

Sixth Report on the Situation of Youth in Austria

Overview

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Sixth Report on the Situation of Youth in Austria

Overview

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Overview¹

The Sixth Austrian Youth Report presents a comprehensive perspective of the processes and demands of growing up in Austrian society. In it, youth politics becomes recognizable as being a cross-sectoral issue: Wherever young people congregate, wherever they make their vital experiences of life, it is necessary to create frameworks which are conducive to the development of all adolescents and to promote resources that are appropriate to the situation and specific to the circumstances. In a narrower sense, this applies to the areas of youth work, youth development and youth welfare and, going beyond this, family, education and labour-market policies as well as health, criminal politics and socio-political activities in the field of consumption, leisure-time and the media.

Part A of the Sixth Report on the Situation of Youth includes scientific expertises that analyse the living conditions of young people and draw conclusions for responsible youth politics. Based on their experience and their knowhow in the specific areas, practitioners describe the situation of youth work in Austria and evaluate the chances and perspectives for development resulting from them for young people in Part B. This section clarifies what is already effective for – and with – today's youth, how this has been achieved, what has become political reality for young people and where there is still a need for action in order to make the most positive use of the dormant potential for development for the benefit of Austria and the young people themselves.

For the first time, the thematic focus of the youth report, the compilation of the individual expertises, the selection of the authors, the introduction and the final editing of the recommendations lay in the hands of an independent "commission of experts" consisting of the following persons:

- Lajali Abuzahra (Moslem Youth of Austria)
- Univ.-Prof. Dr. Johan Bacher (Johannes-Kepler University, Linz)
- Franz Bair (former member of the Youth Service Agency of the Province of Lower Austria)
- Univ.-Prof. Dr. Eva Dreher (Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich)
- Mag. Sabine Liebentritt (boJA – Centre of Competence for Open Youth Work in Austria)
- Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stephan Sting (Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt)
- Mag. Christian Theiss (freelancer, former Styrian ombudsman for children and young people)

¹ The text of this overview is, to a large extent, taken from the introduction to the youth report authored by Prof. Dr. Dreher and Mag. Liebentritt.

Although the Sixth Report on the Situation of Youth in Austria is extremely comprehensive, it lays no claim to being absolutely complete and restricts itself to dealing with selected themes and problems. These limitations and exclusions were not only unavoidable, they were also an absolutely necessary and helpful voluntarily imposed constraint to prevent the work going beyond the scope of a youth report. In addition, a conscious decision was made to do without a special chapter dealing with matters of gender, migration and handicap. Instead, heterogeneity is treated as a trans-sectoral issue and, in specific sections, the extent to which individual concepts are viable for diversity orientation is questioned.

Part A: Young People in Austria – Youth from a Scientific Point of View

First of all, the discussion on the theory and practice of the investigation into, and support of, the demands and possibilities for realization of growing up requires considering the characteristics that distinguish “youth”, which aspects have been valid for generations and which now appear obsolete in a society determined by change. The concept of “youth” is not only a matter of contemporary history but also reflects the areas of interest of various disciplines that investigate the phenomena of the “adolescent phase” from a fundamental and application-oriented approach.

The multidisciplinary foundation of the youth report is taken into account in an expertise on the concept of youth in research and practice. Experts in the field of sociology (Rudolf Richer), development psychology (Eva Dreher), pedagogy (Stephan Sting), youth work (Lajali Abuzahra) and juvenile justice (Alois Birklbauer) demonstrate the approaches taken by the individual areas of study to the subject of “youth”.

Interdisciplinary consensus exists about understanding the “adolescent phase” as a socio-historic and socio-political phenomenon that reflects the momentous changes caused by the socio-economic, multicultural transformation of living conditions and ultimately the self-image of the particular generation of adults. There is also unanimous agreement that “adolescence” represents an especially distinctive phase within the life cycle; paths of development laid down in childhood lead into biological, cognitive and social changes whose dynamic force not only moderate previous developmental effects, but also have a prospective influence on processes and functions of later stages of development.

1. Adolescence: Stage of Life and Phases of Development

The fact that every adult person once passed through adolescence as a developmental phase in his or her life and possibly forms the basis for their claim to being experts in specifically “adolescent phenomena”. The range of positive – as well as negative – memories that are linked with individual events, challenges, and experiences made in one’s own youth often come to the fore once again when judgements are made on “young people” that might be authentic but, at the same time, hardly have sufficient validity for completely understanding this phase of development.

The expertise by Eva Dreher (Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich), Ulrike Sirsch and Sabine Strobl (University of Vienna) and Sigrid Muck (Therapy Clinic, Mistelbach) on the adolescent stage of life focuses on theoretical development concepts that explain the

period of transition from childhood to becoming an adult on the basis of individual and societal system relationships and, at the same time, also considers the autonomy of biopsychosocial changes and the variety of individual phases of development. The active participation of the individual in the formation of the conditions and processes of his or her development is currently considered to be the core theoretical paradigm. In this connection, international development-oriented youth research stresses the relevance of stimulating the competences of self-regulation.

The contribution focuses on the "normal" processes of development that occur between puberty and early adulthood. This approach does not exclude the problems and difficulties experienced by adolescents in their everyday life but accents that this stage can in no way generally be considered as being a "crisis period". Building on the concept of development tasks, it can be seen that the majority of adolescents are extremely interested in dealing with the typical demands of their age group. Among all the socio-political and forward-looking goals, precisely this fact provides a relevant starting point for making an insightful investigation into the prerequisites and conditions that produce differences possible of either stimulating or hampering possibilities for development. With this perspective, the contribution opens the interdisciplinary spectrum of the following topics to which the authors offer relevant answers, and formulate new assignments for research and practice, within the scope of their expertises.

2. Youth – Education – Work

The thematic complex "Youth-Education-Work" deals with the social conditions that have a major influence on the chances young people have in life. On the one hand, the demographic developments taking place pose questions on the relationship between the generations, and to the social security systems while, on the other, the changes in social interests that affect the fundamental possibilities and goals of education and participation in working life become apparent. Measures for a forward-looking style of youth politics can be derived – differentiated between age, gender, migration background and regional affiliation.

Demographic developments and their consequences for the social security system and relationship between the generations

The contribution made by Gudrun Biffel (Wifo, Vienna; Danube University, Krems) elucidates the demographic change with reference to the transformations in the age structure and specific immigration rates of the individual provinces in Austria. From the demographic point of view, the author perceives the danger of investments in education and research not being sufficiently increased, and cutbacks in infrastructural institutions for children and adolescents intensifying the exodus from rural areas. Faced with the disproportionately increasing risk of young people (15 to 19 years of age) being without work, the guarantee of a socially open education system has become a major challenge. In the author's opinion, flexible, imaginative forms of employment could provide a new approach to the labour market. This situation will become problematic if it is not possible to provide a sustainable entry into a stable and secure working environment. It seems to be especially important to improve the chances of those young people with fewer competences in order to avoid unfavourable developments occurring as a result of long-term unsuccessful integration into the labour market.

Participation in education: Educational paths and choices

In his contribution "Participation in education: Educational paths and choices", Peter Schlögl (Austrian Institution for Professional Education Research, Vienna) first of all describes participation in education by adolescents and young adults; this amounts to 82% in the case of 15 to 19-year-olds and 20% with those between 20 and 29 years of age. A mere 3.6% of the 15 to 19-year-olds are neither attending school nor working. The qualifications of the over 25-year-olds are dominated by apprenticeships (40%), followed by secondary-school graduation (20%). The author's report concentrates on formal forms of education that are characterized by class-related regional, gender and migration disparities. On the one hand, particular attention is drawn to the low quota of girls in industrial and technical secondary education and their concentration on a few apprenticeship professions and, on the other, the noticeable under-representation of adolescents with a migration background in secondary vocational schools. When dealing with the discussions on education taking place, Schlögl points out that, in addition to questions of distributional justice (who attends which school), those concerning participation justice should receive increased attention. This is concerned with the stimulation of those basic competences that are absolutely essential for participation in society. From the author's viewpoint, action must be taken to reduce the external differentiation in the educational system for the benefit of an internal differentiation, as well as in developing customized resource distribution models and improving the statistical data bank for recording educational paths and school populations.

Young people with educational deficits

Based on an empirical study carried out by the Institute for Research into Professional and Adult Education of the University of Linz (IBE) in 2008, the report made by Karl Niederberger (IBE) investigates those conditions and factors that result in adolescents having educational deficits. The following characterization is used as a definition: Young people, between 15 and 24 years of age, who have not completed any higher level of education than that compulsory and are not in any formal secondary education programme, are considered to have educational deficits.

The following ranking was made of the possible risk factors affecting them: termination of education, the desired education could not be realized, non-German mother tongue, inadequate use of active information channels (reading, internet, friends), school problems, intuitive decision making behaviour, parents with a low level of education, little involvement in sporting activities and clubs, a lack of social support from friends and relatives, urban place of residence. Additional findings in the analysis of differences in behaviour and attitudes show that adolescents with educational deficits are significantly less satisfied with all aspects of everyday life than young people with a satisfactory educational level. The situation on the labour market is extremely unfavourable for poorly educated young people and it appears plausible that they have an especially pronounced desire for professional change, for a respected profession with good pay, and a secure working place.

Labour market

In the expertise made by Lorenz Lassnigg (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna), the author investigates the situation of young people on the Austrian labour market. The author initially draws attention to the favourable situation – compared with that in other European countries – in the key variables “youth unemployment and/or employment”, “qualification status” and “early school leaving” and substantiates this with statistical data. However, the author also mentions obvious problematic situations. These are mainly concerned with the integration of adolescents and young adults into the labour market. It is shown that adolescents with a migration background have noticeably lesser chances of entering into professional education and that there is still a strong level of gender segregation. In addition, many young people do not feel themselves sufficiently informed about the demands of the world of employment and the number of persons who remain in their profession for a lengthy period after completion of an apprenticeship is very low.

Austrian politics has reacted rapidly and comprehensively to the problems of young people on the labour market. According to Lassnigg, orientation on employment and concentration on a dual education characterize the political measures taken on the labour market. The starting point is a deficit model that sees the reasons for the lack of integration into the labour market in the deficit in the qualifications of the young people. However, structural deficits such as the early selection that takes place in the schools, the strong dependence of the educational and professional career on one’s social background, as well as changing demands placed on specific qualifications, have hardly been dealt with and politics has only attempted to remedy certain aspects.

The author feels that it is important to make a fundamental paradigm change that would lead from a deficit model to an interests model and also take activities outside of the working environment into consideration. Lassnigg sees a need for research into the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the future of young people, the structure of labour-market and employment prognoses, as well as the evaluation of measures going beyond the purely descriptive.

Why – and to which extent – do young people get into debt?

The practices of the adult world in connection with consumer motivation, dealing with decisions to buy, alternative forms of financing and the dynamics of debt careers, obviously provide children and young people with abundant models for their own activities. The quota of adolescents and young people who make use of an advisory service for debtors shows that the start of a debt career goes hand in hand with motives that regulate independent consumer patterns and financial behaviour.

Based on the results of quantitative and qualitative social-scientific studies on the financial behaviour of young people, the author Heinz Schoibl (Helix Research and Consulting, Salzburg) outlines the motives and indicators for a possible development of debt careers. While the starting phase of the first “minor debts” (from around the age of 12) is embedded in the culture of the relationship within the peer group where the reciprocal borrowing and lending of money documents a form of belonging, it must be borne in mind that the future stages in the consumer and financial behaviour correspond closely with the increase in a person’s contractual capacity. Although neither consumer debts nor purchasing addict-

ion can be explained monocausally, certain important markers for adolescents on their path to adulthood also involve risks for behavioural patterns that exceed their competence in consumer and financial affairs. With the help of concrete facts, such as the availability of a personal bank account, the transition to cashless consumption, a salary of one's own, the possibility to overdraw one's account (e.g., after the age of 16), the author displays analogous lines to the increase in debt quotas. These components can lead to a spiralling escalation when the desires to consume and the demands structuring one's life (a car, acquisition of housing) increase and exceed the available regulatory possibilities. A development-oriented structure of consumption and financial competences demands a spectrum of measures. These include the systematic investigation of the financial and consumer behaviour of specific target groups, consideration of possible structural measures (e.g., standards within the world of finance, regulation of responsibilities) and concepts for the development – as well as evaluation – of preventive approaches.

Income, poverty and the living conditions of young people in Austria

In his expertise on the economic living conditions of young people, Matthias Till (Statistik Austria, Vienna) uses the results of special evaluations (EU-SILC 2007, questioning of approx. n=6,800 households) to show the forms these take within the context of the risk of poverty and financial deprivation. One quarter of those in danger of becoming poor in Austria are adolescents and young adults (10 to 27 years of age); in concrete terms, 13% of young people are threatened by income poverty and the number is slightly higher for financial deprivation. Five percent are manifestly poor. There are no differences between the age groups. From the gender point of view, girls and young women are more threatened than boys and young men (15% compared with 11%). Young people living in Vienna are especially at risk (25%) while in small, agrarian communities only between 6 and 9% of young people are threatened by poverty.

Differentiating between the various ways of life, young people living alone and young adults with children have an especially high risk of becoming poor. Those adolescent who are employed and live with their parents are the least threatened. Adolescents and young adults from lower social levels have a higher risk of becoming poor. A migration background (first or second generation) also appears to have an influence. Unexpected expenditures play a decisive generating role among the forms of financial deprivation.

3. Interests – Values – Relationships

“Interests – Values – Relationships” not only form a part of the concrete world young people live in but also mark important components in the cognitive, emotional and social discussion accompanying the development of an identity and the acquisition of attitudes, action orientation and maxims.

The world of values of young people in Austria

Based on the Austrian study on the values of young people from 2006/07 dealing with the concepts of life and values of 14 to 24 year olds, Ingrid Kromer (University of Vienna) draws attention to the fundamental changes in societal circumstances and stresses their importance for the multi-dimensionally organized world of values of today’s youth. The most obvious developments in recent decades have taken place in the “work” sphere where the changes in value systems can be deduced as coming from the massive changes in conditions on the labour market. In addition, emphasis is placed on the importance of the family and circle of friends in the sense of relationship networks whose stable form of solidarity is fundamental to establishing values and orientation.

When dealing with adolescents’ attitudes to politics, reasons are given for this being regarded as distant and a noticeable decline in political interest – independent of gender – can be noted. Aspects of the concept of democracy were observed in connection with the importance of the socio-cultural background (level of education). Additional components in the canon of values include the typical aspects of religiosity of young people in Austria in which the increasing movement “away from the church” and the great variety of positions connected to religion is dealt with.

While a value synthesis (a combination of characteristics in individual value dimensions) makes it possible to differentiate between definable value types, it does not make a typology of today’s youth apparent; this means that young people are not a group with homogeneous values. Ingrid Kromer’s postulate is that “love, achievements and hope” are the central dimensions of young people’s value systems.

Family, friends, the scene: The culture of relationships in the everyday life of young people

Contrary to the wide-spread assumption, the family – as a support system and emotional refuge – forms an important reference system that is expanded in the years of adolescence to include people of the same age without being substituted by them. With this in mind, the expertise by Beate Grossegger (Institute for Research into Youth Culture, Vienna) demonstrates that, to a large extent, young people regard the quality of their relationship to their parents as positive and describe it as being predominantly partnership-like. Fifteen to eighteen-year-olds have an increasing perception of their parents’ involvement in their educational career; this is especially pronounced in families where education is regarded highly. Almost half of the adolescents felt that they were being pressured by their parents to perform at school; this applied particularly to those with a migration background as the parents had higher performance expectations.

Conflicts do exist within the family but, today, young people react less to confrontations between the generations. This could be more precisely described as a kind of self-socialization; especially in everyday life, young people resort to their peers and this development has received great support from technological progress. In addition to the family, the group of people of the same age represents an important arena for gathering experience and guidance. Young people – including those with a strong computer affinity – are integrated into networks of friends where relationships are mainly based on common interests and emotional contacts resulting in friends becoming important discussion partners.

On the one hand, adolescents' relational behaviour is characterized by a desire for commitment and stability in the primary relationships with the family, circle of friends and – at a later stage – romantic interests. On the other hand, young people strive to develop an identity within the life-style communities of youth culture. The main aim is to feel a sense of belonging (with a fairly weak commitment) and to be able to express oneself within the group. The standard relationship is characterized both by primary relationships with strong emotional bonds, reciprocal trust and a sense of responsibility, and weaker links to loose social and contact networks where prestige and personal benefits play the main role.

Young people's leisure-time culture in the risk society: Post-traditional forms of communitization, leisure-time behaviour, media use and sport

Bernhard Heinzlmaier (tfactory Hamburg and Vienna) takes the "economization of the social" (the subordination of all areas of life to the imperatives of the market) that is increasing its grip on the everyday activities of the adolescents' circles of friends, peer groups and scenes, as the starting point for his expertise. This has led to the principle of competition and performance making inroads into leisure-time behaviour. The resulting stress factors affect the shift of personality development to leisure time (above all, in the form of courses) and the natural responsibility for shaping one's own life, as well as integration within the context of youth cultures.

The attributes of "youthfulness" have become dominant on today's leisure market. Informal, post-traditional relationships are becoming more important for young people. Leisure time is defined as a self-determined period, a sphere providing freedom to make experiments, not controlled by pedagogical aspects, removed from other heteronomous areas of life. Leisure-time activities are dominated by the time spent together with friends, followed by media use (listening to music, watching television and videos or DVDs, as well as computer and internet use). Here, the thesis that mainly non-discursive visual media are gaining ground, and that visual forms of reception requiring less pressure are preferred, is presented. The internet occupies a special place as an "all-round medium" that stimulates active medial forms of communication. The "event" is a typical characteristic of post-traditional societal forms that culminates in flexible associations and experience orientation (e.g., private parties that cannot be controlled by the authorities or adults and provide space for group-specific or individual participation). The changes taking place in leisure-time behaviour are also affecting sport that has become less linked to associations and clubs and more an area of body-related aestheticization and working on one's own identity. Parallel to this, one discovers a psychologization of life that attempts to camouflage the insecurity and lack of reflection of the outwardly "cool" adolescents.

Active citizenship

This expertise by Eva Zeglovits (University of Vienna) and Steve Schwarzer (TNS Opinion, Brussels) develops out of the broad definition of active citizenship within the context of the general concept of democracy and politics. The first question asked by the two authors is: "What is political participation or active citizenship?" They continue by examining the influences of active citizenship on young people, the factors for political participation in society, and the reasons for becoming less engaged in politics. The developments accompanying the lowering of the voting age to 16 form the point of departure for an analysis of the results of recent Austrian studies on political participation by young people and reveal the positive effects of this measure. The results available show that, since lowering the voting age, 15 to 25-year-olds show more interest in politics – a basic prerequisite for political participation that is realized in various forms. Around one third of the 14 to 24-year-olds have already taken part in an election, fund-raising drive or collection of signatures. Compared with this, participation in pupils' and youth representation (19%), demonstrations (13%) and civic action groups (4%) is rather rare. While approximately one quarter have already practiced a form of "political consumer behaviour" (purchasing products for political, ethical or environmental reasons), illegal and violent forms of political participation are not strongly represented in Austria. So far, no significant data on participation forms via the internet have become available. One important motive for political participation can be found in dealing seriously with the problems affecting today's youth in everyday life. The school plays an important role in providing possibilities for helping in organization and participation. The final recommendations once again stress the positive effects of lowering the voting age and the introduction of "political education" into the school curriculum. Adolescents with a migration background and young people who are already employed are target groups requiring special attention to reduce their distance to politics and develop a sustainable willingness to actively take part in the democratic process.

4. Health – Risky Behaviour – Delinquency

During adolescence, fundamental changes take place in the physiological-biological sphere, as well as in various cognitive functions, that contribute to the expansion of the scope of action and experience. The resulting new challenges affect processes of considering and evaluating risks. When selecting between alternatives, the immediate needs and advantages often play the single major role. For young people, dealing with the subjects of health, risky behaviour and delinquency frequently takes place in the area of conflict between experimentation and developing one's sense of responsibility.

The health of young people in Austria as a basis for political measures

Starting with the WHO definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing", Wolfgang Dur, Robert Griebler and Markus Hojni (all, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Medical and Health Sociology, Vienna) show that health, in the form of human and social capital, represents an important social productive factor which needs to be stimulated at the interface between man and the social systems.

Based on studies made to evaluate the health patterns of young people (HBSC Study 2006, Austrian Health Survey 2006/07, European Social Survey, Carinthian Youth Health Report 2006, Study on Apprentices' Health 2001), the authors show that the subjective health and life quality of 11 to 15-year-olds lies at a medium to high level. A slump sets in after the age of 13; it is assumed that this is due to a lack of compatibility between the conditions in the school and the family and the problems caused by growing up. These difficulties are transient as the life quality of 15 to 29-year-olds shows a rising tendency; however, girls over the age of 14 tend to consider their health worse than boys. The 11 to 15-year-olds usually complain about psychosomatic problems such as headaches, having trouble sleeping and nervousness, while those between 15 and 29 are increasingly prone to physical complaints.

Seeing that the foundations for later lifestyles and behavioural patterns are laid in adolescence, attitudes towards food, physical exercise, tobacco and alcohol consumption that affect health play an important role in later risks. The most significant health problems among young people are injuries resulting from traffic accidents, high-risk sports and leisure-time activities. The central health-related factors are education, participation and scope for formative action in the environment, social relationships and status, as well as the socio-economic situation. The authors regard compensating for unfortunate family class-specific effects, as well as measures taken at school to better the physical and social conditions there, as starting points for improving the health of young people. Examining the way traffic, sport and leisure-time accidents are dealt with is also stressed as being a necessary measure.

Youth and sexuality

The authors Barbara Neudecker (Universities of Vienna and Innsbruck) and Karlheinz Valtl (University of Vienna) describe the stand of research on adolescent sexuality in their expertise. They note that the lack of studies in the field in Austria is a limitation. The core of their remarks is formed by findings on the sexual experiences of young people. Seventy-seven percent of the girls and 81% of the boys under the age of 14 admitted having had experience with kissing or embracing and half of the 14-year-olds said they had had intimate experiences in the form of petting. The majority of studies on adolescent sexuality concentrate on the age and experience of the first sexual intercourse. Ten percent of the 14-year-old girls and boys had already had intercourse; this reached 50% with the 16-year-olds while 25% of those over 18 had still not had sex for the first time. Most of the young people feel that they are aware of the facts of life but their knowledge about contraception and the possible risks resulting from unprotected sexual intercourse was rarely brought into play; above all, in the case of casual sex, there was hardly any communication on matters of contraception (33%). In addition, the awareness of sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. AIDS, herpes, and hepatitis) is relatively weak.

Further relevant aspects are concerned with the attitude towards masturbation and the importance of pornography. Thirty-three percent of the boys and 18% of the girls consider masturbation an important part of their sexual life. Most of the young people (69% of the boys and 57% of the girls) have already seen "pornographic" pictures of films. While half of the girls reject porn, half of the boys find it stimulating and see it as potentially educating. However, 84% of the adolescents would welcome more information on sexual matters.

The number of teenage pregnancies in Austria is decreasing although it is higher than in other countries such as Germany and France. Seeing that no central records are kept, the number of abortions can only be estimated. Dealing with the problem of “sexual violence” also proved to be difficult as significant studies are lacking.

Addiction

In his expertise on addiction, Stephan Sting (Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt) first of all points out that the developments in addiction in Austria represent a serious threat to health and noted that it is difficult to estimate the actual percentage of adolescents and young adults affected as discussions on the subject tend to concentrate on “addiction” as being almost exclusively a problem affecting young people. The differentiation between consumption and addiction is particularly difficult because the point of transition to addictive behaviour is unclear and the indications manifold. Addiction problems only affect a small segment of young people and do not manifest themselves to later in life.

Adolescence is the initial phase of tobacco consumption but the major “cultural drug” is alcohol: 97% of Austrians over the age of 14 have had experience with alcohol. An increasing early stage of entry into consuming alcohol can be recognized; it starts at 13 years of age, increases markedly among the 16 to 17-year-olds before reducing between the ages of 18 and 21 and tapering off even further after that. Daily consumption of alcohol is comparatively rare among adolescents; it is much more concentrated on weekend binges. Being intoxicated has a special significance among young people where it can be a kind of ritual for being accepted by a peer group or as a possibility for experiencing one’s own limits.

Consuming illegal drugs is a clear temporal and age-specific phenomenon and is usually limited to a few experiments. An international comparison gives below-average values for the most frequently consumed illegal drug – cannabis. To date, no substantial investigations on non-substance-related forms of addiction (e.g. pathological gambling addiction and internet addiction) have been made in Austria.

Addiction prevention has been treated professionally in Austria in recent decades and includes numerous activities such as providing information and knowhow on the effects of the individual substances and the symptoms of addictive behaviour. Activities also aim at increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy as well as developing social and communicative competences. When dealing with risky forms of consumption by adolescents and young adults, these undertakings are expanded to include early detection and intervention as well as harm reduction.

Prevention research

In their expertise, the authors Franz Gschwandtner, Richard Paulik, Seifried Seyer and Rainer Schmidbauer (Institute for Addiction Prevention, Linz) define “prevention” as prophylactic measures taken with the aim of avoiding an undesired occurrence or development. They begin by making an introduction to various classification systems: The ranking as primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention, differentiated by the time when intervention measures – universal, selective and indicated prevention – were implemented represents a target-group relevant classification; an additional categorization differentiates be-

haviour- or personality- oriented from structure-oriented prevention. In their investigations of the reasons, the authors make it clear that problematic behaviour is determined by multiple factors. With the help of the fundamental relationship between social status and health, the authors explain how material, psychosocial and cultural behavioural patterns (e.g. lifestyle) influence health and the way it is dealt with.

A critical analysis is made of the boom in prevention that has taken place in the past two decades and is interpreted as being an answer to the need for security that has developed in the risk society on the one hand and as being connected with new forms of disciplining body culture, on the other. However, prevention measures aimed at young people should not be patronizing or standardized but rather respect the addressee's maturity and sovereign lifestyle.

The description of selected prevention strategies is concentrated mainly on life-skill approaches oriented on protection and risk-factor models. The explanation of the life-skill model approach examines how it can be implemented in the context of the school in particular. In addition, structure-related factors such the school climate, working conditions and living environment are considered and recommendations made for the employment of competent disseminators.

Conflict, escalation, violence: Debates on an "increasing propensity to violence" and some aspects of youth work

The expertise made by Ingo Bieringer (Friedensbüro, Salzburg) on "Conflict, escalation, violence: Debates on an "increasing propensity to violence" and some aspects of youth work" not only substantiates the volatile nature of this area of problems but also provides relevant approaches to an appropriate diagnosis of the matter and corresponding forms of intervention through the differentiation of the phenomena of violence. Various terms for violence are frequently used synonymously but actually have different meanings. Based on actual cases, the author illustrates the broad spectrum of phenomena of violence in the differentiation between aggression, conflict, mobbing, happy slapping, escalation, self-damaging behaviour, vandalism, running amok, violence, deviance, delinquency and criminality.

The author considers integrative theories as the appropriate tools for explaining these phenomena. These theories form the basis for his recommendations to politics, youth work and youth research where he proposes that youth politics should develop from being oriented on deficits and problems to a view and practice focussed on resources in order to avoid collective labelling (e.g. criminal adolescents). Open youth work can make an important contribution to violence prevention upstream of the integration of young people with multiple disadvantages. In addition, the cooperation principle between the individual bodies (youth work, police, and social work in the schools) is considered to be indispensable. Particularly when dealing with young people from family systems with many handicaps, the cooperation between the organizations is a central criterion for (primary, secondary and tertiary) violence protection.

Numbers and understanding them: Juvenile delinquency from the viewpoint of empirical science

Walter Fuchs and Brita Krucsay (Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminal Sociology, Vienna) deal with juvenile delinquency in their expertise and use so-called "dark-field" studies and qualitative studies, in addition to statistics on criminality and court cases, for the first time in Austria. This makes it possible to judge the validity of the criminal statistics that are so prominent in the media.

First of all, the following can be observed: There has been an increase in charges against young people for criminal offences since 2003. However, the number of convictions has remained relatively constant. A rise in the number of acts of violence (physical injury) reported since 2002 can also be observed. The authors see one of the reasons for the increase in charges being made in a change in the behaviour of the public towards pressing charges and – in connection with property offences – more technical surveillance. However, an increase in juvenile criminality, in the sense of actually committed offences, can not be deduced.

Using a secondary analysis of a dark-field study, which was undertaken in Austria for the first time, makes it possible to analyse possible factors influencing acts of violence. This records important variables that increase the probability of self-reported physical violence in the previous 12 months (e.g. gender, school type, self control, drug consumption, poor school performance, personal experience as a victim, the possibility of having performed an act of physical violence in the past 12 months). It is shown that, here, a migration background does not have a significant influence.

A qualitative study provides a precise impression of the motives and reasons for deviant actions being taken by young people on the fringes of society. This reveals the interaction between experienced discrimination and stigmatization and the resulting realization of one's own lack of opportunities and perspectives.

Part B: Youth Work in Austria – Achievements and Offers

Extra-curricular youth work has the task of offering young people the personal freedom and “laboratories” that are absolutely essential for the constructive and creative realization of the potentials and resources of the “youth” stage of development – removed from the purely pedagogical sphere and those dominated by economics and commerce.

A practice-oriented approach forms the foundation for the descriptive and analytical expertises and specialized contributions in Part B of the Youth Report, which describes the links between the world of young people and the reality of “being young”.

Practitioners from a wide range of relevant fields of work describe the situation, chances and perspectives for the development of young people in Austria based on their experience and specialist knowhow. Which kind of youth politics is a form of reality for and with young people, how this has been achieved, and where there is still a need for action in order to take advantage of the dormant development potential to benefit Austria and the young people in the country, becomes clear.

1. Status-quo of youth work in Austria

The present situation of youth work in Austria

The contribution made by Eva Häfele (www.worknet.at) provides an introduction to youth work in Austria in which the author and gives an overview of the complex system that exists in this country.

In Austria, youth work is usually understood as being extra-curricular youth work – with the emphasis on leisure-time activities. It aims at the non-formal and informal education of young people. It is plurally organized at all levels: the authorities, the fields of activity, the contents, offers and methods, as well as organizational forms.

The major areas of action in youth work are organizational youth work, youth information and youth counselling, open youth work, sport and leisure-time activities for young people, institutional youth work (communities, provinces), youth participation as well as international youth work (exchange programmes for young people, international meetings, knowhow transfer from abroad).

Organizational youth work is the oldest and most established form and the one that is most strongly anchored in the public’s perception. The main burden in the organizations is still borne by volunteers. Paid personnel are primarily responsible for consulting and supporting the volunteers, organizing further training courses, public relations, winning new volunteers and representing the club or organization to the outside world.

In contrast, open youth work is a recent development in the socio-pedagogical area in which mainly full-time workers, with a broad range of qualifications, are active. Psychologists, pedagogues, and social workers are also active as youth workers in addition to those with specialized training in the appropriate areas and leisure-time and social pedagogy, Open youth work is also an attractive field for “recruits” from totally different professions.

The path to empirical portraits of open and organizational youth work in Austria: Visible participation and more

The contribution by Arno Heimgartner (University of Graz – Institute for Educational and Teaching Science) makes use of existing empirical data material to complement the thorough description of the situation made by Eva Häfele.

The accomplishments of open youth work are depicted in a study carried out by Heimgartner with the support of Dorit Kraft. The results show that open youth work is firmly anchored in the nine Austrian provinces and is characterized by a large degree of heterogeneity in the qualifications and number of personnel, sponsoring bodies, financing and standard of equipment. A major portion of the facilities for young people is financed by the individual communities on a voluntary basis, which often results in meagre financial resources and insecure employment conditions. The provision of an open meeting place, complemented by a variety of pedagogically-accompanied leisure-time activities, forms the core of the facilities investigated. Consulting for young people, organization of events, networking and public relations, as well as further training courses are additional priorities and all the offers are characterized by the principles of participation, low-threshold activities, gender sensitivity and an open access.

On the other hand – given that there are more than 100,000 clubs and associations in Austria – organizational youth activities realize themselves in a multifaceted, systematic model – both in terms of content and structure. It penetrates into all areas of the community making it a mirror-image of the traditional life of a civil society. As shown in Eva Häfele's expertise, most of the work is the result of involvement by volunteers.

According to a study on volunteerism in Austria (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection), a total of 31.4% of the 15 to 19-year-olds are formally involved – male youths somewhat more than females, and the level of young people participating is higher in regions with a low level of urbanization than in cities. In this case, the difference is 16.6%. One explanation for this is that, in urban areas, various services are provided by full-time workers whereas these are the responsibility of volunteers in rural regions (e.g. volunteer fire brigade). Formal involvement tapers off slightly after the age of 19.

2. Youth work: Approaches and Methods

Following on the overall portrayal of the situation of youth work in Austria, the chapter "Approaches and Methods" elaborates on selected aspects of youth work: leisure time, experiential education, sexual education, sport and culture. The subject of "right-wing extremism" is dealt with as a kind of excursus in the form of a "practice report".

Leisure time in youth work

The author Eva Häfele (www.worknet.at) investigates the subject of what leisure time means for young people, analyses the aspects of equal opportunities in this area, and describes how youth work should react to this situation.

Young people's leisure time – the time away from school and other forms of education – is characterized by a great variety of activities with different time requirements. However, one significant trend is recognizable: To a large extent, leisure time is spent away from the family, with friends, with the peer group, with people of the same age.

A list of wishes drawn up by young people dissatisfied with leisure-time activities showed distinct – but topographically differentiated – preferences: First and foremost, better – and more varied – offers in the area of sports, followed by more informal meeting places and, at a lower level, discos and clubs, offers in the music sphere, hip places to get together, and then cinemas and new media, as well as possibilities for shopping.

Youth work – both organizational and open – deals with this condition by offering various activities tailored to the target groups and, above all, with free spaces where the young people can decide on, organize and spend their leisure time as they desire. Informal meeting places in safe areas that can be used for organizing leisure-time activities are especially important for young girls. Open youth work has also developed offers specifically suited for young people with a migration background.

Experiential education and youth work

The authors of this contribution, Martina Gasser, Werner Ebner and Jürgen Einwanger (www.erlebnispädagogik.at), describe the approaches and implementation of experiential education in Austria.

Austrian activity-oriented education and outdoor offers have been developing continuously for about 25 years and experienced a real upswing in the past 10 years. Austria played a pioneer role in the area of individual socio-pedagogic offers as early as in the 1980s. However, in recent years the conditions for implementing experiential offers has increasingly deteriorated in all areas. Above all, the fear "that something might happen" and the person in charge could be held responsible is a hindrance to involvement. Dwindling financial and temporal resources have led to increasing savings being made in the area of experience-intensive offers. It is also the case that many political decision makers are not prepared to openly declare their support of experiential educational and therapeutic measures for difficult young people. Experiential education is not a popular rehabilitation measure in society.

However, precisely in youth work, there is the possibility that much more can be reached through "experience and reflection" than through "sanctions and regulations". This has been recognized in many pedagogical disciplines. Concepts to expand competences and increase self esteem have been successful when dealing with matters such as addiction, high-risk sports, aids, accident protection, etc, if "learning" is given the necessary time and attention. If things have to go quickly, information events and "chalk and talk" teaching are frequently resorted to. However, it is often overlooked that this type of "imparting" usually has no lasting effect whereas "holistically experienced information", as offered in experientially-oriented concepts, can provide genuine impulses for development.

Sexual pedagogy in youth work

In her expertise on sexual pedagogy, Carola Koppermann (www.sexuellebildung.at) deals with a subject that has so far been handled with caution in the area of youth work. In the author's opinion, the level of institutionalization and integration of sexual pedagogy and sexual education is not very advanced. Individual professionals are active, along with single actions taken by diverse institutions. Sexuality is a subject that is still laden down with taboos and ambivalence.

However, changes in society's approach to sexuality have led to youth-work institutions looking for sexual-pedagogic concepts. Although there are currently no consistent standards, the following prerequisites could provide a basis for a well-implemented form of sexual pedagogy:

- Basic knowledge specifically geared towards young people
- Sexual-pedagogic competences
- Special didactic forms
- Willingness and possibility for self reflection, respecting limits
- Relationship work

Sport and youth work

The contribution by Helmut Baudis (Working Group for Sport and Physical Culture in Austria – www.askoe.at) on the sporting activities of young people describes a paradoxical situation: More sport is carried out than ever before; however, a lack of exercise is a characteristic of all age groups – including young people. Twenty five percent of young people take part in sport four or more times a week; 33%, 2 or 3 times weekly; 20%, once; 13%, 2 to 3 times a month and 7%, less often while only 2% are completely inactive. However, a trend has developed where sport has a superficial influence (sport in the everyday life of people in their clothing, language, interests, membership, etc) that must not be confused with real, medically effective, physical activity.

Along with health and fitness, the possibility of making social contacts and relaxation are important motives for sporting activities; this applies especially to girls. Only 29% of young people are active in sports because they want to take part in competitions.

This has resulted in a shift away from club sport to individual activities – on the one hand, this has led to an increase in high-risk, extreme, nature and trendy sports and, on the other, to "softer" kinds of sport that are extremely beneficial to one's health, require little specialized knowledge and, above all, also have a "low threshold".

From this viewpoint, it is absolutely essential that organized sport, sporting associations and clubs, along with other key players, become active and create stronger links to the area of youth work and the schools. There are already first signs that this is happening and these activities should be strengthened in the coming years.

Culture in youth work

The cultural aspects of youth work are investigated in connection with traditional forms of culture as well as activities that have been developed by youth cultures themselves. Eva Häfele (www.worknet.at) differentiates between an “educational-theoretical” position, which understands cultural work as the transmission of culture and artistic skills, and an orientation based on “everyday culture” that has its place in the culture experienced in the quotidian life of adults, children and adolescents.

It is now possible to detect activities and scenes in the area of culture overlapping with the cultural activities of youth work in all walks of life. Youth work takes advantage of youth-cultural scenes and their interests in order to organize related activities suitable for young people. In addition, the media, activities and organizational forms of youth cultures find a place in cultural work. The general goal of culture work – expanding the possibilities for young people to participate in society and its cultural offers – has, so far, only been realized very unevenly. In this connection, the potential of youth work is seen as being rather compensatory.

Today, children and adolescents primarily regard classical leisure-time locations, such as sports clubs, youth organizations, youth centres and cultural organizations, as being service facilities and no longer centres satisfying a wide range of interests. Young people learn to differentiate between professional, demanding leisure-time offers and those that are amateurish at an early age. Youth work that includes cultural projects in its programme must take this change in attitude into consideration and – observing self-activation forms – support the desire of young people to participate and integrate, and provide them with aids to their orientation.

Assessment report “Right-wing Extremism”

Christa Bauer and Willi Mernyi (Mauthausen Committee, Austria) outline what is understood as right-wing extremism in their report. They describe the changed, new manifestations of this phenomenon that make it more difficult to recognize, but do away with three misconceptions concerning right-wing extremism and clarify that:

- Right-wing extremism is not exclusively a “youth phenomenon”
- Right-wing extremism is definitely related to social circumstances
- Right-wing extremism is not only a “lower-class problem”

There is not ONE SINGLE concrete reason for young people becoming susceptible for right-wing extremist ideas – it is much more the case that there are many individual pieces in the puzzle. The majority of young people do not have ideological reasons for becoming attached to the right-wing extremist scene. The determining factors for drifting into this milieu are usually personal and social circumstances and problems. Young people mention friendship, a sense of belonging, a feeling of being in good hands, discovering a meaning of life and similar aspects as being the decisive reasons. Only in very rare cases does political conviction lead to young people entering into the right-wing extremist scene.

Just as the way into the right-wing extremist scene is composed of many individual pieces of a puzzle, several large and small steps must be resorted to when taking counter-measures: these can be summed up as “watching closely”, “recognizing” and “acting”. Specialized facilities can provide valuable help and support for parents as well as the young people affected.

3. Information – Education – Work

The thematic block “Information – Education – Work” deals with experience, developments and necessities in connection with “extra-curricular youth work” and the relevant challenges in the fields of economic, education and youth politics concerning the “education and employment of young people”.

Information competence and political education

In her assessment, Alexandra Cangelosi (www.jugendinfo.cc) deals with the relevance of information competence in youth work. UNESCO considers information competence as one of the six necessary for survival in the 21st century. Information competence encompasses the possibility to find, evaluate and use information.

Youth information centres in Austria regard providing young people with the necessary information to enable them to act independently and make sound decisions as their primary task. They are conceived as so-called “one-stop shops” to provide adolescents with a place to go to find answers to all relevant questions. A particular challenge has developed out of the shift away from simple, concrete basic questions to complex relationships and orientation. In the past, a large number of young people approached the youth information centres with short, concise questions but the need for this kind of information is now easy to satisfy independently on the internet. The youth information centres are now increasingly confronted with providing orientation in the information overload and “interpreting” what has already been found, with consulting on complex questions and confirming the quality of the information previously obtained by the young person and, in this way, conveying information competence.

Supporting educational processes and imparting life skills – that include information competence as well – is also the task of open and organizational youth work. Although information competence is not explicitly identified as being part of youth work, the goal of supporting young people in their development and becoming independent implies that this competence – and its individual components – should be imparted in relationship management as well as in individual projects.

This approach is depicted taking political education as an example. These offers provide young people with the possibility of acquiring new capabilities and skills with the goal of being able to act responsibly and far-sightedly in the field of politics. Innovative extra-curricular offers can help reduce the distance between politics and young people and provide the motivation for active opinion-forming and participation.

Education and further development in the context of open youth work

The contribution made by Richard Krisch (Advisor for pedagogical basic research, (www.jugendzentren.at)) describes the educational responsibilities of open youth work.

On the one hand, open youth work enables a great variety of learning processes in the social sphere and, on the other, provides educational offers specifically tailored for children and young people with major social deficits. The educational activities of open youth work exhibit a fundamental difference to the processes that take place in schools. They are voluntary, low-threshold, cooperative and non-hierarchical and make it possible to develop specific skills and competences through practical activities. This appears especially crucial in a social context in which children and adolescents are increasingly confronted with success-oriented educational expectations that hardly leave any room for coming to terms with childhood and youth in a self-determined way.

This is the reason that the author speaks out in favour of all-day education – quite distinct from the all-day school – and, in this way, once again takes up a discussion that was intensively carried out in Germany a few years ago.

Education and occupational orientation in organizations for children and youths

In his contribution, Benedikt Walzel (Federal Youth Organization) throws light on the areas of education and occupational orientation in organizational institutions for children and youths. Similar to open youth work, these “non-pedagogical spaces” also play an important role in the development of young people and enable self-determined, self-organized learning removed from any pressure to achieve results or success.

All types of integration into organization for children and youths make this type of non-formal learning possible. However, the more actively young people participate in the working structures of such organizations, the broader the palette of the skills and competences they can develop as a result becomes. The voluntary involvement of many young people in child and youth organizations leads to the crystallization of those characteristics they consider important for their future profession – whether it be the way they deal with other people or the motive of self-efficacy. Sometimes the experience made in voluntary involvement can even lead to questioning the chosen profession and possibly changing it.

Dealing with the subject of the world of employment has long played an important role in the orientation of youth organizations. For this reason, they concentrate on offers for young people that can be classified as belonging to the sphere of vocational guidance and consciousness raising for the world of employment, in addition to implicit possibilities for occupational orientation.

Low-threshold approaches to occupational qualifications appropriate for young people

Martin Hagen (Open Youth Work Dornbirn, www.ojad.at) provides an insight into the real world of young people not integrated into the labour market and illuminates the necessity for low-threshold offers for vocational orientation and qualification in extra-curricular youth work.

A poll made by the Synthesis Research Institute in 2007 assumes a total of almost 150,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 who have neither completed an apprenticeship nor graduated from a secondary school and are not taking part in further education activities. Low-threshold offers for occupational orientation, counselling and qualification are especially necessary for those young people who are not, or choose not to be, registered with the conventional institutions such as the Austrian Labour Market Service.

Projects based on the following methods have shown themselves to be particularly successful:

- Approaching the target group by way of leisure-time activities
- The culture of the second or third chance that keeps the young people in the project
- Placement of the young people on the labour market through personal assistance, care and consultation

The personal aspect is of central importance and the following are necessary:

- Personnel with socio-pedagogical qualifications and those with training in a trade
- A realistic relationship between the advisor and adolescent
- Pedagogical principles that help the young people develop their motivation for work

In addition, all qualification projects need to be evaluated regularly in order to test their viability for being transferred into the rule-based systems of occupational education.

“Youth” as a phase of life and the demands placed on youth work

The general social conditions of young people and their interaction with youth work are investigated in the expertise provided by Heinz Schoibl (www.helixaustria.com).

The most in danger – and also the most difficult for social and youth work to reach – are young people threatened by poverty, those affected by divorce or who have broken off their education, out-of-work adolescents and others with psychological problems or subjected to violence in their homes. However, young people are often not prepared to seek – and often even reject – help from outside in periods of existential crises. In many cases, easily accessible, low-threshold offers for providing comprehensive help are missing.

This means that social work for young people is increasingly focussing on making contacts available where adolescents congregate, where their problems develop, and where they can be systematically dealt with and overcome. The facilities provided by open and mobile youth work have not only shown themselves successful as “door openers” for social work for young people but have also increasingly taken initiatives that have proven to be effective in dealing with the existential crises of today’s youthful population.

These innovative approaches have, to a certain extent, introduced a paradigm shift into youth social work but – taken as a whole – they are still restricted to small areas of the help system, both technically and regionally, and are only just starting to be integrated into the regular activities of youth welfare.

4. Youth work and youth welfare

The classical borderline between youth work and youth welfare that is still rooted in the Austrian political and funding mindset has long disappeared in the practical work being carried out with young people.

Youth work does not simply mean “fun and games, and leisure-time activities” and “supporting young people without focussing on their problems” but also working with a great variety of young people, in a wide range of settings, using specialized methods, on subjects and problems that are absolutely relevant to youth welfare.

Against this background, two specialist contributions in Section B “Youth Work in Austria” complete the depiction of the youth welfare system in Austria and illustrate the links that exist between youth work and youth welfare in order to elucidate the perspectives for development.

Youth welfare in Austria

Joseph Scheipl (University of Graz – Institute for Educational and Pedagogical Science) elaborates on the central contents from the wide-ranging area of youth welfare that appear to be especially relevant within the scope of this “Youth Report”.

As an introduction, the author defines the concept of “youth work in Austria” and gives a description of the legal basis. This provides an overview of the character of the law as well as its fundamental regulations and their interpretation in the individual Austrian provinces. He continues by dealing with the principal aspects and services provided by youth welfare in Austria, defines the eligibility for taking advantage of these, explains the principle of subsidiarity and points out the problems of standardization. This is followed by a depiction of the variety of services offered and their quantitative characteristics, as well as a discussion on the extent to which the model of social orientation is appropriate for the future. Concepts oriented on the social sphere should – at least – complement the traditional understanding of youth welfare seeing that the social environment is not only a source of individual problematic situations but also provides a pool of resources for young people. The development of flexible forms of help through teams in the social area, the de-specialization of installations and the development of networks and other forms of cooperation targeted on “the area” – the world those affected live in – as well as a new form of budgeting (social-environment budget) are among the most important characteristics of this approach.

Summarizing, the author demonstrates that the federal law on youth welfare from 1989 can be evaluated as being a structural landmark in the socio-historical sense. With its orientation on service provision, stressing subsidiarity for the first time, the institution of ombudsmen for children and young people, and many other positive developments, it was the driving force behind the establishment of practical areas of social work in the 1990s and has only recently started to show signs of growing weaker.

Interfaces between youth welfare and youth work

In an additional expertise, Joseph Scheipl (University of Graz – Institute for Educational and Pedagogical Science) demonstrates the opportunities for a stronger form of cooperation between youth welfare and youth work and recommends that the terms of “integrative” or “inclusive youth work” be used. He finds the necessity for cooperation between youth welfare and youth work on the fact that, although youth welfare offers a comprehensive, differentiated range of help in Austria in the form of mobile services as well as counselling and welfare facilities, young people take too little advantage of – or even reject – them. The difficulties in reaching young people with problems and developing a preparedness to cooperate and being accepted are described as being some of the major hurdles facing youth welfare.

Young people fear the unfamiliar and the guidelines of youth welfare are firm (absolutely set structural framework, little flexibility in the offers). The services provided by youth work (information, everyday communication, leisure-time support, animation) would be a good way of reaching young people.

The following hindrances would have to be overcome in order to develop integrative approaches:

1. The constitutional competence for youth welfare is in the hands of the federal government and its execution is the responsibility of the provinces whereas youth promotion is completely under the aegis of the provinces.
2. Youth welfare and youth work are two different fields of administration with the respective financing; a satisfactory form of cooperation between the heads of the individual political departments (possibly from different political parties) is, therefore, essential.
3. Youth work considers the interfaces to youth welfare as being complicated; cooperation is only effective in places.

Conclusions of the expert commission

In its conclusions, the expert commission summarizes and systematizes the recommendations and measures in the field of youth politics in general, as well as in specific areas, elaborated in the various expertises. The expert commission's recommendations are based on the political understanding of youth politics as a multidimensional, trans-sectoral issue. Youth politics makes use of various instruments on various levels and is in urgent need of coordination.

The overall goal of youth politics must lie in guaranteeing those growing up the best possible chances for development and making it possible for the coming generation to become fully integrated and participate in society. For this reason, youth politics must be oriented on demands and needs appropriate for each stage of the development of young people and make every effort to create spaces and environments in the family, school, training, profession and leisure time capable of promoting these developments. Young people need supportive conditions to come to grips with the mounting demands placed on them in developing their own identity, dealing with their body and sexuality, the assumption of a gender role, the development of social connections and partnerships, furthering educational and professional perspectives, and handling their individual social future.

Investigating the themes and spheres of life that are relevant to young people makes it possible to determine guidelines and principles for Austrian youth politics and work with adolescents. An orientation on these guidelines in the activities, promotional measures and support services offered to young people will contribute to expanding and improving the potential for development. For this to be successful, coordinated action is necessary on the part of federal, province and community politics, as well as from all those involved in youth work.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The agreement on the rights of children (the so-called Child Rights' Convention) applies to all people between 0 and 18 years of age and was ratified by Austria in 1992. Politics on the rights of children and adolescents, oriented on the UN Convention, "must place the concrete needs and expectations of young people at the core of its attention. This centring on children and/or adolescents recognizes them – as individuals as well as a social group – as independent, self-aware subjects of society and as legitimate creators of their environment. It legitimizes the representation of their interests with the demand that these actually be taken into account in any consideration of interests."

In addition to the guiding principles of the Child Rights' Convention, the following aspects are of importance for youth politics.

Orientation on strengths, resources, opportunities and needs:

A resolute change of perspective is required in youth politics away from an orientation on deficits and problems towards one focussing on the strengths, resources, opportunities and needs of young people. Only an orientation on the needs of young people and the world they live in, which also includes a compassionate, partisan approach to them, can guarantee the creation of the sense of one's own responsibility and self care that is so often demanded today.

Avoidance of generalizations:

Public, social and political discussions on these subjects frequently tend towards a negative understanding of the term "youth" that carries risks for the self-perception and social position of young people. Strategies that discriminate and exclude individual young people or specific groups must be vigorously countered. Ensuring objective reporting on juvenile criminality is one of the many measures that are necessary. Being social integrated within various spheres of life and the avoidance of any forms of exclusion by providing low-threshold sport, culture and leisure-time activities are just as important.

Making participation possible:

Austrian society needs active citizens in all social classes and areas. Politics firmly rooted in the real world is especially important when dealing with young people. Adolescents must have concrete possibilities for influencing the problems affecting them in their social environment today. For this reason, structural opportunities must be established in the schools, communities and regions.

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