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**The history of youth work in  
Europe -  
The perspective of the German-  
speaking Community of Belgium**

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Blankenberge 25-28 May 2009

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# Part I: Youth work before the First World War

- A common past with Prussia

## In Germany

- Emergence of Youth movements at the turn of the 19th-20th century
    - 2 categories: Youth organisation work and youth social organisations
    - Instigated by adults
    - 2 objectives for the Youth social organisations:
      - a. emancipation of young people
      - b. main concern: to improve the treatment of young workers
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## In Eupen-Malmedy

- First steps of youth work in East Belgium by gymnastics clubs
    - The foundation of gymnastics clubs was a wide-scaled movement in Germany at the end of the 19th century
    - The St.Vith gymnastics club: founded at the initiative of a national movement and subsidized by the state
  - Gymnastics considered as a part of pre-military education
  - First form of youth work in Eupen-Malmedy: initiated by the state and purely integrative.
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# Part II: Between the two World Wars

## 1. **The pre-1933 period**

### **Context**

- The region was merged with Belgium through the Treaty of Versailles.
  - Between 1920 and 1925: interim regime
  - Period characterised by a conflict
    - advocates of the reintegration into the German Reich
    - People who wished to remain part of Belgium
  - Germany played an important part in this conflict
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## Youth Work

- The gymnastics clubs remained the only organised youth movements (until 1925)
  - After 1925, youth work can be divided in two camps:  
**pro-Belgian** and **pro-German** followers
    - the **gymnastics club in St.Vith** revealed rapidly his pro-German tendencies
  - Another type of youth work emerged in 1926:
    - The first agricultural organisations
      - > the **St.Vith Winter school** was dependent on German organisations
      - > the **farmers in Eupen** stayed faithful to the Belgian associations
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- Creation of the *Christliche Arbeiterjugend* (CAJ – Young Christian Workers) in 1925.
    - created by a Chaplain in Kelmis (90% working class)
    - based on the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique* (Belgian movement created in 1924)
    - with the objective to oppose inhumane work conditions
  
  - The *Jeunesse Estudiantine Catholique* (JEC)
    - originated in Inner Belgium
    - gained followers in Eupen-Malmedy
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- The **Scout movement** emerged in East Belgium in 1933
    - at the initiative of JEC-members
    - joined the *Federation of Catholic Scouts of Belgium*
  
  - The **Student movement at the University of Leuven** (1926)
    - socio-political nature
    - cultural home of German-speaking students studying in Leuven
    - Financed from Germany by 1933
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## 2. The 1933-1940 period: Youth as an ideological instrument

### **Context**

- Political changes in Germany led to the radicalisation of existing ideological conflicts in East Belgium
  - On 10 May 1940 the East Cantons were annexed by the German Reich
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## Youth work

- The two camps (pro-Belgian and pro-German) continued to radicalise
  - Young people were used as a tool by the two opposing ideologies
  - The pro-German movement placed special emphasis on youth work
    - 21 national-socialist youth groups emerged (1934-1936)
    - The ring-leaders preferred to go undercover
    - The integration of youth movements into the *Heimattreue Front* was completed during the years 1937-38
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- How was the subversion organised?
    - Annual holidays in Germany provided, free of charge, for 200 young people in Eupen-Malmedy
    - Students were provided with assistance
  
  - The catholic Scout Organisation (1933)
    - intended to correct the influence of nationalist youth organisations
    - developed by the Belgian camp
    - reinforced by the catholic *Jungscharen* (youth groups)
  
  - The two camps conducted trench warfare in terms of youth work:
    - using methods of advertising and propaganda
    - Using the media with great consistency
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- The recruitment:
    - Scouts were recruited from grammar schools
    - The *Hitlerjugend* targeted lower social classes
  
  - The invasion on 10 May 1940
    - Annexation of Eupen-Malmedy
    - All the pro-German youth organisations joined the *Hitlerjugend*
    - The Scout organisation and the CAJ still held secret meetings during Nazi occupation
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# Part III: The post-war period

## **Context**

- Eupen-Malmedy was liberated on 11 September 1944
  - Relentless purge
  - Failure to differentiate between occupied and annexed Belgium
  - The last remnants of German culture had to disappear



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## Youth Work

- Scouts made themselves useful wherever they could
  - The CAJ was reformed in 1946
  
  - Re-emergence of the two categories:
    - Youth organisation work (Scouts)
    - Youth social organisations (CAJ)
  
  - New youth movements, organisations and new forms of youth work came into being during the 20 years that followed the war
    - base of the actual youth work in the German-speaking community
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- The assimilation policy
    - Scouts and *CAJ* were monitored by the Belgian organisations
    - Less autonomy for the youth movements in the East Cantons
  
  - A policy of abstinence in the East Cantons (1945-55)
    - people never wanted to belong to a partisan organisation again
    - The church and the clergy had the only successful initiatives
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- The 1950's : A period of creation of youth organisations
    - Youth social organisations: *KLJ* and *Patro*
    - Youth organisation work: *Chiro* (St.Vith area)
  
    - Structured along similar lines: governed by a president (spiritual guidance), very hierarchical structure
  
    - A new type of youth work in East Belgium: the 'open' youth work:
      - > creation of the first youth club in Eupen (1959)
      - > young people that don't belong to an organisation
      - > need to cope with everyday problems
      - > Aim: reach young people from the lower classes
      - > self-administration
      - > creation closely linked to the church
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- The 1960's: Breakthrough in various aspects of youth work:
    - The role of the spiritual guides became less significant
    - More responsibility for the leaders

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# Part IV: From 1963: The German-speaking Community of Belgium

## **Context**

- Major state reforms will conduct Belgium to complete its process of federalisation
  - 1963: Language legislation
    - Belgium was divided into three language communities
    - One Ministry of culture but two Ministers
    - A German-speaking department in the two parts of the Ministry of Culture
    - 1968: creation of the Cultural Office for the German Language Area
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- The first state reform (1968-71)
    - Creation of the three language communities
    - Two Ministries of Culture
    - Creation of the Council of the German Cultural Community (1973) with limited non legislative powers: consultative function
  
  - The second state reform (1980-83)
    - Power to issue decrees for cultural affairs
    - German-speaking Community of Belgium
  
  - The third state reform
    - Powers in terms of education
    - Extended autonomy
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## Youth work

- The youth organisations in the 1960's:
    - The *KLJ*: largest youth organisation and only group to form a German-speaking regional organisation
    - The *CAJ* (working class districts) in Eupen, Kelmis and St.Vith
      - > These organisations targeted young adults
    - Other organisations: Scouts, *Patro*, *Chiro*
      - > worked more with children
      - > Until 1967 all these youth organisations were dependent on funding from national movements or organisations
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- 1967: the first intervention of the Ministry of Culture
    - funding youth leader training but only for young adults
    - Origin of the youth policy in the German-speaking Belgium
  
  - Emergence of problems within the German-speaking organisations
    - all of them were language related
  
  - Extension and increasing of the subsidies to youth organisations (1969)
    - Independence from national movements (*Bauernbund*, etc.)
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- Creation of the first autonomous « Official Youth Council » (1976)
  
  - After the creation of the German-speaking Community (1983)
    - Since 1967 the role of politics in youth work has become increasingly important
  
    - The Ministry's objective: actively involve young people in youth policy
      - > Instrument: the German-speaking Youth Council
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*Responsibilities of the Youth Council:*

- *to give a voice to German-speaking young people*
- *coordination of youth work*
- *enable German-speaking young people to communicate with other young people*

> *Creation of the Information and Advice Service for German-speaking young people (non profit organisation)*

*Responsibilities:*

- *Preparation and implementation of German-speaking Youth Council decisions.*
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# Conclusion: The current situation

- The German-speaking Community is legally and financially responsible for youth policy
  - Relies on 3 bodies:
    - The German-speaking Youth Council
    - The Youth Office
    - The Ministry (Department of Cultural Affairs)
  - Supporting the 3 types of recognised organisations:
    - 8 youth organisations
    - 19 open youth clubs
    - 3 youth services
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- Efficiency of youth policy and the tangibility of youth work's influence:
    - At the end of the 1990's the German-speaking Youth Council was responsible for two tasks:
      - > its actual role as an advisory body
      - > the affairs of the *Information and Advice Service for German-speaking Young people*
    - The role as a youth policy committee was neglected
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- Restructuration of the *Information and Advisory Service for German-speaking Young people* and Youth Council:
    - The *Information and Advisory Service for German-speaking Young people* was renamed in *Youth Office of the German speaking Community*
    - The administrative board would be composed of representatives :
      - > Of the Youth Council
      - > From de government
      - > From the ministry
  
  - Close cooperation between the Youth Council, the Youth Office, the government and the Ministry
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- Youth policy managers gained an insight and direct link to youth work in field
  
  - Significant changes after the restructuring:
    - Open youth work was strongly promoted:
      - > Introduction of « performance mandates » (2001).

*The Youth Office offers young people a point of contact for a wide range of problems*

*Creation of meeting places and opportunities for young people*

> Introduction of the concept of *Streetwork*

*Young people talk to the streetworker on the street*

*Objectives: extend people's decision-making skills, develop new life perspectives*

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> Youth counselling available

*emphasises work and prevention*

- Consultations of the youth sector

> Initiated by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community and the government

> Objective: identify issues affecting young people in all fields

> The current youth policy is based on the recommendations of the consultations

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# Conclusions

- A very eventful history
  - Success of youth work in the 1920's
  - Youth work as an instrument of ideologies in the 1930's
  - Youth work as an instrument of integration (after 1945)
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- The first intervention of the Belgian state affecting Youth work in 1967
    - distance from the national movements
    - advent of youth policy in East Belgium
  
  - Young people involved in Politics with the « Youth Council » (1976)
  
  - Increasing of cooperation between youth work and youth policy
  
  - A policy originated from young people and youth work
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Thank you!

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