

The Netherlands

During recent decades, youth work in the Netherlands has remained largely in the shadow of youth care. Even though the target group of youth care – youth at risk – accounts for only about 15% of Dutch youth, it nevertheless receives the lion's share of political attention. It is not particularly surprising that a similar picture can also be found within the Dutch sector of youth work.

What we will call 'youth work in the narrow sense' once again focuses on young people at risk. Prototypical examples for such a target group are young people with a migration background and young people whose families are in a precarious financial situation. The activities organised for and with them are often carried out by public providers and aim at intervention into the problematic situations. For two reasons, youth work in the narrow sense is to be found especially in urban areas: firstly, population density is higher there, making it possible to divide the target group into subgroups; secondly, the proportion of young people with a migration background is larger there. In Amsterdam, for example, young people with a migration background account for more than 50% of the young people living within the city boundaries¹.

'Youth work in the broader sense', in contrast, usually aims at young people in general or at specific age groups, e.g. the 10-14, or the 14-18 age group. It takes a more universalistic approach, offering a range of activities that are carried out by public, non-profit or for-profit providers. This kind of youth work can be found in cities, but is more common in villages and rural areas. The reason is that population density there is lower than in urban areas, so that it is counterproductive to subdivide the target group in any appreciable detail².

Together 'youth work in the narrow' and 'in the broader sense' cover a whole range of activities. Noorda and Veenbaas have suggested the following classification: (1) professional socio-cultural youth work, encompassing neighbourhood-based youth work and open youth work; (2) voluntary youth work, including youth work based on a particular ideology, interest organisations, organisations focused on playtime activities, and organisations of migrants, (3) street youth work; (4) sports, and similar associations³.

Finally it should be noted that the activities and structures of youth work as described above are likely to change in the near future. On 1 January 2007, the Social Support Act came into force in the Netherlands. One of its concerns is to strengthen the role of municipalities in the provision of social support. As a consequence, the Dutch landscape of youth work might become even more fragmented than it already is. On the other hand, a Ministry for Youth and Families was established on 22 February 2007. The existence of this might shift the topic of youth work further up the political agenda, taking it out of the shadow of youth care. As both of these events are fairly recent, their mid- and long-term consequences still remain to be seen⁴.

¹ Gemeente Amsterdam, 2006

² Veenbaas & Noorda, 2005

³ Noorda & Veenbaas, 2005; Veenbaas & Noorda, 2005

⁴ Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning, 2005