

Austria

Youth work in Austria is divided into open youth work, youth associations, institutional youth work and commercial youth work. There are also so-called 'youth initiatives', that is, youth services offered by young people to young people. This relatively new kind of youth work can be defined as peer group education, and it is prevalent in the area of prevention in Austria¹. Open youth work in Austria consists of youth centres, mobile youth work and regional youth information services as well as regional and local initiatives². It essentially focuses on providing young people with space to structure and organise their leisure time on their own. Open youth work is generally open to all young people – hence the name – and there is no membership required or regular participation expected. Open youth work – especially in the area of prevention – focuses more on socially disadvantaged young people, whereas organisationally structured youth work sees the non-deprived youth as their target group³.

Youth associations in Austria are quite diverse. There are youth associations with different political or religious backgrounds. In the past, a distinction was made along ideological lines, meaning that there were two different political camps with distinctive cultures and ideologies: one associated with trade unions and the Socialist Party (SPÖ), the other with the Catholic Church and the People's Party (ÖVP). Young people grew up in one or the other 'camps' and also joined organisations affiliated with their 'camps'. Due to socio-structural and cultural change in Austria, this system has somewhat changed over the last ten to 20 years, but there are still a number of organisations which can be characterised as part of the 'camp system'⁴.

The target group of most Austrian youth organisations is quite diverse and often not limited to a specific age group. There is nevertheless a tendency to address 15- to 19-year-olds in extracurricular youth work. Youth organisations also target 20- to 24-year-olds. All in all, however, there are youth services offered to all age groups. According to the fourth youth report commissioned by the Austrian government, 93% of all youth groups and youth organisations see school pupils as their main target group, 88% address themselves mainly to apprentices and 80% to university students. 72% of all providers of youth work claim that young adults who work or are unemployed take part in their services⁵.

In Austria, institutional youth work is youth work carried out by state or municipal youth departments. Each one of the nine states of the Austrian federation has its own youth department, which coordinates youth work in the state, offers services and organises activities for young people.

With regard to youth information, there are internet portals affiliated with the federal government that provide information on various topics related to young people. Making youth-relevant information available is a concept encouraged by the European Commission's White Paper on youth. The aim is to provide young people as well as youth workers and parents with helpful information on different issues⁶.

¹ 4. Bericht zur Lage der Jugend in Österreich (2003b)

² BMSG (2006): Youth Policy in Austria, p.9

³ BMSG (2006): Youth Policy in Austria, p.9

⁴ IARD (2001); p.31-32

⁵ IARD (2001); p.31-32 d.

⁶ <http://www.jugend.bmsg.gv.at>

One of the most important fields of action in Austrian youth work of all kinds is the field of prevention of social problems. Not only do many youth organisations identify prevention as their main focus, but there is also a lot of prevention work done without even recognising it as such. Nine out of ten youth organisations offer activities to help young people gain more self-confidence and more self-control – something which is generally perceived as a preventative measure. The topics covered by prevention in youth work are mainly in the fields of drug abuse/addiction and violence, followed by sexual abuse and AIDS/HIV. Other areas of preventative youth work are racism, criminal behaviour, sexuality and hazardous leisure time activities⁷. A lot of youth work takes the form of activities such as parties or sporting events. There are also workshops covering a wide range of issues and educational offers. Most youth organisations give their target public the opportunity to work creatively in different areas such as youth, environment or drugs and addiction. The latter topics once again fall into the category of preventative youth work⁸. In addition, youth work in Austria includes counselling for young people.

Over 70% of youth institutions offer counselling services to assist young individuals with issues such as occupational choices and work-related questions as well as problems pertaining to drugs and addiction in general. Other areas covered by this type of counselling are school-related issues, family problems and questions about relationships and sexuality. There is also counselling on the issue of community work in lieu of military service⁹. Some youth work involving recreational activities can be described as educational. The Austrian ministry responsible for youth matters has also commissioned research to study new trends in youth culture. The objective of these studies was to gain more insight into new developments in order to apply the newly found knowledge in future concepts of youth work.

⁷ 4. Bericht zur Lage der Jugend in Österreich (2003b)

⁸ 4. Bericht zur Lage der Jugend in Österreich (2003b)

⁹ 4. Bericht zur Lage der Jugend in Österreich (2003b)