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# Chapter 18: Interventions of Gender-specific Youth Work in Vienna, Austria: Between Integration and Critique

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter contributes to the collected volume with findings from the Austrian case study. It brings together insights from three different reports<sup>65</sup> accessing disadvantaged youth, freedoms for participation of young people and their aspirations from various angles. Besides the socio-economic and political context for addressing young people's particular problems, situations and opportunities to participate, also local policies and networks for supporting young people are considered as important field of interventions. We put an emphasis on local policies in a comparably disadvantaged area in Vienna that aim at taking seriously young people's demands for spatial appropriation. Here, the role of youth work as a field of policy intervention in shaping young people's opportunities to participate in policy processes was particularly addressed. Following this focus, the participatory research tracked girls' ways of spatial appropriation and the role and tools of gender-sensitive youth work for enhancing girls' scope of action and desire.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 National analysis

The data used for the analysis of the socio-economic and political context for the Austrian study stems from expert interviews and documentary analysis on youth policies and programmes. It was collected between September 2013 and February 2014. The documents used for the documentary analysis cover official reports of ministries and administrative institutions, evaluation reports as well as descriptions of measures and programmes issued by stakeholders in the field of youth policy. The partners for the interviews were selected on three levels: practitioners, mid-level, and governing body level taking into account the following three criteria of sampling: a) involvement in or responsibility for youth policy, b) particular expertise on groups of youth identified in the literature review, c) mixing practitioners, mid-level governing bodies and service providers, and policy makers.

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<sup>65</sup> Knecht/Kuchler,2013); Haidinger/Kasper,2014; Haidinger, 2015

**Overview 1: Interviews on national level**

National government policy makers	2 civil servants of federal ministries
Regional government policy makers	1 deputy to Vienna's Parliament, and 1 leader of the youth department of a federal province
Training and education providers	2 programme managers and 2 practitioner working in non-profit
Employment support service providers	2 managers of the PES youth department
Citizen's bodies	1 board member of the National youth council
Youth work organisations	4 representatives
Networks and membership organisations (sector bodies/agencies, campaigns, lobbying, networking, project work, awareness raising)	5 representatives of the social partners (Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Labour) and other associations.

With regard to interview data, we conducted a qualitative content analysis following Mayring (2007). The combination of the analysis of documents and of expert interviews allows describing the way experts understand disadvantage, poverty, and inequality of young people and the informational basis of judgements of justice (IBJJ) of Austrian politics.

Regarding questions on policies (instrument/measures) and policy making/implementation, we applied the policy analysis approach. It serves for analysing the "assortment" of measures and programmes as well as for describing how measures are implemented.

**2.2 Local social support network analysis – Simmering/Vienna/Austria**

The Austrian local social support network analysis was carried out between February 2014 and September 2014, in the Viennese district Simmering. It drew its results from several sources including quantitative secondary descriptive data (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, 2012, 2014) and data from guideline-based stakeholder interviews, one group discussion and field notices of several observations and informal talks in the field of local youth work. The table below provides detailed information on expert interviewees. The group discussion was carried out with five young people who participated in the "word up" youth parliament. The data was analysed following a qualitative and thematic content analysis drawing on the core themes of the common WP4 report structure.

### Overview 2: Interviews on local level

Regional/local government policy makers	3 (borough mayor, representative youth welfare office, district councillor)
Training and education providers	4 (2 teachers and 2 school social workers)
Citizen's bodies (e.g. youth parliaments/councils)	1 (social worker involved in youth parliament)
Youth work organisations	3 (including 1 youth worker specialised in girls' work)
Networks and membership organisations	1 (urban development agency)
Other types of organisations:	2 (director of district library and police officer)

## 2.3 Participatory research in Simmering

The case study carried out in Austria attempted to implement a participatory action research approach with young people (Cahill, 2007; Dentith et al., 2012). It was based on four methodological elements (see Overview 3): ethnographic methods including observant participation and informal talks in youth centres in Simmering; arts-based methods focusing on street-art; problem-centred interviews with both girls and youth workers; and three reflective sessions in terms of group discussions with stakeholders and informal talks with participants to reflect the research process. The main venue the research process was carried out was the girls' garden, a girls-only programme of a local youth centre in Simmering.

### Overview 3: Participatory Research Design

Kick-off period	Selection of focus and method involving gatekeeper (youth centre) and young people → "out-reach" and decentralised research work with the girls' garden as "home base" run by Balu&du
Workshop preparation I + II	Design and distribution of flyers and posters Workshop preparation with girls: introducing them into street-art methods; designing bags and stencils Ethnographic life-world analysis (Mar-Nov 2014); continuous presence in the girls' garden, youth centres and parks; documentation and reflection in research diary
Workshops	Organisation and implementation of two workshops on street-art with street-artists (July and Sept 2014)
Follow-up and reflection	Reflective (group) discussions on participatory research design and workshop proceeding with girls, youth workers and other stakeholders

### **3. Socio-Economic Political Context**

#### **3.1 Disadvantaged youth and inequalities among youth in Austria: the impact of the educational system**

Besides the description of inequality by ascriptive criteria such as migrant background and gender, the discussion on disadvantaged youth in Austria is shifting more and more to the causes of inequality – and here especially to the highly selective education system. The focus on the system of education resulted in new ways of describing inequality, and early school leavers and youth in a NEET situation became more visible in research and targeted by politics (cf. Bacher et al., 2013).

The school enforces social inequality between different family backgrounds (Bruneforth/Lassnigg, 2012). The school system reinforces these differences by allocating students to different types of schools/tracks and qualification levels. The obtained qualification highly predetermines the choice of vocation, the opportunities available on the apprenticeship and job market, and the future level of income. At the same time, the school system does not respond to the educational needs of disadvantaged young people. Children at risk, whose parents are first generation immigrants, are affected by poverty or have low educational attainment (Vogtenhuber et al., 2012: 22).

With respect to gender differences, the ninth school grade (usually at the age of 14-15) marks an educational turning point: On the one hand, 6 out of 10 girls but only 5 out of 10 boys decide to attend an academic secondary school, higher technical or vocational college ending with an exam that allows them to enrol in university. On the other hand, male apprentices dominate the dual system: two thirds of students are boys. Male youths are also overrepresented in apprenticeships, which still lead to well-paid and stable jobs. In contrast, young women are concentrated in a small number of not very promising apprenticeships in the service sector (Mairhuber/Papouschek, 2010: 443).

#### **3.2 Policy interventions targeted at disadvantaged youth**

Regarding measures and interventions, we found that there is a broad range of measures aimed at improving the situation of disadvantaged youth. However, there are hardly any direct anti-poverty measures for young people, except financial support for poor families, and also a co-ordinated anti-poverty youth policy reflected in the policy making process is lacking. The procedures in the field of financial, educational, and vocational measures follow different rationales. Federalism, and the Austrian system of Social Partnership, which includes representative organisations of employees and employers, yield widely spread influence and power. This makes decision making difficult and opaque. The multi-level governance system places high demands on co-operation, a fact that has come to be understood by an increasing number of actors; albeit young people themselves are barely included in decision-making processes.

Most of youth policy measures are designed to help with particular problems regarding school, apprenticeships, or jobs and transition processes from school to work or to

apprenticeship training. An apprenticeship is considered to be the best way to avoid future unemployment or poverty. This training system, however, has negative aspects, too: there are not enough apprenticeship places and their number is diminishing continually (Dornmayr/Nowak, 2013). In addition, the quality of the training is very low in some companies, so that youngsters have difficulties to pass the final apprenticeship examination; half of the apprentices are dissatisfied with their training and the dropout rate is high.

A particular Viennese focus is based upon outreach youth work and youth centres. It particularly addresses young people from disadvantaged background, as they are low threshold institutions where participation is voluntary and free of cost. They aim to expand young people's scope of action, supporting appropriation/negotiation of public spaces and its usage by different groups. Youth centres are in general important actors in the district and also serve as hubs. They play an important role mostly as mediators but also as supporters (as for the young people participating in the young parliament) and "framers" or designers of public spaces, together with children and adolescents.

Youth work with girls in Vienna is a youth work response to inequality and difference among young people stemming from the category gender. It is a kind of policy being fed by an informational basis for the judgement of justice that took seriously persistent inequalities among girls and boys and consequently between men and women and recognised gender as a major reference point for policy intervention. Throughout Vienna, there are three exclusive girls' spaces, namely the two girls' cafés "flash" and "peppa" and the girls' garden situated in Simmering (BWJF 2011, 418: 521). In addition, youth centres offer "girls only" activities such as specific time slots for girls or even an exclusive space which is only open for girls.

### **3.3 Policy making, implementation and participation**

With respect to young people's formal opportunities for policy making the National Youth Council and some advisory boards do include young people as delegates; however these institutions are more or less toothless. Rather, they are to be seen as "training for (democratic) participation" rather than participation in and for itself. Moreover, they do not reach disadvantaged young people. Two other measures are more useful for fostering young people's consideration and participation in political and economic decision making processes: firstly, the system of youth work councils in companies (Jugendvertrauensräte), and secondly, the lowering of the voting age, which is accompanied by large-scale information campaigns and makes young people a more valuable population stratum for politicians.

All in all, many measures aim to improve the situation of disadvantaged youth. Most of them, especially in the field of vocational training, work in a paternalistic way: the programmes are mandatory and the possibility to choose between programmes or to participate in decision making is limited (Knecht, 2014). Often, young people do not get sufficient information on their rights. Most of these programmes are oriented towards employability rather than the development of capabilities (ibid.). Young people perceive these programmes as stigmatising.

In relation to politics, disadvantaged youth is hardly engaged; at least youth work tries to make political topics attractive to them, and offers opportunities for experiencing that their actions can result in real-world changes (cf. Verein Wiener Jugendzentren, 2008). Furthermore, youth work offers informal processes of participation, with youth workers passing the “voice” of the young people to higher administrative or political levels. But this also means that young people who are not in touch with young centres – such as many girls – are less likely to be heard. The involvement of young people in youth centres and their consultation in specific questions are integral part of bottom-up approaches in youth work. At the same time, youth centres and in particular partisan youth work follow and impose (top down) particular (socially innovative) guiding principles such as anti-discriminatory behaviour that are discussed but are not subject to disposition.

## **4. Analysis of Social Support Networks and Policies and Strategies of Local Actors for the Austrian Case Study**

### **4.1 Selection of location**

The Austrian local area in focus of both the analysis of social support networks and policies of local actors as well as of the participatory research was located in Simmering. It is the second biggest district of Vienna situated at its Eastern periphery. Simmering is a traditional working class district with a quite heterogeneous population. Apart from the traditional working class areas, some petty-bourgeois areas can be found as well as very specific neighbourhoods such as “Macondo” where around 3.000 refugees live.

In comparison with Vienna’s overall population, Simmering has a quite young population. As for the whole of Vienna (and Austria), the district’s migrant population has risen steadily over the last years – a fact that increasingly challenges local policy and its position towards a multicultural society. In terms of educational attainment, the share of inhabitants with completed tertiary education is the lowest among all Viennese districts and the residents share with only compulsory education is comparably high. As lower educational attainment is known to have a negative impact on employment, it is not surprising that Simmering is among the five Viennese districts with the highest unemployment rate. Apart from unemployment, the weaker economic situation of the district’s population becomes apparent in – compared to Viennese average - lower income levels and a higher share of “needs-based minimum income” recipients (Magistrat der Stadt Wien, 2014).

### **4.2 Selected policy area: (out-reach) youth work (with girls) in Simmering**

Within our local social support network research we focused on the open and outreach youth work which implies a low-threshold access and keeps the influence of institutionalised settings as low as possible. Starting from this perspective, we focused on policies regarding (gender-specific) youth programmes in the context of social work and youth work, expanding our research perspective by local and urban development programmes.

With regard to policies towards young people, Simmering is quite a resourceful district, not only in terms of “quantity” – there are more youth centres in Simmering than in any other

Viennese district – but also in terms of “quality”: In Simmering, youth policies and youth programmes cover a broad variety of youth work such as “traditional” youth centres, outreach youth work, special offers for children, girls, young mothers, youth work with children of refugees. What makes the case of Simmering particularly interesting is the close cooperation and collaboration between the different institutions and stakeholders, the youth centres, the district’s youth welfare office and urban development agency, school social workers and even the borough mayor, when it comes to the planning and implementation of district policies. The “Regionalforum” for instance is a local network of public institutions meeting once a month to share and spread information about the district, specifically about the district’s youth issues.

We identified two core themes – spatial appropriation and “learning” democracy – within local policy programmes youth centres in Simmering focus on. First, we considered issues of spatial appropriation, conflicts on public and semi-public spaces and the role of social and youth work to solve those. This also includes conflicts of multicultural and intergenerational cohabitation reported many times by different interviewees. Initiatives tackling this issue can be interpreted as bottom-up approaches resulting from the urgency solving day-to-day problems of living together.

Second, we took a closer look at the youth parliament initiative “Word-up!”, fostering the political participation of young people in the chosen district. This one can be rather interpreted as a “top-down” initiative aiming at the democratic education of young people who – in Austria – have the right to vote from 16 years onwards.

In both of these thematic fields youth centres play a crucial role for preparing and implementing tools that shall help to foster young people’s participation on local level.

### **4.3 Youth participation in local initiatives**

*Participatory spatial planning:* a park should be designed with participation of girls to meet particularly their needs in the planning of the facilities on offer. Through out-reach work youth workers tried to interview girls to collect/identify their ideas for designing a public space that is often divided only between little children and boys. The children have their swings and climbing nets; the (adolescent) boys get a skate ramp or a football and basketball cage; the (teenage) girls are somewhere in-between. The project aimed to particularly address girls’ needs for a public space. In the end, some suggestions were taken up, for instance, a hammock that is not easily reached by children and that offers a safer and more comfortable space apart from the boys’ space but at the same time gives girls the opportunity to overview the whole area. The difficulties from the engaged youth workers’ point of view was to “activate” girls for formulating their interest and opinions. This movement from silence to speech is a crucial point – particularly for girls who seem to disappear at a certain age from public space. The other deadlock was that girls are asked for their opinion but there is no sustainable strategy of keeping their interest and involve them into concrete implementation processes. Again, you are asked, give your opinion and then the professionals take over. This reminds us of how justice can be perceived from the point of view of the producers and not only from users. What matters for justice from this point of view is not only the un-equal distribution of opportunities but inequalities in the availability



of meaningful contribution (Gomberg, 2007). An equal opportunity to contribute entails being allowed, expected and encouraged to contribute with one's skills and creativity to society in detail (Simmering's girls' garden for instance – as will be shown below) and as a whole (Sayer, 2011: 9).

*The local youth parliament initiative "Word up"* gives young people the possibility to raise their voice and to be heard, particularly being heard by persons in power positions on local level such as the borough mayor or representatives of public services. It is the young people – and not the politicians, youth workers or other representatives, who raise demands after doing structured walk-throughs in their neighbourhoods what engenders a connection between the spaces of their daily life and the raised issues. Still, critical light should be shed on the educative and pedagogical aspect of the youth parliament. In the discussions about how demands could be implemented, the students are supposed to be treated as equals with whom one can discuss "like an adult". At the same time, they have to accept a "no" and respect constraints. Therefore, young people rather "learn how to do democracy" and compromise than to have a say and a voice and to contest.

In both examples, participation to feed concrete policy steps is fostered in rather institutionalised settings such as the youth parliament or within the rather short- to middle-term design processes initiated by the district's urban development agency (Haidinger/Kasper, 2014). Participation is possible in terms of raising demands or wishes while it stays unclear to what extent the implementation of these demands is constrained by financial and other "practical" impediments. Here, a critical point is the young people's contribution going beyond their opinion and including their involvement into the concrete implementation of ideas. In this case, participation remains rather superficial. Youth centres invest time and energy to reach young people and to include them into processes of consultation, however, the scope of decision making is very restricted. After consultation respectively "choosing" between different offers, the participation process ends, and the implementation is handed over to professionals.

## **5. This is a girls' space?! Re-Searching for Participatory Parity in Gender-specific Youth Work in Simmering**

This section presents findings of a participatory research project undertaken with girls engaged with open youth work in Simmering, one district in Vienna, Austria. Hence, the focus of the participatory and action research was put on the presence, situation and participation of young girls in open youth work and public and semi-public spaces in Simmering and the role of gender-sensitive youth work in enhancing girls' empowerment.

### **5.1 Research questions and research design**

Particular research questions beyond our common research question: "In what way are young people's narratives, aspirations and conceptions of justice articulated, heard and contested in social policies and practices as well as in other aspects of their daily lives?" encompass young girls' limit-situations revealed in their attendance of public and semi-public spaces. By "limit-situations" (Freire, 2009[1970]: 96, 99) we refer to situations that

constrain aspirations or the development of capabilities and their usage in daily life. In our case study, we focused on the limit-situations girls encounter in public and semi-public spaces. We scrutinised the gendered structural and discursive constraints shaping these limit-situations and how girls are “doing gender” (Gildemeister, 2004).

Freire interprets limit-situations as challenges: They are not impassable boundaries where possibilities end but the real boundaries where all possibilities start ... a frontier that separates being from being more (Freire, 2009[1970]: 99, 103). Therefore, partisan and particularly partisan girls youth work is all about signalling interest, respect and recognition and realising possibilities and experiences that girls do not find as such in their daily lives (Bitzan, 2010: 105).

Therefore, we argue about the added value of girls-only space as an important tool and resource in gender-sensitive youth work. This means to report on the challenges, limits and contestations of gender-sensitive and feminist youth work to enhance girls’ scope of space appropriation and girls’ capacities to aspire from the girls’ perspectives and in dialogue with youth workers.

The local youth centre “Balu&du” was the entrance point to our research area. As we decided on a gender-specific perspective for our participatory research, the “home base” of the project was the girls’ garden, one of three girls’ only spaces in Simmering’s youth centre scene. It is a place open from April to September and run by Balu&du where girls and young women can meet. The girls’ garden target group are between 7 and 15 years. Besides the girls’ garden, we visited other girls-only spaces in Simmering where girls and youth workers with a gender-sensitive approach interact.

Our case study included several methods that we combined (see above section 2.3) and that to different degrees fostered an interactive process among the participants. We relied on ethnographic research and observant participation and problem-centred interviews both with young women and youth workers on the one hand. On the other hand, we attempted to implement a collaborative process with young women and girls in a street-art- based project. Batsleer (2011: 424) regards arts-based practice such as street-art as one alternative form for gathering data to express contradictory, ambivalent, multiple feelings and meanings, to try out new ideas that “have the permission also to be different and silly” and that at the same time are tools for informal learning.

As we took the decision to concentrate on street art, we dedicated the following girls garden sessions to the preparation of the participatory action research. In this framework, we as initiators were available for the girls interested in participating in the process to design a wall just in front of the girls’ garden. The aim was to engage the girls as much as possible already during the preparation of the street-art workshops so that they can bring in their ideas and topics and decide how to depict these contents and what materials we will use. Together with the girls we designed and distributed flyers and posters to announce the workshops.

In the forerun of the two organised workshops with two Graffiti artists, the Balu&du sessions were used to introduce the girls into street-art methods such as the designing of

characters and the cutting of stencils and to make them familiar with the material in use such as stencils and spray cans. In this process, the girls designed bags and tried out stencils and free-style graffiti on a huge banner. In July and September 2014 finally two Graffiti workshops took place resulting in the design of a wall vis-à-vis the girls' garden.

## 5.2 Spaces of gendered dominance

The Austrian case study showed empirically how girls and boys are using space in a different manner and scrutinised underlying explanations. Girls' reduced spatial agency is contrasted to boys' expanding spatial agency that manifests itself in the way they playfully occupy public and semi-public space and in the way they communicate with each other and also intersexually (Löw, 2001: 92). Girls remain comparably invisible and silent in such settings – and are up to different games and used to a different division of tasks. They are those playing parlour games, helping to prepare food with youth workers and they are often those who care about their siblings. This gendered division of tasks also means that adolescent girls are more often met in mixed public spaces and playgrounds for children and young people. Girls skating on ramps, playing football and boys caring for their siblings remain rather the exception.

Often girls also “disappear” to invisible places in parks and take their positions there as spectators or audience of busy scenes such as the skate ramps or the football and basketball cage that are rather used by boys. Girls prefer uncontrollable and unreachable free places (from parents and younger children and boys) in public space for chatting and chilling and being among themselves; places that are not socially controlled. An example is the participatory planning of a girls' zone in a park described in section 4.3: girls formulated the wish of being invisible (from outside) and unreachable (for small children); as a result of this participatory planning process high hanging hammocks were installed.

At the same time, going out, strolling around outside appears to be a strategy of girls to escape social control by fearful parents. Teenage girls together with their female friends seem to be much more mobile over distances (“strolling around”). This behaviour might be due to the restriction of possibilities in “fixed” public spaces such as parks or due to the eagerness to get out of the tyranny and control of the local. The “street” or the public transport system are important spaces for being seen, for getting into contact with others, for social interaction with peer groups.

Rumours about unsafety in public space often urge girls into a defensive position having the power to create a felt space of fear that can turn into a real space of fear you use warily. At the same time, the “safe space” private home as opposite to the “unsafe public space” is actually the place where violence against children, girls and women happens. Such dominant discourses restrict girls' (public) space appropriation. Edthofer et al (2015: 94) give a noteworthy example of how to confront such a constructed space of fear – in this case an underground car park - by collective space appropriation of a group of girls using Wen Do techniques (feminist self-defence form) and documenting and reflecting their experiences in a comic strip. Their slogan: “we do not stay at home!”

### 5.3 Gendered aspirations, and the role of gender-sensitive youth work

Our research showed that the formation of aspirations is closely connected with identity formation and with realising what role is foreseen for girls and boys in a society that is strongly divided along the gendered lines of behaviour, doing and labour. Any kind of projection into the future is constrained or at least shaped by the young person's present embeddedness in terms of his or her material position, status and representative situation (Fraser, 2005, 2009).

At the same time, between the age of 13 and 17, sexual intercourses, self-consciousness and personal or occupational projections into the future are subject to rapid twists and changes. Aspirations and projections that have been important at 14 might be completely uninteresting at 17. The completion of school at 15 is a turning point in young people's life course. Delving into the world of work with apprenticeship training or not succeeding in finding a job or an apprenticeship place has major gendered implications. Most of the girls opt for traditionally female occupations such as retail sales, hairdressing or office administrator work with very restricted career and income prospects (Mairhuber/Papouschek, 2010). Nevertheless, this move is an important step of growing up, of – especially as a girl - standing on your own feet and earning money on your own. When girls do not succeed in finding an apprenticeship place the option of staying at home, marrying and becoming a mother is widespread. In these cases, labour market policy is speaking about the “disappeared girls”. Those are early school leavers or NEETs who “disappear” for some years and are difficult to be reached by public policy. This leads to an underrepresentation of girls in training programmes. The research of Bacher et al. (2013) confirms that very little is known about this group.

Since modern claims towards girls request to go beyond or to break with traditional gender roles especially with respect to the world of work, girls permanently experience “double messages” and have to cope with them. A critical stance towards the gendered division of labour cannot mean just persuading girls into technical occupations and devaluing traditionally female occupations such as care work. The mainstream discourse identifies these young women responsible for their place in society's unequal division of labour who opted for an unsuccessful career path. The openness and allegedly “everything goes” attitude of modern life brings along more (at least theoretical) opportunities for girls, however daily routine and adaptive preferences limit this alleged freedom (Bitzan/Daigler, 2004: 34). At the same time, a self-perception of being “different”, of being “distinct” to boys and other girls mixes with the realisation that breaking out of conventional gender roles needs power and endurance.

In this respect, gender-sensitive youth work plays an important role for recognising and naming contradictions in processes of identity formation and becoming. Gender-sensitive and feminist youth work aims at accompanying adolescents' processes of searching and finding with a critical perspective and with awareness of the pitfalls of normalcy. Taking seriously young people's aspirations and voice means building upon participatory knowledge, nevertheless a (contradictory) dialogue strengthens and makes visible that gendered, raced, classed and other positionalities play a role in opening up or limiting self-

knowledge (Dentith et al, 2012: 8; Bitzan/Daigler, 2004: 182) – and a wider range of imaginable aspirations.

Following recent discussions in feminist and gender-sensitive youth work (Autor\_innengruppe, 2014), social work rhetoric and policy moved away from a victim's perspective that sees girls as an entirety as subject to male oppression to resource orientation and diversity of oppression. What different resources, backgrounds and capacities do girls bring along? What other dimensions of inequality among girls such as ethnic background, sexual orientation and identity, financial family background etc. are of importance for addressing girls? What to do in youth work with boys or girls that are not feeling as such? How are we contributing to constructing gender or to deconstructing gender as a social relationship? (Gildemeister, 2004). At the same time, feminist youth work is not an individualistic approach but aims at collectivising experiences of daily life: girls shall feel safe in a collective space where their experiences are embedded in and become politicised (Autor\_innengruppe, 2014: 252). Practices of feminist youth work must permanently reflect on the dialectics of being subject to oppressive structures of gender inequality and the way we are reproducing them in daily practice. This means to listen carefully to a range of experiences and reflect upon the discursive nature of these experiences. Though it is necessary taking seriously daily experiences and bothering about them you are trapped in your limit-situations when you do not succeed in reaching beyond the 'daily' and 'local'.

#### **5.4 The added-value of girls-only spaces**

It is crucial to accompany girls in transition processes in all possible spheres of life – work, leisure, family, friendship, education, sexuality - trying to create free spaces and to amplify the girls' scope of action, facilitating "identity building" and transgressing gender roles (Bitzan, 2010; Batsleer, 2013). The teenage period is a critical period of gender identity formation. Therefore, adequate space and methods for searching and trying out are needed, for "doing gender" and for reflecting the body as a central battlefield of gender norms.

A very common policy to address girls and their particular interests and needs is to offer specific time slots exclusively for girls in youth centres as well as girls-only spaces (BWJF, 2011: 418) which are sometimes open to young mothers or women with small children too (as women are still mainly in charge of child care). All youth centres in Simmering (and throughout Vienna) offer at least one specific time slot per week exclusively for girls.

Our research showed how girls are using and that girls are appreciating a space that they can occupy for themselves. The girls' garden is an example for such a space. It offers experiences of doing and behaving that are more difficult or impossible to accomplish in mixed settings. It is a place to act and to try out bodily experiences without reference to boys and with less hetero normative pressure. Since it is a garden, girls are not only away from home and its social control but also outside in a safe and semi-public space. We emphasised in this report the importance of young people's contribution going beyond their opinion and including their involvement into the concrete implementation of ideas. The girls' garden is a place where meaningful contributions can happen. Girls together with youth workers and other (female) visitors use the "material" in terms of "nature" and tools

this place is offering. They are trying out what is seemingly not possible in other (public) or private (family) spaces, moving from capabilities to functionings in gardening and building/constructing, climbing, showing and moving their bodies – and doing graffiti in a public space as was the focus of our participatory action research.

## **5.5 Arts-based practices and empowerment of girls**

Feminist youth work aims at enhancing girls' presence and symbolism in youth and youth work and in the society as a whole (in public space, in language, etc.). Arts-based experiments such as graffiti have the power to strengthen the transformative character of participation in girls-only settings. How do girls' ideas and voices in the context of street-art emerge, become visible and find their spots?

On the one hand, we motivated voices through artistic practice “of the moment, belonging to a pedagogy of the here-and-now” (Batsleer, 2011: 428). New ideas and finally whole oeuvres emerged through this artistic process starting from a self-perception of many girls not being capable of drawing. The practice of street-art involved a commitment to risk-taking with respect to ideas, fantasies, and oneself becoming visible, public and subject to deliberation when performing in public space. This – we would argue – is a breaking through limit situations in the sense of Freire (2009[1970]) and a feminist practice of turning private issues (the restricted space appropriation of girls) into public ones.

On the other hand, the practice of street-art is a commitment to visibility and to symbolisation in public space. It involves also a commitment to public scrutiny and debate. Girls' spaces and girls-only gangs/groups in public space become symbolised as a political issue and become subject to social deliberation. Moreover, it is a public performance with respect to the symbols staying on the wall such as “Mädchengarten” or their names. It confronts and perhaps provokes the public with political issues such as the existence and symbolisation of girls' groups and girls' space as well as with an offensive claim for girls' appreciation and symbolic visibility in public space. This means limit-situations in terms of constrained and contested (public) space become visible and get public attention. At the same time, a careful balancing between publicity and the commitment to the principle of providing a safe, enclosed and targeted space for girls must be borne in mind and the tension between these two poles discussed.

## **5.6 The imperative of participation**

Engaging young people in participatory processes can be quite a challenge as, especially adolescents, tend to act very spontaneously and are difficult to hold in long- or even mid-term processes. Youth centres and youth workers themselves can find themselves in a difficult situation between supporting the young people, giving them a voice and passing their ideas and wishes on to a “higher level” (as district administration etc.) on the one side and accomplishing a specific task, such as redesigning a park or skate ramp, on the other side. Therefore, the “task” potentially constrains the openness of the process. In addition, the youth workers have to come up with a “result” in order to show that they succeeded in the participation process.

One of the main difficulties from the youth workers' point of view was to "activate" young people for formulating their interest and opinions. This movement from silence to speech is a crucial point – particularly for girls who seem to disappear at a certain age from particular (semi-) public spaces.

At the same time, young people perceive participation sometimes as an imperative they are exposed to in many aspects of their lives, for example at school. Therefore, from this perspective, a youth centre must also be a place for just hanging around without "participating in a project", without claims, without an obvious aim and a purpose than just "being".

## **6. Discussion and Conclusions**

### **6.1 Gender as a structural category for youth policies**

The necessity for gender-sensitive youth policies becomes obvious when we take gender as a structural category – for distributive injustice due to the class structure of society, for misrecognition due to status inequality, and for representative exclusion (Fraser, 2004, 2008) – pervading human relations among young people and between grown-ups and young women seriously.

Our case study showed the prevalence of gender-specific aspects of inequality, oppression and violence both in public and semi-public spaces and private spheres. Gender-specific inequality and difference exists in the use of space and concerning the appropriation of public and semi-public spaces. Boys frequent youth centres as semi-public and low-threshold places more often than girls. Hence, girls and boys use and need different offers of support and leisure activities provided by (open) youth work and support in conquering public space and critically coping with gender norms.

With respect to educational trajectories, girls more often than boys opt for higher education, however the Austrian "flagship" against youth unemployment, i.e. apprenticeship training, comes along with a strong gender bias. Male youths are overrepresented in apprenticeships, which lead to well-paid and stable jobs. In contrast, young women are concentrated in a small number of not very promising apprenticeships in the service sector.

Youth policy in general is a much disrupted policy field where coherent strategies are lacking. Many measures on federal and provincial level for disadvantaged youth focus on educational and employment issues following a rather employability oriented approach offering little scope for young people's voice and choice. They work as thoroughly structured systems, with little room for manoeuvre to develop self-determined and freely chosen capabilities (Haidinger/Kasper, 2012). To better grasp young people's voices and aspirations, this research switched and focused on a stronger subject-oriented policy field, i.e. youth work.

## 6.2 Gender- sensitive youth work: a political issue

Gender-sensitive girls' work is a youth work response to inequality and difference among young people stemming (not only) from the category gender. It is a kind of policy being fed by an informational basis for the judgement of justice that takes serious persistent inequalities among girls and boys and consequently between men and women and recognises gender as a major reference point for policy intervention. The emancipation from limit-situations that are the vessels constraining one's room for manoeuvre and not the adaptation of one's life course to them is the big challenge of this kind of policy.

However, policy priorities in youth work make explicitly feminist youth work harder. Janet Batsleer (2013: 30-31) assesses for the UK that youth work initiatives rooted in social justice struggles in the 1980s. Professionalisation and changing policy priorities moved focuses towards more competence based learning and labour market orientation and "case management". Recognition of gender in policy programmes and initiatives nowadays often only goes along with the adaptation to the prevailing norms and structures (that is a men's world); and the recognition of subjective differences only comes along with individualisation. Specific life situations are here within interpreted as choice of one's own or in negative terms as self-blamed and not as being part of societal constellation, that structurally disadvantages particular groups of young people. Although gender-specific youth work must encompass working with girls and boys, "only" spaces and initiatives must follow principles of anti-sexism as a legacy of feminist youth work. Girls-only activities must not be discredited by equally demanding boys-only spaces on the ground of "equal opportunities". Structural deficits of youth work as social work are to be met by dedicating resources to less powerful groups.

Youth work with girls and gender-sensitive youth work necessarily includes a politisation of youth work in at least three directions: First, a back-up of public policy for gender-specific / feminist /participatory youth work is crucial. It is not a separate "niche" subject of individually committed youth workers. It is a political decision, a contested field also on district level where resources are to be allotted or not.

Second, youth centres must follow a "true" commitment to enhance participatory parity between boys and girls. Time constraints and limited personnel resources jeopardise the involvement and thinking through of adequate practices on the one hand. On the other hand, the principle of gender-sensitive youth work is sometimes interpreted as a "must" or a duty that is anyway kept in mind. The simple assertion that gender-sensitive youth work is a principle is not enough. It must be implemented and lived in daily practice, in dedicated projects, in reflection processes, and in permanent dialogue with girls and boys.

Finally, work with girls and young women might be jeopardised to shift from an agenda concerned with challenging existing forms of power relations to an agenda essentially rooted in them, upholding difference and enhancing adaptive preferences. Therefore, gender-sensitive youth work must be based on the breaking-out of the position of women defined and categorised by their sex as persons and contributors of minor importance in society, work and politics.



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