

5 Definition of main Action Fields of Youth Work

The range of activities provided by youth work associations and institutions varies from country to country and depends on different national youth work traditions. But the following overview shows that even in European countries where it traditionally has a more marginal position, youth work provides a broad spectrum of activities. It takes place in a wide and varied setting including recreational activities, sports, extracurricular education, youth information, counselling and participation as well as career services, education and personal support for youngsters at risk.

Table 7: action fields of youth work

	Austria	Estonia	Germany	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Netherlands	Norway	Romania	Spain
Main action fields	Open youth work	Open youth work/centres	Extracurricular youth education	Career services	Youth associations	Education	Youth participation	Youth clubs	Recreational/leisure time activities	Education
	Youth associations	International youth work	Open youth work/clubs	Youth Information	Youth centres	Socio cultural youth work	Youth information	Services for disadvantaged groups	International youth work	Cultural youth work
	Institutional youth work	Peer education	Sports	Youth counselling	Education	Sports	Youth education	Youth associations	Youth information	Leisure time oriented youth work
	Recreation/leisure time activities	Prevention activities	Target group oriented youth work	Education for disadvantaged target groups	Personal social services	Social support	Youth social work	Cultural youth work	Youth associations	Youth information
	Mobile youth work	Sports	Youth associations and participation	Cultural education			Youth centres	Sports	Volunteering	
	Sports	Youth counselling	Youth social work	Open youth work			Youth associations	Recreational activities	Counselling	
	Pedagogical prevention activities	Youth information	International youth work	Social care			Streetwork	Participation	Cultural youth work	
	Cultural youth work		Youth counselling	Sports			Sports			
	Youth counselling			International youth work						
	Youth information			Youth associations and participation						
International youth work			Recreation and leisure services							

Although the terminology of youth work varies from country to country, the categories of youth work listed below were identified as those categories that are most appropriate to map the range of youth work provided in all European countries participating in this study. The list should be understood as an initial systematisation attempt. It is not intended as a definitive list, and could be expanded by adding new spheres of activity.

a) Extracurricular youth education:

The organisers of extracurricular youth education offer basic services relating to general, political, social, health-oriented, cultural, ecological and technical out-of-school education of non-formal or informal character. They offer experiential education programmes, or a targeted emphasis on group sessions, projects and events. A large number of programmes and services in extracurricular youth education also contain aspects of primary prevention - by examining one's own life, by exposing young people to experiences of enjoyment, fun,

pleasure, and desire, by strengthening their self-esteem, by examining values and ideologies, or simply by community experiences during individual activities. Finally, their services range also from problem intervention for young persons, who are already affected by one or more risk areas and for whom they offer counselling and personal support, to offers for a sheltered and support-oriented environment. Nowadays there is a growing recognition that extracurricular youth education can (among other services and offers) sustainably promote the type of basic and key competences that are increasingly understood as preparation for working life and a general enhancement of “employability”.

b) International youth work²:

International youth work consists of professionally guided activities in professionally organised and settings related to international contexts. It provides to young people from different countries, ethnic backgrounds and cultures with opportunities to meet and to reflect the experiences made in the intercultural dimension and to widen their cultural knowledge and enhance their personal skills (i.e. interaction, communication and understanding). International youth work consisting of extracurricular educational opportunities and leisure time activities is regularly provided during holiday and vacation time

c) Open youth work³:

Open youth work provides a space (e.g. youth centre or youth club) which is principally open to all young people from the local community or territory. In most cases, the space (and the time, i.e. programme) is only partly pre-structured by youth workers and is supposed to be actively appropriated by the young people themselves. Leisure time activities cover a great part of open youth work, but they are also the context in which other social and educational tasks (also for marginalised groups) and outreaching activities are realised.

d) Participation and peer education⁴:

Participation is about having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society. Actions designed to promote youth participation include different approaches to becoming an active citizen for instance 'taking an active role both in the development of one's own environment, at local, national and European level'. They provide opportunities for group effort toward a common goal; involve youngsters in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making. Youth associations play a central role in the provision of opportunities for participation and peer education. They provide non-formal and informal

² see: <http://www.training-youth.net/INTEGRATION/TY/Publications/tkits/tkit4.html>; www.dija.de, Modul “Interkulturelles Lernen”

³ See: IARD Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe, January 2001, part IV, page 130

⁴ see: IARD Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe, January 2001, part IV, page 130

education, primary prevention and social integration opportunities, space for conviviality and social model learning from peers. With their range of profiles youth associations offer different possibilities for identification as their work is optional, voluntary, self-organised, lobbying the interests of youngsters and value-based.

e) Prevention of social exclusion/youth social work⁵:

Youth work aimed at the prevention of social exclusion encompasses counselling, support, education, training and employment opportunities for socially disadvantaged and/or individually impaired young people to support their social integration, their formal education and their integration into the labour market and/or adult life.

f) Recreation⁶:

Play, recreation and leisure services encourage and facilitate young people`s effective use of their leisure time. Leisure time activities may include games, sports, cultural events, entertainment and community service and aim to contribute to the development of the physical, intellectual and potential development of young people. These activities provide youth specific socialisation opportunities as well as space and opportunities to appropriate youth life in modern structured places. Recently prevention and recreations aspects have gained specific importance as they provide young people living under difficult conditions i.e. poverty recuperation and regeneration opportunities.

g) Youth Counselling⁷:

Youth counselling addresses young people and their youth-specific questions and problems. It provides them with information and support based on professional counselling techniques and trespass-management to other institutions. Counselling can cover school problems, career management and insertion into the labour market, crisis intervention in partnership or family-related problems, health and legal issues. It can be provided “on the doorstep”, in specific counselling agencies or by telephone, e-mail or Internet.

h) Youth information⁸:

Youth information consist of comprehensive, coherent and coordinated information services that take account of the specific needs of young people and are youth friendly and economically accessible. They are provided by youth information centres or services and disseminated through all information channels, particular those most frequently used by

⁵ see: IARD Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe, January 2001, part IV, page 128

⁶ see: IARD Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe, January 2001, part IV, page 134; *World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond*, Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly (A/50/728, 13 March 1996), United Nations, page 23

⁷ see: IARD Study on the State of Young People and Youth Policy in Europe, January 2001, part IV, page 131

⁸ see: ERYICA, European Youth Information Charter, 2004

young people, such as the Internet, mobile phones etc. One aim of youth information is to make information accessible to youngsters on a non-discriminatory basis. Youth information also addresses the growing challenges of orientation in an increasingly complex post-modern world and teaches young people how to better obtain, select and evaluate information. The aim of youth information is to increase the variety of accessible choices by providing direct or indirect neutral information on public issues and to enable youth to make independent choices in organising their lives.

i) Youth work in sports:

Youth work in sports encourages and supports young people to experience and participate in a range of physical activities and sports which help to promote a fit and active lifestyle. It provides young people with opportunities to learn to cope with success and failure, acknowledge the success of others, participate as team members, learn to abide by rules and regulations and come in contact with other young people of different ethnic and social backgrounds. Youngsters can experience personal challenge by trying to improve their own performance, gain new skills or try new activities. Innovative educational methods oriented to the symbolism of adventure and involving the body and physical activity address socio-economically disadvantaged or violent young people in particular.

Before the backdrop of the results regarding the definition of youth work and its scope, we would at this point like to refer to the definition of youth work proposed by Peter Lauritzen⁹:

“The main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for young people to shape their own futures. Youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. Increasingly, youth work activities also include sports and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the domain of ‘out-of-school’ education, most commonly referred to as either non-formal or informal learning.

The general aims of youth work are the integration and inclusion of young people in society. It may also aim towards the personal and social emancipation of young people from dependency and exploitation.

Youth work belongs both to the social welfare and to the educational systems. In some countries it is regulated by law and administered by state civil servants, in particular at local level. However, there exists an important relation between these professional and voluntary workers which is at times antagonistic, and at others, cooperative.

The definition of youth work is diverse. While it is recognised, promoted and financed by public authorities in many European countries, it has only a marginal status in others where it remains of an entirely voluntary nature. What is considered in one country to be the work of traditional ‘youth workers’ - be it professionals or volunteers - may be carried out by

⁹ <http://www.youth-knowledge.net/INTEGRATION/EKC/Glossary/>

consultants in another, or by neighbourhoods and families in yet another country or, indeed, not at all in many places.

Today, the difficulty within state systems to adequately ensure global access to education and the labour market, means that youth work increasingly deals with unemployment, educational failure, marginalisation and social exclusion. Increasingly, youth work overlaps with the area of social services previously undertaken by the welfare state. It, therefore, includes work on aspects such as education, employment, assistance and guidance, housing, mobility, criminal justice and health, as well as the more traditional areas of participation, youth politics, cultural activities, career guidance, leisure and sports. Youth work often seeks to reach out to particular groups of young people such as disadvantaged youth in socially deprived neighbourhoods, or immigrant youth including refugees and asylum seekers. Youth work may at times be organised around a particular religious tradition”.

This definition of youth work, which forms the basis of the study, has ultimately proved to be the most comprehensive. The results of the investigation have not given rise to any need for expanding or reformulating it in more precise terms.