

Chapter 2

Youth work and social work in the German context

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Youth work in Germany

The question “What is youth work in Germany?” needs to be considered across a variety of forms and core values, different welfare settings and different public discourses about what young people should be able to be and be able to do (Giesecke 1975; Krafeld 1984; Müller et al. 1964; Spatscheck 2009; Thole and Küster 2005). This leads to a variety of approaches to how to address young people’s search for autonomy and the public demand to educate, guide and control young people. Early professional examples can be found among the first youth workers in Prussia at the beginning of the 20th century, the youth movements of the *Wandervögel* or the Scouts in the 1920s and 1930s. A regime change with the National Socialists’ dictatorship then led to new attempts to form a “state youth” through the “youth work” of the *Hitlerjugend*. In the divided post-war Germany, other ideals were pursued, such as the creation of the new “socialist personality” through the Pioneers and the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany). At the same time, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, West Germany) was endeavouring to re-establish a democratic form of youth work, and the youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s were searching for autonomous and emancipatory forms of youth work. After 1989, the reunified Germany founded new forms of open youth work or youth work in associations once again, and the search for the right approaches to the demands of the present and future continues today.

Despite its different forms and phases, one common attribute remains typical for youth work in Germany. The outlines and contents of youth work have always been negotiated and shaped between three actors: the state; youth and welfare associations; and youth movements. All continue to debate the right aims, values and forms of youth work (Spatscheck 2006).

To find a current definition of youth work in Germany, one can refer directly to the legal frameworks. In paragraph 11, section 1 of the German Child and Youth Welfare Law (SGB VIII) the key dimensions of youth work are formulated as follows:

Required offers of youth work are to be supplied for the promotion of the *development* of young people. They should connect to the *interests* of the young people and should be *co-determined* and *co-designed* by them, enable them to *self-determination* and foster *co-responsibility*, and stimulate and lead to *social engagement*. (Translation and italics by the author.)

Interestingly, youth work in Germany is defined in the social code of law and not in the fields of education or citizenship education.

Further main attributes of youth work in Germany are defined through the different theory debates on youth work (e.g. Deinet and Sturzenhecker 2013; Thole 2000). A synopsis (Spatscheck 2005) outlines the main features of youth work, which are described as: a) an orientation towards the interests of young people; b) the creation of offers that are open and can be used voluntarily; c) the aim of participation and the enhancement of the autonomy of young people; and d) the creation of chances to take over responsibility for and engagement in society.

Youth work in Germany is offered in two main forms. The first form is “open child and youth work” (paragraph 11, SGB VIII). Here, open and informal educational opportunities are created with and for young people. Currently, more than 10 000 establishments exist which offer open youth work with more than 45 000 staff (Deinet and Sturzenhecker 2013). They are “open door places” in which to meet and associate, and to take part in, for example, group activities and projects, leisure activities and courses. The second form is “child and youth work in youth associations” (paragraph 12, SGB VIII). Here, mostly self-organised groups with certain value backgrounds can be found. Their main forms are, for example, youth work in religious organisations and churches, the Scouts, aid and welfare organisations, sports associations, youth organisations from political parties and unions, rural youth associations, or associations for culture or ecology. The group and community activities are organised in line with the shared interests and values of the organisations and the members, and usually demand formal membership and a certain continuity of activities.

Both forms of youth work require the ability to create informal learning settings. Youth work settings should be created along the ideals of: a) discursivity and dialogic encounter instead of “teaching and preaching”; b) the creation of protected spaces that help in gaining autonomy through trial, risk and also a space for failure; and c) the chances for an individual experience of the world that helps young people to discover and learn through personal action and feedback (Spatscheck 2005). Such fields for informal learning can also be characterised by the concept of a pedagogy of the creation of learning arrangements for learner-centred settings (Lindner 2014). This requires youth workers to be moderators, enhancers and creators of helpful settings, and to leave the idea of instruction and teaching behind.

To create characteristic settings, youth work can build on a variety of methods. The methods chapter in the leading German handbook of youth work (Deinet and Sturzenhecker 2013) provides methods for use in: project work; street work; mobile youth work; working with individuals; counselling; relational work; working with groups; political education; rituals; working with conflicts; mediation; eating and cooking; humour and irony; and travel and international youth exchanges.

As a relevant profession, youth work in Germany also requires spaces for a professional debate. One such example is the last *Fachkongress Jugendarbeit*, a large conference on child and youth work in Germany. The conference took place in September 2016 in Dortmund with about 1 500 participants and nearly 100 workshops (www.fachkongress-jugendarbeit.de). The conference programme contained controversial topics such as: the creation of “landscapes of education” (*Bildungslandschaften*);

participation and citizenship education; intercultural aspects and diversity; youth work and young refugees; international youth work; youth work and community development; youth work and digitalisation; youth policy; how to measure the effects of youth work; the identity and understanding of youth work as a profession; and the classic question “Are we reaching the right target groups?”.

Social work in Germany

The development of social work in Germany can be described as the evolution of a “schizophrenic profession”. Both in practice and in theory, the two traditions of social work and social pedagogy have coexisted for a rather long time: as a voluntary practice since the Middle Ages, and as a profession and an academic training for more than 100 years (Engelke, Spatscheck and Borrmann 2016). It is only in the last 25 years that the two strands have been merged into the single profession of *Soziale Arbeit* (social work, written with a capital “S”), which includes the traditions, theories and practices of both social work and social pedagogy.

The formation of *Soziale Arbeit*

Social work	Social pedagogy
(<i>Sozialarbeit</i>)	(<i>Sozialpädagogik</i>)
Focus: Poverty reduction	Focus: Education/inclusion of children/youth
Cause: Need for help	Cause: Factual need for education (<i>Erziehungstatsache</i>)
Context: Women’s, social and peace movements	Context: Youth movements, progressive education
Since the 1990s both merged to form “ <i>Soziale Arbeit</i> ”	
Subject matter: Prevention of and coping with social problems	
Or: Support for the leading of life (“ <i>Lebensführung</i> ”)	

The broader understanding of *Soziale Arbeit* containing both traditions also means that, unlike in many other countries and welfare systems, youth work in Germany is regarded as a unique and special part of social work. In addition, this thematic connection means that youth work is predominantly regarded as a social activity, albeit with pedagogical approaches and implications.

The idea of integration of the public tasks of helping and educating young people and their families is also reflected in the development of the system of child and youth welfare in Germany. It is organised into “four pillars” that can be characterised as follows (Jordan, Maykus and Stuckstätte 2012): a) general promotion – youth work, day care, playgrounds; b) counselling and support – counselling of parents, crisis centres, school-related social work, social work with disadvantaged young people; c) help for families and child protection – non-residential and residential settings for families and young people; and d) governmental tasks – legal assistance, guardianships, social work in family or criminal courts.

Interestingly, it is not only the national system of social work in Germany that follows such an integrative perspective. The internationally negotiated “Global Definition of Social Work” by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) also formulate such a broad perspective that integrates emancipatory approaches and a human rights-oriented approach:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes *social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people*. Principles of *social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities* are central to social work. Underpinned by *theories* of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous *knowledge*, social work *engages* people and structures to *address life challenges and enhance wellbeing*. (2014, italics by the author)

Such a broad understanding of social work is also reflected in the definition of social work’s subject matter in German theory debates. A leading and widely accepted definition of social work is “prevention of and coping with social problems” (see Engelke, Spatscheck and Borrmann 2016). An even broader definition regards the “support for the leading of life” (“*Lebensführung*”) as the subject matter of social work (see Otto, Scherr and Ziegler 2010).

This encompassing understanding of social work is reflected in a variety of theories of social work in the German academic discourse. The field can be characterised along many different paradigms. The ongoing debate features the following main theories (Engelke, Borrmann and Spatscheck 2014):

- a) hermeneutic approaches from authors like Hans Thiersch, Klaus Mollenhauer, Michael Winkler or Burkhard Müller that refer to the German tradition of humanities and the *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* (hermeneutic pedagogy);
- b) the lifeworld approach from Hans Thiersch, which refers to critical thinking and hermeneutics and includes references to Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Schütz and Edmund Husserl;
- c) the coping paradigm from Lothar Böhnisch, which includes references to critical thinking, and theories from Ulrich Beck, Émile Durkheim and Carl Mennicke;
- d) a reflexive approach to social work from Hans-Uwe Otto, Bernd Dewe and Werner Thole, which refers to theories of professionalism, critical thinking and authors like Ulrich Beck and Pierre Bourdieu;
- e) radical and critical approaches from authors like Manfred Kappeler, Timm Kunstreich, Susanne Maurer or Fabian Kessler, referring to critical power analyses from Theodor W. Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Karl Marx, or also Michel Foucault, or theories of intersectionality or postcolonialism;
- f) systemic approaches from Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (critical realism) or from Heiko Kleve and Björn Kraus (social constructivism), referring to Mario Bunge or respectively to Niklas Luhmann and theories of social constructivism;
- g) spatial approaches to social work from Ulrich Deinet, Christian Reutlinger, Richard Krisch or Fabian Kessler, referring to theories of social spaces, acquirement, power and critical social geography.

These theories create a common ground for a publicly engaged social work that not only refers to individual and personal problems but also integrates the idea of

the democratic and critical shaping of society through discourses about legitimate rights and needs, and the relevance to think and act together with the target groups of social work.

Connections

A comparison of the definitions and concepts of youth work and social work shows the similarities and overlapping tasks between the two professions. The following three connections in particular can be identified.

Both professions refer to the concept of social pedagogy as a theoretical reference. The key idea of social pedagogy is that all processes of education and development are social and not just individual affairs. Hence, individualistic approaches are regarded as a shortcoming. Social pedagogy, instead, tries to integrate perspectives and analyses about the lifeworlds and the spatial and societal situations of its target groups. This “social” perspective helps in finding an orientation when designing interventions of youth work and social work in line with a broader approach that reflects the effects of power and tries to create solidarity and social change for and with the target groups.

The theoretical background in social pedagogy leads to common principles. Both youth work and social work are defined around the ideal of democratic participation. Furthermore, they are both connected to the ideal of *Bildung*, which aims to enable the involved subjects to fulfil and reach their full individual and social potential. Lastly, both professions strive to reach greater social justice and empowerment through their interventions.

The shared principles also lead to common aims for interventions. Both youth work and social work aim to create settings that enable the development of individuals in line with their perspectives, interests and needs. Also, both professions should enable the inclusion of potentially excluded target groups and support their full realisation in the areas of citizenship and education.

Disconnections

In some cases, however, both youth workers and social workers lose their focus and do not keep to their professional aims and values. These developments are visible in both professions and cannot be attributed to the concepts themselves, but rather to shortcomings in the design of practice and organisational frameworks. In this context especially, the following three problems emerge.

Both youth work and social work tend to neglect poverty and inequality. Non-reflective practice routines and budgetary pressures lead to the development of functionalising approaches that teach individuals to be good market subjects rather than to seek and secure their rights and opportunities for personal and social development. When following such individualising approaches, both professions tend to focus on correction and the technical reduction of behavioural problems. However, when such concepts predominate, youth work and social work ignore the social causes of exclusion and the professional task of fostering emancipation. Both professions

need to develop solidarity and should fulfil their ethical mandates, which requires active positioning instead of a functionalising approach.

Other cases show that both professions do not always manage to empower their target groups in the way that they should. Organisational and societal routines, processes of technical standardisation, a high pressure on cost reduction, a lack of staff and a growing focus on bureaucracy often prevent youth workers and social workers from discharging their original tasks.

Finally, many youth workers and social workers tend to forget their public role. Both professions have a chance to support and create concrete forms of active citizenship and democratic participation. But these professional tasks need to be actively shaped through democratic processes.

Reconnections

Living in contemporary societies requires coping with the following tasks and challenges, from which the necessary reconnections between youth work and social work can be made.

All Western countries are dominated by a “post-political situation” (Biesta 2011). Further analyses in this area are provided by authors like Colin Crouch, Jacques Rancière or Chantal Mouffe. Many citizens have become disenchanted with politics, are turning towards populist and anti-democratic movements, absent themselves from voting and often no longer feel represented by the political and societal “elites”. Facing these developments, the institutions of youth work and social work need to remember and rediscover their public function to reshape democracy and to offer places for concrete and effective forms of participation. Here, youth work might help social work with its broader professional experience. Many public and welfare-related institutions and organisations have lost their appeal and ability to create spaces for controversial political debates and discourses, and also settings that foster social cohesion. Youth work and social work could make a difference here, and, at the same time, reaffirm their legitimisation as professions with a public approach.

Many citizens of our modern societies are facing precarious prospects for their economic participation. This issue is also situated in the contexts of a global climate crisis and a “peak everything” of limited resources. Hence, the social question of economic participation needs to be increasingly linked to a reflection on the social and ecological limits to growth. With this background, social work and youth work are conceptually challenged to address the question of how post-growth societies and post-growth economies could be developed and how sustainable approaches to quality of life and prosperity could be realised beyond growth models. In this context, both professions need to find answers and models for the thematic connection between the social/economic and the ecological question. Currently, there are only initial ideas about how this task could be designed. Here, social work might help youth work with its broader experience in the field of socio-economic participation.

The third challenge for both professions is the need to deal with increasing diversity and plurality and to develop models and concepts for reaching integration, participation and social cohesion in pluralistic societies and communities. Here, an

ideal model could be the concept of the “parapolis” (Terkessidis 2015). This term describes communities and societies that are leading ongoing political and social discourses on how to live together in situations of increasing and persisting social pluralities without expecting to reach a common sameness in all aspects of life. Discourses about how to form communities and societies that are solidary without expecting their members to submit uniformly to certain cultural unities are not easy to lead. They need time and space and are also challenging to individual and social identities and to the question of social justice. Beyond that, the idea of a parapolis is especially challenged by populist and fundamentalist movements that essentially oppose these ideals. In this new and complex situation, both youth work and social work encounter new terrain and need to learn from each other how to design this challenging professional task.

A concluding outlook

The themes and challenges that have been described in this chapter call for longer and bigger societal projects that need to be carried out with a clear focus and vision. Such projects are often in danger of losing this focus. A point of orientation for both youth work and social work could be derived from the following conceptual trinity that was also formulated as a guiding theme for a *Festschrift* for the social pedagogue and youth worker Franz Josef Krafeld (Spatscheck and Wagenblaus 2013). This book explores the meaning of and the thematic connections between:

- ▶ *Bildung* in the sense of individual and social development;
- ▶ *participation* in the sense of active and accessible democracy for all people; and
- ▶ *justice* in the sense of social, individual and institutional justice.

These three key principles of social pedagogy might need to be reformulated and adapted in line with the challenges we are currently experiencing. A discourse on their relevance and meaning could help to describe and develop key criteria for interventions that foster democracy, the realisation of human rights and the possibility of achieving individual and social development. In addition, such debates could also help to identify the key challenges for institutions and organisations involved with both youth work and social work in the context of their different and changing social spaces and societies.

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