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## **History of youth work and youth policy in Austria**

**T**his paper focuses on the history of youth policy and youth work policy in Austria, more than on youth work history since the diversity of different approaches to youth work could not be reflected in this article.

### **→ Outline of a history of youth work in Austria**

As in many other countries in central Europe before the mid-19th century, the beginnings of youth work in Austria can be found in the religious sphere. The goal of these interventions was to support those young people who had to leave their well-known (often rural) surroundings for educational or professional reasons. In many cases, these young people had to search for work or for opportunities to learn a profession in the growing cities and found themselves in an unknown and hostile environment without any social support. As in Germany, the ideas of Adolph Kolping were very influential on these first approaches. His idea was to establish so-called “Kolping families” and build houses for apprentices coming from the countryside to provide them with a place to sleep and with a community to take care of them.

A different approach of young apprentices and young workers was followed after 1884 by the Verband junger Arbeiter (association of young workers), the predecessor organisation to the socialist youth. This organisation cared about the education and rights of workers, and also offered a social community. Parallel to church and socialist approaches, liberal as well as German-national (*deutsch national*) forces were active in out-of-school youth education – mostly in physical education and cultural activities. From 1908 onwards, a spin-off of the Scout movement was active in Vienna. In this movement, out-of-school physical education was the main objective.

Overall, the social tendencies that were present at the *fin de siècle* during the Habsburg monarchy were reflected in the approaches of out-of-school youth education as well.

After the First World War, Austria remained a small country compared to its previous expanse, and its inhabitants lacked a clear idea of what “Austria” and “Austrian” meant. German-national and Austrian-national tendencies disagreed on the concept of the state; monarchists, socialists, communists and liberals all had their ideas of future developments, whilst the Catholic Church tried to strongly influence political development. One can interpret these approaches to extra-curricular youth work as a reflection of these political movements trying to dictate their views in debates about the “definition” of Austria and future Austrian policy in out-of-school youth education. Both the Socialist Worker Youth (Sozialistische Arbeiterjugend) and the Communist Proletarian Youth (Kommunistische Proletarierjugend) saw apprentices and young workers as their main target group. The Sozialistische Arbeiterjugend was founded in 1919 as successor to the Verband junger Arbeiter whereas the Kommunistische Proletarierjugend was founded directly after the war in the year 1918. These two organisations held similar views to their parent parties, and saw their role in organising young workers in accordance with these aims.

The associations of bourgeois Catholic pupils and students, who saw Austria as a nation, opposed both the liberal attitudes of (often Jewish) intellectuals and socialist and communist tendencies, as well as a pan-German confederation of Germany and Austria.

Other ideologies of the early 1920s were also active in the field of youth education, including liberal, German-national, Austrian-national and church-based Catholic organisations. Retrospectively, it seems that youth education in the various organisations was aimed, in the main, at recruiting and organising their own offspring by indoctrinating young people. A similar approach could be seen in the sports organisations, where at least the umbrella organisations had clear political and ideological orientations.

The ideological conflicts and confrontations cumulated in the civil war conflicts of February 1934 when the socialist and the – already forbidden – communist workers’ organisations together with the Schutzbund (defence league) fought against the Austro-fascist corporative system represented by the Heimwehr (home defence force) and the army. Both paramilitary organisations – the Heimwehr and the Schutzbund – recruited heavily from their youth organisations, in which over the years political information (and indoctrination) was offered. After the February disturbances, the Social Democratic Workers’ Party and all associated organisations were outlawed, so were the socialist worker youth. The only youth organisations left in existence and able to exert some influence were the church-based ones, the Scouts, and (non-liberal) pupil and student organisations.

Meanwhile, the NSDAP (National Socialist Party) and its youth organisations were organised illegally and became larger and larger so, after the accession (*Anschluss*) of Austria to the Third Reich, they were functioning and active immediately. Youth work was mainly carried out in the youth organisations of the National Socialist Party, the Hitlerjugend and the Bund deutscher Mädchen, and had the clear aim of indoctrinating young people with the ideology of the national socialist system. Religious-based youth movements lost their influence and independence from political pressure, and the youth organisations of the Austro-fascist Jungbünde and Landbünde were forbidden.

Right after the Second World War and the rebirth of Austria as an independent state, many youth organisations were (re)established. Socialist Youth Austria (Sozialistische Jugend Österreich), for instance, was founded the day after the Constitution of the Republic of Austria was adopted. Also in the same year, the Austrian youth movement (Österreichische Jugendbewegung), the predecessor to the Junge Volkspartei, the youth organisation of the Austrian People's Party, was founded. Also, the communist youth organisation was re-established in the year 1945. Its name back then was Free Austrian Youth (Freie Österreichische Jugend). Politically (more) independent organisations like the Catholic Youth of Austria (Katholische Jugend Österreich), the Scouts (Pfadfinder), Rural Youth (Landjugend), the Catholic Children's Movement (Jungschar) and others were founded in the period between 1945 and 1950. This is a further indicator of the close connection between youth work and policy in Austria. The main focus of youth work in the post-war period was education on democracy, as well as on values and attitudes. Recreation and fun were of secondary importance. Priorities included promoting the feeling of community and voluntary work, and tackling the problem of unemployment.

In the 1960s and 1970s new forms of youth work were established: open youth work was the new approach that received ever-increasing attention. Open youth work was not an alternative to existing forms of youth work carried out by organisations, but an addition to it. Youth clubs and youth centres were founded, and the opportunity to visit those institutions and participate reflected the trend of growing individuality.

The demographic changes and the increased number of young people with a migration background led, from the 1970s onwards, to altered needs and demands on youth work – both on open youth work and in organisations.

### → The creation of special interest groups in youth work

Already in the year 1953, an umbrella organisation for the youth organisations in the form of a youth council, the Österreichische Bundesjugendring, was founded. The seven founding organisations were religious-based youth organisations (Protestants, Catholics), two Scout organisations, the youth organisation of the trade union, and the youth organisations of the two political parties (socialists and people's party).

In the opening speech, it was pointed out that common interests should prevail over existing differences and that work should be carried out in co-operation in order to favour democratic development. In the first articles of the association's statute, the general direction and the tasks of this umbrella structure were described as follows:

1. to foster a common understanding and a willingness for co-operation within the Austrian youth;
2. to contribute to the solution of youth problems;

3. to support the healthy youth to live in accordance with ethical, social and cultural norms;
4. to get involved in open questions in the field of youth policy, and child and youth rights;
5. to contribute to a financial plan for the support of out-of-school youth education;
6. to lobby for the youth organisations;
7. to co-operate with the public authorities in bringing as many children and young people as possible into the youth organisations;
8. to oppose other tendencies of (public) national or semi-public organisation of young people;
9. to counter militaristic, nationalistic and totalitarian tendencies; and
10. to advocate together democratic youth education.

From this it becomes clear that the youth forum understood itself to be a representative body for all young people in Austria, since they wanted to get as many youngsters as possible involved in one of their member organisations. Furthermore, the democratic reorientation of young Austrians is seen as a common task for all youth organisations and is therefore supported by the youth forum. This was a clear signal at a time of Allied occupation of Austria that all youth organisations wanted democracy and freedom.

During the next 50 years the number of members grew to over 30, during which time their tasks changed. For example, instead of the aim of fostering co-operation among Austrian youth, co-operation between children's and youth organisations should be encouraged; and instead of efforts to get as many young people as possible involved in youth organisations, co-operation with the public authorities in supporting and educating children and juveniles was promoted. Furthermore, international representation became another task for the youth forum. In 2001, the Bundesjugendvertretung was established as the successor to the Bundesjugendring, taking over its entire remit.

In 2008, open youth work got its own lobby organisation. The establishment of bOJA as a network agency for open youth work provided the opportunity for open youth work to exchange best practices but also to get involved in policy making in a structured way.

### → Youth policy development

Parallel to the development of youth work, youth organisations and youth work methods, there were changes in legislation concerning young people. With an examination of specific youth laws as well as other laws that affect young people in a significant way, one can see the needs of young people and can understand the development of youth work.

It is not surprising to see that laws concerning young people reflect the main political tendencies of the interwar period: for example, the first law of the Austrian Republic (1919) that concerned itself with young people directly was aimed at improving working conditions (under a government that included the Social Democratic Workers' Party). The so-called night-shift law states that juveniles between the ages of 14 and 18 – as well as women – are not allowed to work at night. The next law from the year 1922 was concerned with youth protection: it was forbidden to serve alcohol or to sell it to young people – with the exception of those who were getting it for adults.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the political conflicts between the conservatives, who were in government, and the socialists and communists became more pronounced. In 1931, the youth organisation of the Communist Party, the Communist Proletariat Youth, was forbidden, as was the Communist Party itself.

From 1933 onwards, the form of government was dictatorial and tensions between the conservatives, who were in favour of the corporate state (*Ständestaat*), and the socialists grew ever greater until February 1934, when armed conflicts started. After the civil war in February 1934, all socialist and social-democratic children and youth organisations were banned together with the Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiter Partei, SDAP*). After this move, many of the socialist organisations worked illegally.

It is revealing that one law that concerned youth is the law of 1936 on patriotic out-of-school education. This law stated that all organisations that wanted to practise youth work had to submit an application to the Ministry of Education and deliver their educational curriculum before they could legally form the organisation. However, Catholic-based youth organisations were exempted. With this law, youth education in and out of school was now entirely under state control. And the role of out-of-school youth education was clearly defined as well: its task was education – or better indoctrination – according to the ideology of the Austro-fascist corporate state, based on the ideas of the Catholic Church. When Austria joined the Third Reich in 1938, youth organisations that had a close connection with Austro-fascism were forbidden.

After the Second World War, the legal framework for youth work was prescribed at the level of the nine federal countries with the establishment of the *Landesjugendreferate* by an edict of the Ministry of Education in 1946. These administrative units were in charge of youth, out-of-school youth education and the provision of youth work. Accordingly, youth work became, on the one hand, legally controlled and, on the other hand, detached from schooling. The tasks of the newly established *Landesjugendreferenten* were defined in five fields, namely, to:

1. forward proposals, plans, wishes and inquiries of the youth department in the federal ministry to youth organisations in the province (*Bundesland*);
2. transmit proposals, suggestions and applications from youth organisations to the federal ministry in the correct formal and objective manner;
3. promote and control education and further training of youth that had left school, their artistic activities and youth literature;
4. promote and control the physical education of youth (trekking, sports, youth hostelling, games);
5. accomplish social tasks, such as co-operation among youth organisations and autonomy (youth parliament); practical social work (programme "youth for youth"); connect with foreign youth agencies.

With this edict, youth work was more or less defined as a concern of the federal states, thus the task of co-ordination between the federal ministry and the local/regional youth organisations became obvious.

The task of the units to control the education and further training of young people offered by youth organisations is remarkable. Furthermore, it is of considerable interest that the target group for youth work is young people who have reached the age when they do not have to attend school any more. So, these units in the

departments of education in the regional governments gained control not only of the education of pupils but also of other young people.

But only a few years later, the task of controlling education and training in youth work organisations was no longer mentioned. At the conference of the Landesjugendreferenten in 1954, support and promotion became the main assignments. In particular, the promotion and support of organised and non-organised young people was to be the aim of these units. Furthermore, the main objectives of the educational approach of youth work were defined as humanity, tolerance, civic understanding and democratic disposition. International relations were also a topic, as were the preservation and fostering of tradition and folklore, and a feeling of patriotic belonging. Supporting abstinence from alcohol and narcotics was a means of health promotion and education. The wide-ranging tasks of the Landesjugendreferenten showed that youth (work) policy was already, as long ago as the 1950s, a horizontal topic that impinged on many policy fields.

From the 1970s onwards, the promotion of open methods of youth work was included in the list of duties for the units. Explicitly mentioned were also initiatives for young people in migrant worker families (*Gastarbeiterjugend*). Over all, a distinct orientation towards service and support in the youth work policy of the federal states can be detected.

Legislation on youth is also a concern of the regions; and one can find youth protection laws in all nine federal states – dating back to the 1940s. In particular, protection concerning alcohol, narcotics and (pornographic) media – like movies, theatres and magazines – were covered by these laws, although these laws contained many differences among the federal states (and still today no consistent law on youth protection exists in Austria, even though they are now very homogeneous). However, extra-curricular youth work was not tackled in regional laws until 1977. In this year, a law on youth was passed by the regional authorities in Vorarlberg, one of the nine Austrian countries. In this law, youth protection, youth (work) promotion and the representation of young people by youth organisations were covered. Since then other federal states have developed their own laws on youth and created legal regulations for youth protection, youth (work) promotion and representation.

At the national level, three other dates are of particular importance. In 1962, the first financial budget for out-of-school youth work was developed, *Bundesjugendplan*. In this plan, state spending on out-of-school youth work amounted to 20 million Austrian schillings, whilst the entire national budget stood at 54 billion Austrian schillings. Out of that 20 million, approximately 12.5 million were given to the youth organisations for their work, 6.5 million for hostelling and the rest for the work of the youth forum.

The second important date was 1983, when responsibility for youth work affairs was taken away from the Federal Ministry of Education, and the Federal Ministry for Family, Youth and Consumer Protection was established. In this ministry, a department is in charge of youth and extra-curricular youth work at the national level. Since 1983, during most of the legislative periods, the term “youth” has also been part of the name of the federal ministry in charge of youth affairs (with the exception of the period between 2000 and 2007).

The year 2000 is also important for the first enactment of national laws on youth promotion and youth representation. These two laws cover the topic of youth work

for the first time at national level. The ways in which youth organisations are supported and how they should be included in youth policy making are stipulated in these laws. (Until then, only youth welfare was dealt with in a national law, although other laws mentioned youth and juveniles.)

Over all, we can see a very close connection between youth policy and youth work during the past century in Austria. Although youth work was sometimes nothing more than the executive body of national policy, it was more frequently an important partner in youth policy development.

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