

Children and Youth Work in Austria

– An Overview –



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Introduction

Even today, children and youth work is largely an unknown concept to people who do not work in this field. And even among the actors themselves there are a number of definitions with some regional variances, which presents certain challenges when communicating about the overall activities, the changing demands and the services rendered by children and youth work in the 21st century.

This publication outlines children and youth work in Austria. It familiarises readers with the principles underlying children and youth work and with the framework conditions, as well as presenting implementing organisations and their interface function.

What is children and youth work?

Defining children and youth work and locating it within the spectrum of social fields of action is not an easy task, as it encompasses a wide range of activities and fields of work. Werner Thole and Thomas Rauschenbach, experts in this field, developed very useful definitions. Werner Thole's definition is practice oriented: "Children and youth work comprises all those extracurricular and not specifically vocational, primarily pedagogically framed and organised, public, non-commercial education- and experience-related socialisation fields of independent and public-sector organisations, initiatives and working groups" (Thole, 2000, p. 23). Thole goes on to specify that children and youth work is a voluntary service for leisure time, with no obligation for children and youth to take part. Thomas Rauschenbach sees youth work as an integral part of multiple, plural and broadened living

environments – as a counter-experience to formal schooling and everyday family life (Rauschenbach, 2003, p. 40). He defines it as a place for informal learning in which there is an arrangement of learning opportunities, educational impulses and social spaces that facilitate self-determined learning (ibid., p. 18).

We can therefore state that children and youth work is a socio-pedagogical field of action and an extracurricular, organised socialisation field. For this reason, it is generally also referred to as extracurricular children and youth work, which clearly sets it apart from the school setting. Extracurricular children and youth work places an emphasis on activities during young people's leisure time, but is also geared towards informal and non-formal learning during these times.

Why children and youth work?

There are varying definitions regarding the age of children and youth in the Austrian legal system. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Austria in 1992, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. According to the Federal Youth Representation Act (or Federal Act regulating the representation of youth concerns) (Bundes-Jugendvertretungsgesetz) and the Federal Youth Promotion Act (or Federal Act governing the promotion of extracurricular youth education and youth work) (Bundes-Jugendförderungsgesetz), youth are defined as people up to the age of 30. As soon as one takes other factors besides age – e.g. socio-demographic factors – into account, children and youth are extremely heterogeneous groups. Nowadays, traditional definitions of adulthood – such as living in one's own household, having a completed education or entering the professional world – fall short, as these events in a person's biography are being pushed further and further back in time. It is therefore essential to consider not only age but also specific target groups when applying the terms of child and youth. This makes it possible for children and youth work to concretely address the different circumstances and needs of young people.

Youth researchers as well as children and youth workers have observed that increasingly young groups define themselves as "youth" and also seek access to the youth work services and institutions. Youth work has adapted to this development and now addresses both children and post-adolescents.

The term "children and youth work" is applied when both children and youth are addressed. If the target group is only children, the term "work with children" is used to avoid confusion with the term "child labour". According to developmental psychology criteria, a line can be drawn at the onset of puberty to distinguish between children and youth. Klaus Hurrelmann describes this transition as a phase "characterised by a completely different physical, physiological and mental 'inner reality' meeting an altered social 'outer reality'. Both areas – inner and outer reality – together make new kinds of demands upon personal conduct" (Hurrelmann, 1994, p. 32). This transition from one life phase to another is also known as a "status passage". One of the characteristics of modern societies, however, is that these transitions – which also include youth to young adulthood – are no longer clearly defined or bound to specific time frames. This is also why society no longer has rituals that symbolically mark the transition from one status to the next.

Principles and goals of children and youth work

Children and youth work aims to provide services and institutions that benefit the socialisation of young people, whose interests and needs therefore form the main basis for orientation. At the same time, children and youth work wants to enable these young people to live self-determined lives and motivate them to participate in shaping society.

By discovering their own abilities as well as their limits, they can develop their own perspectives on life. By building relationships – whether with other children/youth or to the children and youth workers – they develop their ability to communicate and strengthen their social skills. Being able to experience a variety of views and interests, different cultural orientations and religious beliefs creates a foundation for dealing with such differences in a reflective manner. This strengthens the basis for solidarity.

When children and youth are actively involved in children and youth work institutions, work on projects and take part in local decision-making processes, they can experience their own potency; they get a sense of themselves as being effectual in the public sector. Seeing that their opinion counts and that anyone can contribute towards the success of a project is a fundamental of political participation and thus for shaping society.

Reflective learning becomes possible when children and youth discuss and reflect on their current experience and then transfer these experiences to their own living environment. In this way, children and youth work facilitates learning experiences that are anchored in reality and that – as opposed to formal learning settings – are neither evaluated nor graded. A position paper of the National Youth Council (BJV, 2006) states that “non-formal learning is an organised process in which young people can gain knowledge and competencies and develop a wide range of skills”.

The double mandate of children and youth work

Children and youth work fulfils a “double mandate”: on the one hand, it has the task of representing the various expectations and needs of young people in the public and to the government; on the other hand, it should take into account the concerns and expectations of the implementing organisations and backers, which can also vary (Scheipl, 2008, pp. 23-25).

Child and youth participation

Getting children and youth involved in shaping their shared living environment is one of the cornerstones of children and youth work. Young people are valued as experts for their living environment, irrespective of their skills and competences or their social, ethnic and religious background. The children and youth workers advise and support them in expressing their issues, concerns and needs.

Societal changes mirrored in children and youth work

Children and youth work deals both theoretically and practically with changes in living environments and their consequences. These include the shift in family structures, changes in the education system, the integration of immigrant groups, the marginalisation and impoverishment of social groups and the profound changes in the labour market. These changes pose intense challenges to children and youth when shaping their lives. At the same time, young people are the seismographs of this societal shift and their needs and expectations make them part of the shaping process. Children and youth work observes these diverse and often conflicting experiences and passes them on to other societal actors and institutions, in order to help them get a better understanding of the living environments of children and youth.

Quality assurance in children and youth work

High-quality services and well-trained children and youth workers play an especially significant role in dealing with young people.

Constantly looking for ways to improve the quality of children and youth work and developing it further has become an indispensable field of activity. By defining standards and directing attention to assessment tools such as self-evaluation and impact analyses, the needs of this increasingly complex field of action are taken into consideration in the best possible way.

Quality-centred and evidence-informed approaches in children and youth work as well as a definition for Europe-wide “quality youth work” are currently the main focus. There is need for a clearly defined positioning of youth work in the interaction between education and life-long learning. According to the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of the EU (conclusions reached by the Council regarding the effect of quality youth work on the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people, Brussels, 22 April 2013 8575/13 2013/C 168/03), a quality-oriented and insight-based approach can also help to enhance the accessibility, visibility, effectiveness and efficiency – in short: the significance – of youth policy and youth work services. Youth policy is responsible for creating quality frameworks as well as systems for self-evaluation and external evaluation. And politicians, researchers and practitioners must work together closely to implement this.

aufZAQ – Certified quality of non-formal education in youth work

The aufZAQ certificate is proof of personal qualifications on the one hand, but also helps to safeguard quality standards in education and further training offers for full-time and voluntary youth leaders and youth workers on the other. With this certificate, the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth, the provincial youth departments and the Youth Work Authority of South Tyrol confirm that the certified courses are high-quality non-formal educational offers. It is the aim of aufZAQ to make the quality of courses visible and comparable, and to recognise them. It gives children and youth workers a point of orientation when choosing an education or further training. For education providers, the aufZAQ certification verifies the high quality of their offer. For employers and children and youth work organisations, aufZAQ is a guarantee that the respective course is a high-quality professional education or further training that is highly practice oriented.

www.aufzaq.at/english

Political and legal framework

Children and youth work is subject to certain legal and institutional framework conditions at the local government, provincial and federal levels.

Youth policy at federal level

Owing to Austria's federalist structure, the responsibilities for youth policy and for children and youth work are divided up between the nine provinces and the federal government. Youth policy is an inter-ministerial, cross-sectional issue. For this reason, youth-relevant agendas can be found in all federal ministries.

The agendas for general matters and youth policy coordination lie with the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth (BMFJ). Based on the Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), the BMFJ began to develop a national youth strategy in 2012. The goals of the Austrian youth strategy are to establish youth policy as a cross-sectional issue, to position children and youth work as an important pillar of youth policy, to make the existing activities for youth in all political areas or fields of action visible, and consequently to improve the coordination of measures between the youth-related stakeholders.

www.jugendstrategie.at
www.bmfj.gv.at

In accordance with the Federal Youth Promotion Act (Bundesgesetz über die Förderung der außerschulischen Jugenderziehung und Jugendarbeit, B-JFG), the work of nationwide youth organisations and associations receives financial support from the BMFJ.

The National Youth Council acts as an advocacy group established by law for all children and youth (see Chapter 10.1). The Federal Youth Representation Act (Bundesgesetz

über die Vertretung der Anliegen der Jugend, B-JVG), whose implementation falls within the purview of the BMFJ, governs the Council's tasks.

All parties represented in the National Council have (child and) youth spokespeople. There is no separate child and youth committee in parliament; the agendas are dealt with in the respective committees – primarily the Family Committee.

Youth policy at regional level

The respective member of the provincial government (also called the political head of the provincial youth department) is responsible for the regional organisation and implementation of issues relating to youth policy and the implementation of children and youth work. Each Austrian province allocates the competences and duties differently; these tasks could also be assigned to different organisational units within the provincial administration. In order to coordinate youth policy issues nationwide, the provincial youth departments attend an annual conference with the minister responsible for youth affairs; staff of the respective departments also take part. Just as the National Council has child and youth spokespeople, the parties represented in the provincial diet usually also have child and youth spokespeople. Provincial youth advisory councils (with different designations) advise the provincial governments of almost all provinces on youth policy issues. The structure and competencies of these committees differ from province to province.

Youth policy at local level

Communities (Gemeinden) are the immediate living environment of children and youth and therefore play a key role. By creating recreational facilities and other infrastructure, they allow children and youth to have diverse experiences in their immediate surroundings. Local children and youth

work comprises an extremely wide range of activities in this regard. These include, among others, coordinating and linking interest groups and children and youth work practitioners, creating and maintaining child- and youth-specific recreational facilities, supporting child and youth organisations, as well as developing and implementing their own services and programmes such as holiday activities or junior citizen events. The local administration is the first point of contact for associational and Professional Open Children and Youth Work (see Chapters 8.1 and 8.3), as well as for self-organised youth initiatives. The communities play an important part in all this. Besides the provincial government, they are the biggest funders of children and youth work and can finance organisations themselves or engage independent associations for that purpose.

In many cases the community bears the costs of infrastructure such as youth centres, playgrounds and sports fields. In order to make the concerns and needs of children and youth visible and also to give them the necessary weight, many communities have created binding youth participation instruments in cooperation with children, youth and active citizens.

European youth policy

Austria is involved in the activities of European youth policy both at the level of the Council of Europe and at EU level.

Youth policy of the Council of Europe

In the Council of Europe the youth policy agendas fall within the purview of the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation. This itself shows that youth participation and strengthening young people's active role are the most important youth-related goals of the Council of Europe. Youth policy and youth work support the intercultural dialogue, social integration and political measures and instruments for young people. An important feature of the Youth Department in the

Council of Europe is co-management: to this end, government officials and youth NGOs meet semi-annually at the Joint Council on Youth to develop concrete projects and measures and to implement the work programme.

www.coe.int/t/dq4/youth/

Youth policy of the European Union

When Austria joined the European Union, European youth policy became a constitutive element of Austrian youth policy. The Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 laid the groundwork for European cooperation in the youth field from 2010 to 2018. One aspect of this is the "Structured Dialogue". In order to implement and further develop the "Structured Dialogue" in Austria, a national working group was instituted that consists of representatives of the BMFJ, the provincial youth departments, the National Youth Council, Centre of Competence for Professional Open Youth Work, the National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres, the national agency of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme, and youth research.

www.strukturiertes-dialog.at

The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, on youth work (2010/C 327/01), includes the call for an enhancement of the quality of both voluntary and full-time youth work and stresses the important role of the practitioners in implementing the fields of action. Volunteers and full-time youth workers should receive support, public recognition and the best possible training.

The BMFJ represents youth policy issues to the outside world by participating in various committees of the European Union, Council of Europe and United Nations.

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm
<http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership>

Implementing organisations of children and youth work

It is also possible to differentiate children and youth work according to its respective implementing organisations. The implementing organisations reflect the whole spectrum of public-sector and civil society actors. They range from private associations and NGOs through to local, national and international institutions. A distinction can also be made according to areas of activity. The structures of children and youth work are extremely varied; there is hardly a field of action or issue that is not covered. The services and activities aim to do justice to the diversity of young people's living environments. In Austria, the implementing organisations are charity organisations, self-governing youth associations and social organisations. Communities and denominational or party political institutions can also act as implementing organisations. A number of Austrian associations in the areas of sports or

culture, or social or public safety organisations have their own child and youth groups or departments, and are hence also active in the area of children and youth work.

The activities and services of children and youth work are financed by means of own resources (personal contributions of volunteers, donated monetary or physical assets), self-financing (proceeds from events and activities, membership fees, donations and sponsoring) and external financing (grants from the public sector or from the implementing organisations such as churches and political parties). In Austria the communities, federal provinces and the federal government are by far the most important financial backers of children and youth work.

Forms of children and youth work in Austria

The following section describes the forms of children and youth work in Austria. Essentially, there are three areas: children and youth work in youth organisations, youth information centres, and Professional Open Children and Youth Work. First, each area, its principles and goals will be presented, followed by a description of the target group and thematic focus. Methods, services and networking activities as well as an outline of the structure and qualification of the staff round off the overview.

Children and youth work in youth organisations

When speaking about children and youth work, children and youth work in youth organisations is what usually springs to mind in the general public. Most of the youth organisations in Austria have been around for several decades and cover an extremely wide spectrum. Their goals and underlying ideology vary and may be for example of a denominational, cultural, ecological or party political nature. Most child and youth organisations offer not only age-appropriate services for children, adolescents and young adults, but are also socio-political actors and lobby for the manifold issues of children and youth, for instance by means of campaigns and events. Child and youth organisations are an important place to learn about participation in society, especially for those young people who are active within the respective organisation. The voluntary engagement of largely young people is an important foundation and thus central to children and youth work in Austria. With its services and activities, associational children and youth work reaches some 1.5 million young people up to the age of 30 (National Youth Council, 2011).

Objectives

Youth organisations follow an integrative and participatory educational approach and can be viewed as a creative social space in which young people can discover and cultivate their talents. They take the issues and interests of young people seriously and support them in developing personal skills. Above all, associational youth organisations are also an important place for young people to gain an understanding of democracy and participation and to experience self-efficacy.

Services and methods

The services and methods of children and youth work in youth organisations are as diverse as the organisations themselves. They convey a large amount of competencies and knowledge. Starting with so-called soft skills through to technical and organisational skills, young people receive support in their personal development and their civil society involvement. Owing to their great diversity, a systematic compilation and presentation of the organisations would go beyond the scope of this publication. However, the publication “Hier geht’s lang! Navigationshilfe Kinder- und Jugendorganisationen” (This Way! Navigational Aid Child and Youth Organisations) (National Youth Council, 2011) provides information on the various features and focal points of each organisation.

Networking

Youth organisations connect with one another and cooperate at different levels: horizontally between the organisations, and vertically between associational and other youth-oriented institutions. The National Youth Council, of which most of the Austrian youth organisations are members, also offers a number of possibilities for networking and cooperating. Further, many organisations are also linked at international level via European or global associations. As was previously mentioned, there are various networking and representative committees at regional level that are usually subsumed under the term of provincial youth advisory councils. These committees have also been networking with each other for some time, also with the help of the National Youth Council, to share experiences and best practice models.

Qualification

Many seminars, courses, workshops and programmes are constantly held within the framework of internal educational and further training measures, and are attended by thousands of volunteers and communicators. These non-formal educational offers contribute greatly to quality assurance in associational children and youth work. A detailed overview of the educational and further training measures in the area of associational child and youth organisations can be found in the publication “Hier geht’s lang! Navigationshilfe Kinder- und Jugendorganisationen” (This Way! Navigational Aid Child and Youth Organisations) (National Youth Council, 2011).

Currently, there is no standardised nationwide recognition for non-formally gained competencies that young people can develop in youth organisations and transfer into other areas of life (e.g. in a vocational context).

Youth information

The general Youth Information Centres have existed in Austria for almost 30 years. They are not restricted to any particular topics, but rather offer young people a first point of contact for any issues in form of a one stop shop: all questions are either answered right away or passed on to an expert. The Austrian Youth Information Centres have a total of 27 offices in all provinces, thereby offering a nationwide service to young people. 12- to 26-year-olds make up the core target group. Beyond this, legal guardians, family members, educators, youth workers and any other people interested in youth issues also belong to the target groups.

Austrian Youth Portal

The Austrian Youth Portal is an editorially selected, regularly updated and annotated list of links with reference to youth-relevant issues. Its aim is to make it easier for young people to find their way when looking for something on the internet.

www.jugendportal.at

European Youth Portal

At European level, the European Youth Portal offers information on a large number of different topics such as work, health, rights, travel, and education and further training throughout Europe.

www.europa.eu/youth

Objective

The Youth Information Centres support young people in their development and offer up-to-date, relevant and comprehensible information to help them cross the threshold to adulthood. Some of the goals of the Youth Information Centres are:

Orientation

In a time of information overload, helping young people to choose the right services and alternatives for their specific circumstances has become one of the central tasks of the Youth Information Centres.

Autonomy

With the help of pertinent information, young people can make independent decisions on the basis of knowing their possibilities and abilities.

Participation

Knowing one's rights and obligations is one of the prerequisites of actively participating in society.

Information literacy

Handling information critically and reflectively requires a variety of skills and is more important than ever. The Youth Information Centres help young people to develop information literacy skills.

Services and methods

The Austrian Youth Information Centres

- » base their services on the needs and interests of youth,
- » offer information on all youth-relevant topics, free of charge and age group appropriate,
- » present topics in a way that is understandable,
- » act as a link between young people and specialist organisations,
- » use communication channels that are close to young people's lives,
- » offer orientation and information as the foundation for a self-determined life,
- » foster information literacy skills in young people,
- » support young people in realising their own projects,
- » act in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter and the Principles for Online Youth Information.

Networking

Networking is important to the Youth Information Centres to

- » gain first-hand information,
- » consult with experts on all kinds of topics,
- » convey information via a variety of channels to different groups of young people,
- » share experiences and knowhow,
- » collaborate on developing new projects and innovative ideas.

Qualification

The Youth Information Centres are constantly reflecting on the quality assurance of their work. In addition to the individual activities of each federal province, the following measures are being implemented in the National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres:

- » ongoing further training offers for the staff of the Youth Information Centres – from the beginner course through to in-depth topics;
- » nationwide quality criteria and quality standards as well as commitment to the European Youth Information Principles (for details see: National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres [ed.]: "Qualität in der Jugendinformation" [Quality in Youth Information], April 2014 ISBN 978-3-200-03569-0)

Professional Open Children and Youth Work

Professional Open Children and Youth Work as a professional field of action of children and youth work provides offers that are located between social work, educational work, cultural work and health promotion, and is an important place of socialisation for young people in Austria. It is an indispensable part of contemporary local and regional youth policy. Professional Open Children and Youth Work takes place in youth centres, youth clubs, youth cafés and other institutions, but also in public spaces such as parks, at railway stations and in other public places. In Austria there are more than 630 institutions of Professional Open Children and Youth Work.

Objectives

The following objectives characterise the Professional Open Children and Youth Work:

Personality development

Professional Open Children and Youth Work is a place for recreational activities, communication, information, learning, experience, development, advice, orientation, help and support. Professional Open Children and Youth Work has a preventive impact. The continued development of the personality of a young person is actively supported, with a focus on independence, personal responsibility and empowerment. The focus on “learning”, “knowing” and “experiencing” deepens the social, personal, cultural, intercultural, political and gender-related skills as fundamental objectives.

Action competence

Professional Open Children and Youth Work expands young people’s action competence by specifically initiating and promoting educational processes. Cognitive education is an essential aspect in this context. It is about absorbing, processing, reflecting on and acting on information.

This way young people are empowered to actively take responsibility in society, in private, commercial, cultural and political arenas.

Identity development

Professional Open Children and Youth Work supports young people in finding their roles in society. Debating all values and orientations related to human living environments is of particular importance. In addition, Professional Open Children and Youth Work promotes the development of youth cultures. Strengthening self-organisation processes as well as developing an independent cultural and social identity is of primary importance.

Social participation – Distributive justice – Social inclusion

One of the ways that Professional Open Children and Youth Work mainly contributes to distributive justice is by making resources and opportunities available. Professional Open Children and Youth Work seizes socio-politically relevant topics and launches activities that provide room for young people and enable their active participation in our society. Creating and promoting appropriate framework conditions for young people are fundamental objectives of Professional Open Children and Youth Work.

Services and methods

The three central approaches of Professional Open Children and Youth Work are the focus on open space and leisure time, the focus on target groups and the focus on the social environment. The offers are developed in cooperation with the target groups and are based on their living environments and their needs. They allow them to make experiences in their leisure time, without any pressure to perform or any strict orientation on efficiency. The orientation on specific target groups among young people is visible in the gender-reflected children and youth work, in intercultural work, as well as in work with cliques and peer groups. The common space children and young people share with other social groups can also serve as a starting point for relevant services. Therefore, in addition to location-related Professional Open Children and Youth Work, mobile youth work represents an important approach in creating relations to young people at those places they frequent, from residential areas and parks to railway stations, and to offer them services that are based on their needs.

Networking

Networking and cooperation are basic elements of Professional Open Children and Youth Work, because Professional Open Children and Youth Work considers itself as a hub and platform for various concerns and needs. Important matters of concern include, e.g., educational institutions, children and youth welfare facilities, but also police, information centres and the neighbourhood or relevant city district. Furthermore, networking involves experts of Professional Open Children and Youth Work in the framework of further education offers, multiplier training and the annual national Expert Symposium on Professional Open Youth Work.

Qualification

Most Professional Open Children and Youth workers are specifically qualified employees with basic socio-pedagogical training. The “Qualitätshandbuch für Offene Jugendarbeit” (Quality Manual for Open Youth Work), developed by the Centre of Competence for Professional Open Youth Work in 2011, outlines the basic principles in the area of quality standards. It describes the requirements in terms of structure, process and result of Professional Open Children and Youth Work in Austria and makes suggestions for further development.

Interface function of children and youth work

Children and youth work acts in broad, interdisciplinary fields of action. The living environments of young people are complex and interrelated. Therefore the flexible cooperation between children and youth work and system partners is indispensable. In this context, children and youth work has an interface function in different areas and with different parties involved, such as parents or legal guardians, the school system, children and youth welfare, healthcare facilities, cultural organisations and educational institutions, justice and police, city district work, labour market service, private businesses, interest groups as well as administrative and political players. The cooperation happens on multiple levels, for instance in cooperations with cultural institutions and educational facilities, through information about the labour market, traineeships and other educational offers provided in cooperation with the labour market service and other institutions taking political action on the labour market, through job fairs or try-out days for young people in cooperation with local companies, by accompanying young people to court hearings, in the form of joint workshops with the police on such topics as violence, cyber crime, self-defence, etc. The more strongly children and youth work is based on social environments, the more important regional and interdisciplinary partners become.

Despite the various cooperations in children and youth work, young people's interests – and not those of the system partners – play a predominant role. By taking children and young people seriously as individual target groups, children and youth work acts as a lobby for young people.

Parents and legal guardians

Apart from family and school, children and youth work has now been established and recognised as an additional socialisation authority. The boundaries between the work with children and young people in families, schools and leisure-time environments can no longer be drawn clearly and definitively. In addition, children and youth work provides services for family members in order to involve them, if required, and to further expand the services and fields of socialisation.

School

Due to the shift in our society, schools assume not only educational tasks, but also childrearing and childcare agendas and social work tasks. These were previously typical domains of the family. The educational mandate both of schools and of children and youth work has similar objectives but different focus areas. The distinction lies in the formal (and performance-based) education in the school system as opposed to the non-formal learning and informal education in children and youth work. At the same time, cooperation and networking with schools is gaining importance for children and youth work. The forms used and the interfaces created will depend on the relevant local conditions. The changing forms of teaching and learning represent challenges both for children and youth work as well as for schools. At the same time they provide an opportunity to develop new cooperation models.

Children and youth welfare

Children and youth welfare comprises services provided by public and private children and youth welfare institutions that contribute to supporting the rights of children and young people to the promotion of their development and education towards self-responsible and socially constructive personalities, to protect them from all forms of violence and to strengthen the educational abilities of families.

The 1989 Youth Welfare Act ceased to be in force in April 2013 and was replaced by the 2013 Federal Children and Youth Welfare Act. According to Section 1(1), it is one of the principles of this law that children and young people are entitled to the promotion of their development and to be brought up to be self-responsible and socially constructive personalities. The federal provinces act as funding bodies of children and youth welfare. They pass provincial laws for implementation and provide both infrastructures and resources. Children and youth work acts as a supporting system outside the institutions of children and youth welfare and can, if necessary, build a bridge to children and youth welfare.

There are tried-and-tested cooperations of children and youth welfare services in the setting of youth work. In this context, children and youth work can assume an important function in order to fill gaps between these individual systems.

Ombudsman offices for children and young people

In 1995 ombudsman offices for children and young people were established in all nine federal provinces as central, politically independent institutions reviewing and enforcing compliance with the rights of children and young people based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Section 35(1) of the 2013 Federal Children and Youth Welfare Act also provides that each federal province must establish an ombudsman office for children and young people. The ombudsman offices for children and young people are contact partners for all problems of children and young people. Their tasks include raising awareness and lobbying for children's rights, information, networking and advice in case of problems between parents and children (kija, 2012). The Federal Children and Youth Advocate was established as a department of the Federal Ministry of Families and Youth, in addition to the legally provided establishment of the ombudsman offices for children and young people in the federal provinces. Central tasks of the Federal Children and Youth Advocate include the cooperation with the ombudsman offices for children and young people in the provinces, the public representation of the principle of non-violent education, public lobbying for a child-friendly society, as well as counselling of children and young people as well as their parents or legal guardians.

www.kija.at

www.kinderrechte.gv.at

National organisations and networks

The three forms of children and youth work in Austria are reflected in the three national organisations: the legal representation of interests for children and young people – the National Youth Council (BJV), the National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres, as well as the Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work (bOJA). They cooperate with other institutions and networks of children and youth work through European umbrella associations.

National Youth Council (BJV)

The National Youth Council (BJV) is the legally established representation body of all children and young people in Austria. Together with more than 50 member organisations, it acts as an advocate of the concerns of young people. All in all, the BJV represents about 2.9 million young people up to the age of 30 and holds a social partnership status. In its current form the Austrian National Youth Council was established in 2001 when the Federal Youth Representation Act came into force. The National Youth Council is a strong lobby working for the interests of young people independent of party politics and critically evaluating the actions of the responsible political players. The activities of the BJV include representing the political interests of young people towards the National Council, the government and the public, voicing its opinion on drafts for laws and regulations affecting young people, influencing political positions on various sets of youth policy agendas, and implementing youth political campaigns, projects and events. The National Youth Council is a member of the European Youth Forum (www.youthforum.org), where it contributes to European decision-making processes, networked with other youth representation bodies and international youth NGOs.

All information on the National Youth Council and its activities can be found at www.bjv.at.

National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres

The National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres has existed since 2004 and is a national association of youth information centres in Austria. Its main tasks are:

- » Coordination of national youth information projects
- » Preparation of national information products
- » National and international representation
- » National and international networking, projects and development
- » National further education and quality assurance
- » National contact for partners and media.

As a member of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency ERYICA, EURODESK (information network on such topics as advice on funding programmes, stints abroad for young people, as well as youth policy in Europe) and EYCA (European Youth Card Association), the National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres is also active in the advisory bodies of EU youth policy.

All information on the activities of youth information centres in Austria can be found at www.jugendinfo.at.

Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work in Austria (bOJA)

The Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work in Austria, has been active in the field of Professional Open Children and Youth Work since 2009. As a mouthpiece for the issues and practical experiences of Professional Open Children and Youth Work and of young people, the Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work submits its expertise to politics, different stakeholders and the general public. On a national level, it is involved in various work groups and networking committees. On a European level, the Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work is a member of ECYC, the European Confederation of Youth Clubs.

The Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work in Austria is a founding member of the Europe-wide network POYWE (Professional Open Youth Work in Europe).

The offers and information of the Centre of Competence for Professional Open Children and Youth Work in Austria can be found on the website www.boja.at.

International youth work

International children and youth work is an important cross-sectional task that is performed by the responsible institutions and organisations in different ways. It is visible e.g. in cross-border youth exchange programmes or by enabling children and young people as well as children and youth work practitioners to meet and take part in further education in the framework of international and European programmes such as “Erasmus+: Youth in Action”.

The lowered voting age of 16 years and the multi-faceted services provided by associational and open children and youth work make Austria an interesting place for international experts and brings numerous expert delegations to Austria every year. International representative tasks, such as the participation of youth delegates in EU and UNO conferences are realised and coordinated by the National Youth Council.

Sources and related links

aufZAQ – certified quality of non-formal education in youth work: www.aufzaq.at/english

Austrian Youth Portal: www.jugendportal.at

Austrian Youth Strategy:
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Children's rights: www.kinderrechte.gv.at

Conclusions of the Council on the contribution of high-quality youth work to the development, well-being and social inclusion of young people; 2013/C 168/03

Erasmus+: Youth in Action: www.jugendinaktion.at

ERYICA – European Youth Information and Counselling Agency: www.eryica.org

European Council: Youth – Young people building Europe: www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth

European Information Network for Young People (EURODESK): www.eurodesk.eu

European Youth Forum: www.youthforum.org

European Youth Portal:
http://europa.eu/youth/index.cfm?l_id=de

EYCA – European Youth Card Association (concession cards for young people): www.eyca.org

Federal Children and Youth Welfare Act, FLG I No. 69/2013 from 17 April 2013

Federal Ministry of Families and Youth: www.bmfj.gv.at

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Network Children's Rights in Austria – National Coalition for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Austria. www.kinderhabenrechte.at

Ombudsman offices for children and youth in Austria: www.kija.at

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth: <http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership>

POYWE - Professional Open Youth Work in Europe: www.poywe.org

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Working partnership on participation: www.jugendbeteiligung.at

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