

Youth work in Germany

Overview

Social work in Germany has both differences and similarities to social work in the Netherlands. These differences are good to know, because we can learn from them. By investigating the goods and the bads from German social work, we can see what things we could apply to our project for social work in Eindhoven. This research will be done from Wednesday 15 March to Monday 20 March.

Methods

For this research, we have used literature study as a method from the CMD Methods Pack. We were using Google as a search engine and we were looking into search terms like 'Youth work in Germany', 'Youth work in Berlin', 'Social work in Germany/Berlin' and these terms in German, to get more information directly in German. There is a slight focus on Berlin, since Berlin is a technologically rich and large city like Eindhoven, and this makes the overlap between this research and our eventual goal better.

German legislation for youth work

German youth work is always organized on a local scale, with the state and the nation laying out the structure (EACEA National Policies Platform, 2021). Financing however, is also done on a local level. Youth work in Germany follows a three-layered structure, consisting of federal, state and local levels (EACEA National Policies Platform, 2022). At the local level, the youth centers themselves are responsible for the youth. However, if the rural districts, cities or municipalities have a youth care office under the federal state law, the municipalities are directly responsible for the youth work. Since most local youth authorities have their own youth offices, youth work can differ greatly in different regions.

At the state level, the frameworks are made for youth work and the local organizations get financial support when needed. The state parliaments are the organizations responsible for these tasks on state level and each state takes on an approach for themselves. For example, Nordrhein-Westfalen could have a completely different legislation for youth work than Niedersachsen. The state level also provides support from experts in the field of youth work for local youth work organizations to learn from.

Lastly, on a national level, the main task is to provide funding for the states that need funding for sustaining good youth work and when a state is developing better youth work that eventually benefits more than just the region. Also, the national organization which encompasses youth work (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMFSFJ) is the place where the state has to go to approve new laws in the field of youth work. It is the national level's task to approve or decline these propositions for new youth work laws. Furthermore, the BMFSFJ is responsible for making the funding plan and for delivering the report about how things are going on the other levels.

Context of Berlin youth work

The Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family in Berlin focuses on youth from 6 to 27 years old. (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie Berlin, 2022). They aim to get the youth to be responsible for their political and social actions, as well as to get youth to participate more in activities and even international youth work. Berlin youth work works together with clubs, festivals and playgrounds in all districts of the city.

However, Berlin has made this quite confusing, because there is a difference between youth work and youth social work. Youth social work supports youth who are socially disadvantaged or, for example, have trouble at home. And this youth only counts from 12 to 27 years old (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie Berlin, 2019). Youth social work collaborates with schools and youth welfare programs, to get troubled youth back in society.

Roter Baum Berlin (n.d.) states that they focus on a, among other things, universal, free and safe place for the youth, with the goal of personal growth among the youth. Roter Baum Berlin lets youth work together to create coöperation, group interaction and to mix different kinds of cultures.

Online youth work in Germany

When we were looking for online youth work in Germany, we couldn't find a lot. As stated in our project plan, there is a difference between digital youth work and online youth work. Digital youth work is youth work where the youth is physically together, but they do digital activities, like programming, gaming or video editing. Online youth work is considered as having the youth learn on a social, personal and professional scale, via online and remote means (Hamdiui, van den Broek, 2019).

When we searched on social media like Instagram and Discord (public servers), we could not find a lot of examples of online youth work on March 16th 2023. The closest we came to examples of online youth work were pages of some youth

work in specific cities/towns, like Würselen, Stolberg and Möhnesee. This with seeking terms like social work or youth work in both English and German. All of these initiatives mention nothing in posts about online activities, like gaming together while being remote. They all invite for activities and other events that are in person. So unfortunately, nothing to be learned from here.

There is an online initiative that collaborates with the German Institute for Media Pedagogy (Digital Youth Work, 2020). This initiative, called Digital Youth Work, focusses on the actual remote/online part of youth work, which is contradicting to the name, when you read the definitions. They give tips to get closer to the world of the youth to understand them. These tips include using Discord, Instagram and Instagram to their full potential. And not only to reach the youth, but also to follow accounts they follow and to get an impression of the world of the youth.

The Bielefelder Jugendring e.V. (2023) does have a Discord server where they get youth to get in touch with each other online. This is a perfect example of online youth work. A natural environment where the youth feel comfortable and where they learn how to be socially active with other youth, while having supervision in case things go wrong. This has a really great benefit on the youth.

Conclusion

In short, Germany knows that online youth work is a good thing, however, there are not a lot of examples of them using online means to connect youth yet. In general youth work in Germany is fairly similar to Dutch youth work, with getting youth connected to each other by digital means, however still in person. However, the fact that the German Institute for Media Pedagogy is working to get more online youth work, shows great potential for the future of online youth work.

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