THE CONCEPT OF MOBILE YOUTH WORK
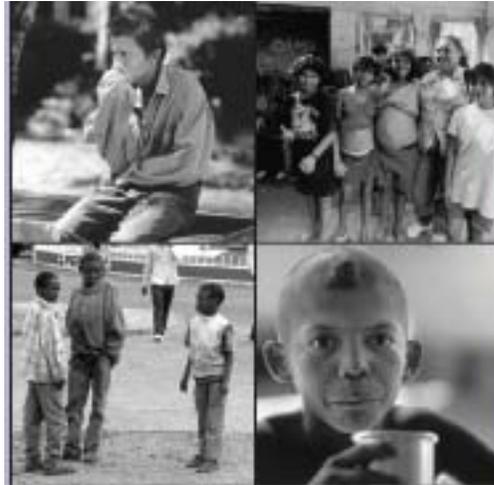
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Mobile Youth Work

Mobile Youth Work is an outreach youth council concept. It is being put into action of social work in the frame of group- and individual social-pedagogic and social work. Mobile Youth Work is district- respectively social-area-related and aims at preventing or cancelling exclusion processes of youths. Hereby, resources and self-aid powers towards the solution of social problems in the community are being used. Two forms of Mobile Youth Work can be differentiated at present: A community-based concept which arose in big housing areas ("dormitory towns") and a rather scene- or target-group-related approach in the action centres of the big cities. Mobile Youth Work has its starting point in the community-based form.

1.1 Historic development of Mobile Youth Work

The concept of Mobile Youth Work emerged from the discussion with American authors and projects in the field of delinquently acting youngsters in street groups and street gangs (street work, street corner work, street gang work, street club work) as well as the community-based work (Shaw and McKay 1942, Spergel 1966, Miller 1986, detailed about that: Specht 1979, 1984). The beginning of professional Mobile Youth Work in Germany in the nineteen-sixties goes back to the Chicago School (Shaw and McKay) in the USA of the nineteentwenties. In Germany, Mobile Youth Work also stands in the tradition of a communitybased work in the Netherlands (cf. "categorical" community-based work by Bolz/Boulet 1973). Although rapidly growing new housing estates arose at the periphery of the big cities in the nineteen-sixties, the time of Western Germany urbanisation, the social infrastructure, mainly for youths, was neglected to a far degree. The same was valid for many other European countries during that period of time. Rockers, conspicuous youth cliques and youth gangs who publicly caused problems and sensation challenged not only the police and the youth courts but, increasingly, social work and social pedagogic as well. It is for this reason that Mobile Youth Work – adopted from the USA and adapted to German conditions, having started in Stuttgart – is being applied as a successful concept of practical youth- and social work concept since 1967. On the local area of Stuttgart, local church parishes (ecumenical supporter-communities) organised themselves with the aim to take up contact with these conspicuous youths on the street in order to prevent them from being excluded from their district and to try to reintegrate them into the community if necessary. In the middle of the nineteenseventies, further projects and institutions of Mobile Youth Work arose outside the city of Stuttgart within Baden-Württemberg (Keppeler 1997). Organisations of Mobile Youth Work exist in about 100 cities and communities in Baden-Württemberg at present, in the whole country, this meaning, since the nineteen-nineties, in the old and the new lands of the Federal Republic, there are as many as 1200. This development was supported by relevant publications like for instance a standard paper published by the federal society of local youth welfare departments outlining the main points of the

concept of Mobile Youth Work in a professional way and referring to legal and organisational frame conditions (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft 1986) as well as the 8th German Governmental Youth Report referring to Mobile Youth Work as a specific approach of action in the context of outreach youth work and youth council (cf. Federal Ministry 1990, 116 f).

[1]

In the nineteen-nineties, the approach was adopted in the fife "new federal lands", mainly in connection with the action programme against aggression and violence of the Federal Government (Action Programme 1992). In the areas with a rural structure the concept gained importance too. The reason for this was that more and more youths in rural areas had problems concerning their life management which the modernised support systems in the rural area could no longer meet (Böhnisch/Winter 1992). Wherever it was possible toovercome the taboo concerning the problems, organisations of Mobile Youth Work standing in the tradition of community-based youth work established themselves (Groß/Schmitt 1997).

Since the beginning of the nineteen-nineties target-group- and scene-related approaches within Mobile Youth Work play an increasingly important role. The mobility of youths with their flexible change of scene and milieu as well as their increasing youth-cultural rooting in their respective areas of action lead to increasingly scene-specific forms of outreach youth work. These forms of Mobile Youth Work have a room or rooms at their disposal as a basis, but mainly follow the aspect of offering individually oriented help and street work intensive shelter places in the inner city areas. Contradictory to the rather district-based work, this approach is less community-related, instead offers a concept of consequent support to secure the survival on the street and of existential aid on the one hand, on the other hand stabilises existing social networks and social contacts (Lutz/Stickelmann 1999). Thus, Mobile Youth Work approaches other concepts doing street work, like for instance drug aid or work with homeless people (Steffan 1988). However, there is a difference as well concerning the age of the target groups as the conceptional approach, which in Mobile Youth Work almost always relates to groups. Depending on age and problem situation, reintegration possibilities for individual youths as well as for peer groups are
being searched within the district of origin, concerning the access to schools and training possibilities as well as employment and housing. In many cases, this differentiation also relates to those approaches of outreach youth- and social work, which in some Federal Lands respectively towns are being described with the terms "street social work" or "street work" (Gusy 1994, Becker/Simon 1995). Meanwhile, 11 local associations respectively working groups exist, which gathered to the Federal Association Street Work/Mobile Youth Work in 1997. The International Society for Mobile Youth Work supports the international experience exchange between theory and field work, among others by organising international congresses (Specht 1987, 1991, ISMO 1999), workshops and qualification seminars.

1.2   Precarious living situations and problematic behaviour of young people: How is a society to deal with it?

The reasons which lead to the foundation of Mobile Youth Work are much the same at present as they were when the first social-pedagogic steps were taken in the district Freiberg of the city of Stuttgart 35 years ago (1967). The initial problem in almost each community, in almost every city is always conspicuous, difficult, attention-demanding or delinquent behaviour of young people. The main question always remained the same and has, meanwhile, reached a global dimension: Shall we turn towards these homeless, impoverished, delinquent, sick, underfed, despised, drug-consuming, provoking, extremist-oriented children and youths or shall we exclude them by lack of attention, punishment, repression and, increasingly, legal sanctions?

[2]

  Do we define the conspicuously acting youths (punks, skinheads, gangs, cliques, youth gangs, street children, young drug-consumers, hooligans etc.) as "endangered" or as "dangerous"? The decisive factor for the choice of either a social-pedagogic or a repressive-controlling approach is which definition is being enforced in the youth-political public. Aid or control, attention or exclusion are the, often fiercely discussed, counterpart positions. Frequently, a mixture of both approaches is being applied, mainly when laws have been violated. The causes, however, have always remained the same. Conspicuous youths provoke conflicts, but also victims.The violence of youths, which has doubtlessly increased in brutality, is also being reported by schools meanwhile. In the present discussion, this leads to the demand of reinforcing school social work and strengthening the co-operation of Mobile Youth Work with schools to meet the common interest to prevent social exclusion of youths. Since exclusion frequently goes along with stigmatising, it is also the aim of Mobile Youth Work to prevent stigmatising processes or possibly to initiate processes of de-stigmatisation. Hereby, Mobile Youth Work relies on structures of trust and voluntariness of the youths by offering themdevelopment options and chances of life management without violating laws. The main age is between 12 and 19 years. Sometimes, however, younger or older youths belong to the target group of Mobile Youth Work as well.

1.3 Method Concept of Mobile Youth Work

The concept of Mobile Youth Work is divided into four fields: Individual aid, street work, group work and community work which are being weighted according to the local situation. The characteristic of Mobile Youth Work is the fact that the concepts of all four working fields are connected with each other.

1.3.1 Individual Aid

Individual Aid means that Mobile Youth Workers feel responsible for all the problems the youths they care for have and approach them in the context of an understanding of council towards pragmatic aid (cf. Thiersch 1977). This is the consequence drawn from the experience that youths will only show trust when trust is being shown towards them. Concerning solutions for their problems, youths will not choose adults according to their official responsibility but have to rely on opportunities available in their every-day-life. Thus, Mobile Youth Workers are being confronted with a variety of issues and

they can only decide in a second step whether to take up contact for instance with an organisation of debt- or drug council. This is being clarified in each individual case in the course of the council process and according to the wishes of the youths. Personal council includes crisis intervention as well as long-term council if necessary. This means to look upon the various problems of youths in their individual development as a whole complex and to develop respective processes of aid. Other youths, friends, pals, the clique, the gang, are being integrated systemically into the aid process provided that they are influential and of importance for the individual person. Club- and group work offers the necessary frame for this kind of aid. This means that the acceptance of Mobile Youth Workers as group-pedagogic persons of relationship makes the contact to the individual youth possible or at least easier. The offer of individual and group-related council relates to the following fields mainly: Family, school, training, clique, work and unemployment, legal and illegal drug consume, regulation of debts, sex and the threat of AIDS.

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Additional is the field of dealing with authorities, doctors, hospitals, financing institutions, police and justice, prisons and victims, which is especially important for delinquently acting, ill or drug-addicted youths (cf. Local Institution 1997).

1.3.2 Street Work – Outreach Youth Work

Street Work as a professional kind of social work and social pedagogic has its origin in the USA. Especially in the big cities respective social-pedagogic programmes have been developed in the view of increasing youth delinquency at the end of the nineteen-twenties. A typical target group of this approach oaf aid, which was established apart from the offices of youth authorities and council institutions on the street, were loose gangs (loosely structured youth street groups, cliques or youth gangs). The working place of social work was, so to speak, being transferred to the meeting points and living places of the youths. Over the years, the following terms were applied to social workers in this ambulant field of council: street corner worker, street gang worker, area youth worker, outreach youth worker, street club worker and field worker. Since World War II street work approaches have been practised in Western European countries, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Australia as well. To name some European examples: In Great Britain the term is "Detached Youth Work" or "Outreach Youth Work" or Mobile Youth Work", in the Netherlands it is "Street Corner Work", in Switzerland "Gassenarbeit" or "Mobile Youth Work", France it is talking about "Travaille de la Rue" and in Austria and Germany it is "Street Work" as well as "Mobile Youth Work". Since the global political change of 1989/1990 there are approaches of Street Work in Central Europe as well. Street Work, in the Federal Republic of Germany being practised for 30 years (Kiebel 1996) seems to have advanced to some kind of all over weapon to deal with inner-city problem groups. Wherever the responsible persons no longer know how to cope, they establish street workers, frequently with temporary, employment contracts limited for 2 years. Time and again Mobile Youth Workers are being confronted with the expectation to function as a short-term task force to solve the problems. It is often not easy to communicate that Street Work represents merely

one methodical concept within Mobile Youth Work (cf. Bopp a.o. 1997). Street Work is a methodical concept which, on one hand, needs the local, community-based rooting and, on the other, has got concrete offers for youths: People who have time for them, a telephone in order to contact authorities or to ask for employment, a cup of coffee, a shower, a place of rest, a refuge for the management of crisis, but also a place where ideas for leisure-time activities, support for the realisation of the wish for an individual space within the district or offers for social experience with other youths can be realised (detailed information: Keppeler 1988).

1.3.3 Group Work – Work with Cliques

Mobile Youth Work was also initiated as a pragmatic critic of merely individualising approaches within Youth Aid. The role of peers, as being helpful for the socialisation next to parents and school, has not been integrated in a productive way into their forms of reaction by Youth Aid. Mobile Youth Work approaches existing cliques and informal groups, because these groups have an important part in the building of views and attitudes of children and youths, but for their management of development challenges as well. Youth research has proved this to be a result of societal developments within the last 40 years in the Federal Republic of Germany (first: Allerbeck/Hoag 1985).

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The term clique is frequently being used as a synonym related to the terms peer or peer group and indicates a type of informal groups which can be described as ”comprehensible construction, in which every-day-needs and adventures are the main thing. The belonging has a rather fleeting character and is not bound to formal regulations. The informal structures may show hierarchic characteristics sometimes, however, they are subject to the direct influence of those belonging to the clique” (Liebel 1991, p. 306). Cliques mostly show local, social-area patterns of orientation and thus differ from scenes, which have an open, not necessarily local structure and frequently establish themselves along different music- and life-styles. ”Scenes count as a youth-cultural expression of a post-modern individualised culture, within which one wants to be both, biographically unique as well as sociable” (Bönisch 1997, 141). The building of scenes and cliques, however, do not exclude each other, as proved by individual cliques representing distinct youth-cultural styles which are at the same time part of local and regional scene meetings. The characteristic of cliques in their social structure is the ”equality of position in the relation to each other” (Krappmann 1991, 364). In this respect they differ from youth groups or –gangs which have a hierarchic social leadership structure. Long before German research adopted the issue of cliques, gangs, especially youth gangs have been researched in the USA. The tradition goes far back to early works of the Chicago School about social-economic delinquency research and the classic about gang research ”The gang” (Trasher 1926). In Germany, Liebel first pointed out the historical establishment of cliques with the thesis that youth cliques mainly arise and increase in importance when they are being cut off from an imaginable better future and civil society is no longer able or ready to grant enough time and space within the phase of youth for the reasonable planning of

the development of a perspective of live. (cf. Liebel 1991, 308)

He clarifies this thesis according to a historic example. Among the proletarian youths, mainly those gathered within a clique who came from a lower working class level and who were threatened by neglect. These cliques "mainly established themselves in the Weimar Republic as amalgamation of working class youths frequently growing up without parents and under problematic conditions. For them, the clique was a social centre point and a place of social learning and surviving (Lessing/Liebel 1981). The authors define this basic type as "Wild Cliques", claiming the cities, the streets in the cities as their own living- and action areas in a loud and provocative manner, insisting on their autonomy (cf. Lindner 1983). Their members supported each other in emergency situations and were allied to each other in unconditional solidarity. The arising of Wild Cliques" makes clear that "working class youths re-defined the vacuum concerning their social- and living-perspectives, into which the crisis had thrown them, in a positive way as a creative area. They did not take the social vacuum as an area of misery but defined it as being a creative, also aggressive, area of articulating themselves" (Peukert 1986, 246).

There are other forms of survival nowadays within which the peer group, the clique plays an important part. There has been a change of meaning even during the last two decades. In the view of growing individualisation and increasing loss of orientation of youths, cliques nowadays frequently are said to be "main socialisation points of crucial importance for the survival" (Ferchhoff 1990, p. 72). If the membership in cliques used to be a time of preparation for the adult role and had the function to mediate between the traditional and the modern value system" (Ferchhoff 1990, p. 27), nowadays cliques are places of self-organisation and important social points for youths.
The living-up of youth-cultural individuality within the clique is frequently connected to a territorial dimension. Youths, mainly boys, occupy public areas, make their own use of them, understand them to be the stage for clique-related possession processes. Mono-functional rooms and objects are being changed in function in a group-specific sense (cf. Becker/Eigenbrodt/May 1989, Böhnisch 1989). Especially in the case of migrant youths, cliques are closely connected to territorial behaviour. Territorial behaviour gives cliques a feeling of power demonstration and acceptance. Within their territory, cliques claim respect for themselves and adopt identifying functions for their self-affirmation within their environment, which they initially experience as being alien, into their action. Of special importance are the fackets as a symbol for clique membership and territorial claim. Conflicts between foreign, respectively multi-ethnic youth gangs arise whenever they move within alien territory (Tertilt 1996). Mobile Youth Work includes into its concept the fact that clique membership nowadays offers a basis for territorial self-affirmation for many youths as well as being a place of mutual support and common aid in managing youth risk situations. Within cliques, common learning and social discussion is possible. Within the group, youths experience self-value, backing, continuity, trust – most important factors for their growing-up. Relation groups can stabilise individual youths in problematic phases. Thus, the approach of Mobile Youth Work is contradictory to repressive forms of dealing with conspicuous street groups. Because frequently,

groups are being denounced as being seductive, and it is being overlooked that frequently they grant status and a subjective feeling of security, belonging and strength to the youth concerned. These basic human needs are obviously not being sufficiently granted in the other daily social contexts of the youth and therefore need the possibility of extension or substitute. It is for these positive resources and potentials that youth groups can be said to possess that Mobile Youth Work includes them into its pedagogic processes as a starting point. There are possibilities of overcoming dyadic structures by applying existing relationships, working with the dynamic of the group, initiating or accompanying group-related processes. The frequently only short-term relationship between the youth and the social worker can be extended by processes of building up support structures which are longer-lasting and often more effective. This needs a longer-term relationship work which is being developed in the context of attractive leisure-time-offers and systematic group work in rooms rented for the purpose (Haeberlin/Klenk 1997, Deinet 1966, Vogt 1997).

1.3.4 Community-based Work

Since integration and exclusion, acceptance and rejection, the origin and the solution of problems frequently arise within the environment of young people, Mobile Youth Work makes a point of its approach being community-based. It is inspired by American examples like for instance the work of Saul Alinsky and the concepts of activating and conflict-oriented community-based work (Alinsky 1973; Bahr/Gronemeyer 1974) but by analytic community approaches like they have already been practiced in the settlement movement at the end of the 19th century as well (Müller 1988). By way of field- and social area analysis the main points of Mobile Youth Work are being determined along the local situations and put into action in a sense of grass root youth aid planning (cf. Specht 1980, Specht 1992, Jordan/Schone 1992, p. 45 f./Lukas/Strack 1996). The concept of community-based Mobile Youth Work includes the joining of existing local offers in the sense of an institutional community network and the creation of respective institutional structures like for instance district working groups.

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The presence within the district, an office, an activity room for the clique, create the necessary precondition to get into contact with the citizens. Additionally to the work with the youths and the families, all inhabitant groups of a district or community are target groups for special actions, who can contribute to the improvement of the social climate within the community or to forms of productive management of social or political conflicts.

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