHODS

The Ferienakademie has many methods in its arsenal to garner the curiosity of students. In this section we want to present some of them. Furthermore, we want to take a look at how they are applied.

A. Courses

Without doubt, the main method are the courses themselves. The Ferienakademie lets the students choose from a wide variety of courses from a plethora of disciplines – informatics, mathematics, medical engineering, psychology, philosophy, etc. The group size usually varies between 10-20 students.

The typical structure of the course is the following: Depending on the core focus of a course, participants prepare a talk for a specific topic before the start of the academy. Quite a few courses consist of a group project. While students still might prepare a talk, they work on specific tasks in groups during their time in Sarntal. In 2015, for example, course 2 developed apps for iOS to enhance the quality of life, while course 5 created a game based on multiphysics simulation using the Xbox Kinect.

In both cases, the small size of the group, the close interaction with the corresponding professors and the motivation of each participating student (and also the non-existent pressure of grading) creates a special atmosphere which leads to exciting discussions that extend beyond the workspace. (Rumours exist that whole game ideas were developed, discarded and reinvented during hikes.)

Examples of both types of courses are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Fig. 1: Presentation in a course.



Fig. 2: Students working on their project.



Fig. 3: Impressions from hikes.

B. Hiking

Right after the courses, arguably the second most important part of Ferienakademie is hiking. (Some people might even claim the hikes to be more important than the courses themselves.) Sarntal and South Tyrol offer a beautiful landscape in the Alps which one can explore through a number of hiking routes. Words, however, can hardly describe the beauty of these trips, hence we refer to Figure 3.

While there are official hiking days (to ensure that professors do not overwhelm their students), most of the courses also plan hiking trips on their own. A healthy competitiveness evolves between the courses which culminates on the final day with the course with the most hikes being crowned *Überhikers* (unofficially, admittedly, but there is nevertheless a lot of pride involved).

C. Culture

The cultural aspects of Sarntal play an important role at Ferienakademie. On one of the first days, all participants meet up in a local town hall and get introduced to the history and culture of Sarntal. This cultural evening includes a presentation about the uniqueness of the valley followed by an enthralling experience of the traditional songs and clothing, see Figure 4. The show concludes with a treat of the local wine (but be careful, it is not water!). The academy also organizes a trip to Bolzano, one of the prominent cities of South Tyrol, see Figure 5. A highlight here is for example the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology which features the Neolithic mummy "Ötzi".

D. Sport

Each year, three different competitions are organized for the students:

- Table-tennis
- Chess
- The Run

The table-tennis and chess competitions are held as tournaments where each house puts together a team.

The houses then compete against each other in semifinals and finals. For the tournament, each team



Fig. 4: Cultural evening.



Fig. 5: Bolzano

is supported in full vigor by its fans, ensuring a great atmosphere during the games (chess being the exception)– see Figure 6.

The run is located at a beautiful spot, going around Lake Durnholz twice for about a total length of 4 km where the participants (and fans) can afterwards enjoy a refreshing swim in the lake.

To show the importance of these activities, it is said, that some professors value the result of the tournaments higher than the results in the actual courses.



Fig. 6: Preparing for the tabletennis tournament.

E. Food

Last, but not the least, the food. Despite the physical demands of the hikes (some courses hike more than fifty kilometers[reference needed]) and intellectual toll of the courses, no one returns from Ferienakademie with a loss in weight. Culinary delights at Ferienakademie are a-plenty! The choice ranges from a sumptuous noodle buffet to an array of dumplings; from schnitzel to Jause.

And then there is Kaiserschmarrn. If you have never been in the gourmet heaven called Kaiserschmarrn, wait for Ferienakademie. Not only is it mandatory to eat at every hut you take a break during hikes; there is also a special Kaiserschmarrn-evening where the students try to eat the kitchen empty– literally. Prof. Bungartz likes to tell the story of Feldrand having to buy eggs from a neighbouring farm to provide more Kaiserschmarrn for the hungry students. The beauty and instant-appetizing nature of a plate of Kaiserschmarrn is illustrated in Figure 7.



Fig. 7: Kaiserschmarrn [Jägerhof et al.]

During our stay at Ferienakademie, we ended up developing a love for Kaiserschmarrn which we would like to express by the following poem– Ode an den Kaiserschmarrn (with the rhythm of Friedrich Schiller's "Ode an die Freude").

An den Kaiserschmarrn

Freude, leck'rer Kaiserschmarren,
Mehlspeis mit Rosinen,
Wir verspeisen wie Barbaren
hunderte Portionen.

Jede Wand'rung endet wieder
mit nem Blech voll Kaiserschmarrn.
Studenten, die am meisten essen,
die sieht Bungartz voll stolz an.

III. CONCLUSION

By applying all these methods and combining them in a most profitable way, the Ferienakademie produces impressive results year after year. These are usually presented on the final evening where the courses come together to share their works with their peers. But the courses notwithstanding, this summer school is a complete success. Students with a motivation for holistic learning from a lot of different fields come together for twelve days to work, study and – most importantly– have fun together. Ferienakademie succeeds at connecting those aspects which sometimes get lost in regular studies and is a great opportunity for students to reap their benefits. If you are not yet convinced, hopefully these final impressions in Figure 8 and Figure 9 can tip the scale.



Fig. 8: Lake Durnholz where the run takes place.



Fig. 9: It can get quite snowy during hikes.