

Germany

Youth work in Germany is widely understood as a sector of non-formal education and support focused on autonomy, participation and integration. Political responsibility for this lies primarily with the local authorities. Responsibility is assumed by larger political entities (state or federal government) only when the work extends beyond local or state level¹. Youth work at local level reflects different values and a wide range of content, methods and forms of work. There is thus no uniform type of local youth work. Rather, this pluralism is the result of the varying needs of young people in individual places. Suitable services are offered by voluntary youth associations or welfare and religious associations. However, the public youth welfare departments also offer services in the field of leisure activities for young people and run youth centres for young people.

The main focuses of youth work include various aspects distinguished by their individual services². These are in particular:

- Out-of-school youth education supplementing the family, school and labour market with: general education, political education, social education, cultural education and natural history, ecological and technical education
- Youth work in sports, play and social life
- Youth work related to the labour market, school and the family
- International youth work
- Children and youth recreation
- Youth counselling
- Job-insertion related training, support and counselling.

Volunteering has always been crucial for youth work and youth associations. It is the basis of youth work within youth associations and the medium for the variety of offers provided to youngsters. Today some 90 supra-local youth associations exist, with the number of all youth associations estimated at approximately 400.

Youth associations organise their work mainly as group work, although forms of open youth work are becoming increasingly popular, as in recent times there has been a greater need for issue-related and part-time involvement in projects rather than for permanent commitment.

In contrast, the youth work provided by youth welfare departments is mostly organised as open youth work in youth clubs, youth projects, youth centres or youth houses. In fact the distinction between open youth work and social work for children and young people is gradually vanishing because of the need to address the special problems of disadvantaged groups of young people.

Youth work in Germany is nevertheless a highly professionalised and legally regulated sector. It is administrated by youth welfare departments at municipal level, and it benefits from cooperation between professionals and volunteers.

¹ Münder, 2006

² Thole, 2000

The essential aim of non-formal education and support is to lead young people towards determining their future and taking responsibility for their actions. Therefore, participation by the child or young person in shaping youth services is not merely a procedural requirement, but also an essential element for the effectiveness of the service itself. Special importance is attached to the participation of young people in youth work. Young people participate in shaping its content and organising it. Their needs and interests are the focus of varied forms of work and organisation. The primary task of youth work is to make a contribution towards personal self-fulfilment and towards greater freedom and justice by developing and strengthening young people's will and ability to play a responsible part in state and social life.