From Hamburg to Salzburg: How the Hacker School is breaking international ground

The Hacker School gets children and young people interested in programming. Low-threshold courses are designed to give young people, especially girls and teenagers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, an insight into programming before they decide on a career. By involving companies, schools, networks and politicians, this goal becomes a task for society as a whole. By 2030, the Hacker School aims to have reached 1,000,000 children and young people with its programming workshops. The founder's motto: "If you're not afraid of your goals, you can leave it at that". As this model is so successful in Germany, founder Julia Freudenberg would also like to inspire children and young people in other regions with her Hacker School. Due to the linguistic similarities, Austria comes to mind first.

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein makes contact with the Hacker School in February and founder Julia Freudenberg talks about her thoughts on scaling the business model internationally. Tim Zebahl is part of this EU network for the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises and is active and well connected in the Social Economy and Proximity Sector Group. After detailed consideration, Julia chose Salzburg as the first international location for the Hackerschool and Tim put Julia in touch with his Austrian EEN colleague Romana Schwab from Innovation Salzburg. In order not only to found Hackerschool Austria, but also to set up its business model in Austria, the non-profit limited company needs cross-industry contacts with companies that have their own IT department. The voluntary commitment of IT employees is necessary in order to run the programming courses at schools. Experience has shown that if companies also provide training in this area themselves, they are particularly committed to inspiring the young talent of tomorrow for this business area. Romana Schwab: "We were able to network the Hacker School very quickly with various players from the business world, but also with the Salzburg STEM Initiative, which in turn established contact with the state and the schools."

Julia Freudenberg is delighted with the pragmatic and targeted support provided by the EEN: "I can't find such detailed information via a Google search. Especially not in a region where I'm not there myself. Integration into the Salzburg ecosystem would have been much more difficult and would have taken longer without the EEN." Another important point was the advice on setting up in Austria, particularly with regard to the legal form. Julia Freudenberg: "Setting up as a non-profit organisation has a completely different meaning and perception in Germany than in Austria, even though we speak the same language. And having a local contact person where I can get reassurance has been very valuable."

In Steffi Susser, Romana Schwab has a dedicated head of the newly founded Hacker School as a sparring partner. "I believe that it wasn't just the contacts with the companies that made this process possible for us, but that the EEN had specific contact persons for us in all kinds of companies that we could write to personally. That was a huge advantage."

Julia Freudenberg: "We were initially very hesitant about the whole topic of internationalisation. We did not know where to start. In this respect, getting to know the EEN was a real turning point. The EEN can open doors for us to partners in regions we haven't even been to yet. And then the idea suddenly

becomes real. I see the same thing happening in the next step with EU funding. Up to now, this has not been an issue for me at all. It's far too complicated to apply for funding and, as a tightly budgeted social enterprise, we don't have the capacity for it. But now that I know that I have a network like the EEN to back me up and that I can make contacts throughout Europe, it opens up completely new opportunities for me. And in this respect, Austria is a first step, but definitely not the last."

An initial experience: the Salzburg schools are very enthusiastic, so the Hacker School can hardly keep up with the number of courses on offer. The goal for 2024 is to bring at least 1,300 children in the Salzburg region into contact with programming. In the two months since it was founded, there have already been around 600, so what now?

"So far, we only have a small team that coordinates all the players involved and also plans the courses. Now we have to scale up faster than planned because the schools are faster than the companies," says Steffi Susser. "On the one hand, we need more IT volunteers to organise the courses, but we also need financial support from companies so that we can coordinate and plan them." Romana Schwab needs no further prompting. A follow-up date has already been found.

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