



Final Report Access Study +.

Dissemination of the research results –
local, national, international.





The project was coordinated by:



Research and Practice in Dialogue - International Youth Work (RPD)

transfer e.V. coordinated the project as organising body of „Research and Practice in Dialogue - International Youth Work“.

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Introduction



International youth exchanges offer a wide range of learning and experience opportunities for young people. Encounters with youth from other countries open up new perspectives, develop young people's own skills and abilities, and the experience of working in a group can leave many important memories. A longer individual stay abroad can have many positive effects as well. There are some studies and evaluations that prove the effects of participation and also present them in the long term and with reference to further biographical development.¹ Youth workers for instance can easily think of anecdotes about the positive impact of a stay abroad on young people. The knowledge gained from practical experience also demonstrates the diverse potential effects. Many professionals who work in the field of international youth exchange have, for example, completed a voluntary service in their youth, participated in youth encounters in other European countries or in school exchanges, and thus have exchange experience themselves. Today, they put their heart and soul into shaping the diverse opportunities and formats so that the current youth generation can gain very similar experiences.

In times of increasing political conflicts, anti-democratic movements and restrictions on freedom of expression, it seems more important than ever that young people are given the opportunity to think outside the box, to experience diversity, and to develop their intercultural skills. Partnerships between civil society organisations and school partnerships across borders shape scopes of action for young people, which are to be understood as an important component of extracurricular youth work and school-based education. The impact of the pandemic also shows how resilient these relationships are. In a situation where physical exchange seems almost impossible, partnerships are maintained and new ways of working together are found. Together, digital formats could be implemented when the epidemiological situation made travel impossible. With regard to these developments, it can be confidently assumed that analog exchange formats will also be implemented again as soon as the general situation permits physical encounters.

However, the research project „Why not? Study on International Youth Exchange: Accesses and Barriers“ (Access Study) has shown that a large proportion of young people are still not being reached or are simply unaware of the opportunities to participate. Yet it was also found that young people are largely motivated and would like to participate. At the same time, the study shows that young people share certain assumptions about prerequisites for participating in international exchanges that are not true, but because of which they rule out in advance that they can participate in an exchange (meaning, for example, the assumption that one must be proficient in the language of the destination country in order to participate). The findings of the access study did not provide „easy“ answers about how those who have not participated so far might be reached in the future. Still, some points of connection for pedagogical practice became clear and should be discussed further. Against this background, the follow-up process of the „Access Study+“ was launched, funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Overall, both the research and the follow-up project provided important impulses for the further debate on access barriers to international youth exchange in Germany and the broader European context. The formulated goal is to enable every young person to have an experience abroad of some kind. The process of the access study has made it clear that this requires,

¹ See Thomas, Alexander; Chang, Celine; Abt, Heike (2007): *Erlebnisse, die verändern. Langzeitwirkungen der Teilnahme an internationalen Jugendbegegnungen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG.; See transfer e.V. (2016): *Abschlussbericht. Wirkungen internationaler Jugendarbeit im Bezug auf Offenheit und Mobilität im Kontext beruflicher Bildungswegänge*. **Download available here.**



among other things, changes in pedagogical practice, the design of exchange formats and, above all, in the structural framework of youth work. These aspects were discussed with professionals and scientific experts in Germany and abroad. This brochure presents the results of the follow-up project and brings together discussions at the interface between academia and practice as well as strategic approaches to implementing the findings. Especially for the post-pandemic redevelopment, these findings can be of great importance.



Stakeholders of the Project

Coordination

„Research and Practice in Dialogue“ (RPD) is a nationwide network that supports the interdisciplinary and interagency exchange between science and practice in the field of international youth work and child and youth travel since 1989. Current topics and needs for action are taken up and worked on through joint projects. The activities of the network make an important contribution to the technical and professional development of the fields of action. The network is coordinated by a team of transfer e.V. based in Cologne.

Research Partners

IKO – Institut für Kooperationsmanagement, Heike Abt



SINUS, Dr. Silke Borgstedt



Forschungsverbund Freizeitenevaluation, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Ilg



Forschungsschwerpunkt Nonformale Bildung, University of Applied Sciences Cologne, Zijad Naddaf, Prof. Dr. Andreas Thimmel



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Cooperation partners



Project Description of Access Study +

As part of the research project „Why not? Study on International Youth Exchange: Access and Barriers“ (Access Study), the proportion of young people participating in youth exchange and the reasons for non-participation were analysed between 2016 and 2018. The findings of the interdisciplinary and multi-method study are diverse, establish a clear link to youth policy in Germany, and highlight needs to consistently improve access. These include, for example, the structural strengthening of youth work and well-founded qualification measures for youth workers, teachers and other professionals in the field. In dealing with the findings, it became clear that the dismantling of access barriers to international youth exchange requires structural changes, but also a paradigm shift in funding policy and in youth-work organizations. Up to now, approaches have been pursued that focus on specific target groups but do not address fundamental problems. The latter lie in particular in reproduced assumptions about so called disadvantaged young people by funding institutions and international youth work organisations as well as only weakly equipped municipal youth work. Often, there is a lack of sufficient resources, especially on the local level, to realize high-quality and professional international activities. In addition, child and youth welfare in general and municipal youth work in particular do rarely have an international scope. Precisely this interaction leads to the fact that access barriers remain and even interested young people do not participate in the formats of international youth exchange.

Against the background of these findings, the follow-up project to the access study, called „Access Study +“ (October 2018 to February 2021), aimed to discuss the identified barriers both at national and international level with professionals and experts of international youth work and to develop local strategies for action.

In Germany, the discourse around the access study was thus strengthened. Institutions and experts of international youth work were given the opportunity to intensively deal with the findings and to transfer and apply them to their own practice. In this way, the scientific transfer into practice was ensured and changes could be made, which in the long run led to a larger percentage of young people participating in international activities. For this purpose, six symposia were held with organisations of international youth work at the municipal level in order to present and discuss the research findings in detail (see chapter 3). Following up on these events, pilot processes for strategy development emerged in cooperation with two of the involved organisations, which will continue after the completion of the project (see chapters 8-10).

At the international level, a great deal of interest in the methodology and findings of the access study has become apparent. The different initial responses to the barriers analysed in the Access Study call attention to the fact that the respective national policies and the diverse realities of young people's lives lead to different assessments of the findings. Since the research findings of the access study are directly related to the national situation and youth policy orientation in Germany, they should not be regarded as universally valid. The reference to the situation in individual countries is therefore relevant, especially since international youth exchange is always implemented with a foreign partner and many funding programs are also based at the European level.

For these reasons, four conferences were held, which brought together representatives from academia, practice and administration to discuss access issues in the respective countries and to clarify common ground, but also differences and contradictions to the findings. The aim was to advance an international comparative analysis and to obtain important suggestions for the practice of international youth work from the perspective of partner countries (see chapter 4).



Ultimately, the implementation of the Access Study + project was about bringing the findings of the research closer to professionals at both national and international levels and establishing links to their own practice and the respective youth policy contexts. In this way, the project contributed to a policy and paradigm shift in youth work and international youth work, leading to a strengthening of both and ensuring that more young people can participate in measures of international youth exchange.





Summary of the Regional Conferences

From March 2019 to January 2020, the coordinating team of the RPD network, in cooperation with the Forschungsschwerpunkt Nonformale Bildung of the University of Applied Sciences Cologne and the research partners of the Access Study, held six national events as part of the follow-up project. The conferences pursued the goal of stimulating exchange on a local and national level in order to enable more young people to participate in international youth exchange formats in the long term.

At national conferences, the findings of the access study were presented and adapted to the specific situation and local structures. The organisation and implementation of the events took place in cooperation with a local partner:

- 28.03.2019: Halle/Saale (GOEUROPE! and JugendSozialwerk Nordhausen e.V.)
- 15.05.2019: Nuremberg (Bavarian Youth Council)
- 19.06.2019: Hanover (Lower Saxony Youth Office)
- 18.09.2019: Düsseldorf (aktuelles forum e.V.)
- 20.11.2019: Schwerin (Ministry of Social Affairs, Integration and Equality of the State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Youth Council Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)
- 22.11.2019: Stuttgart (Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg)

Two research partners, who were involved in the access study, accompanied a team from transfer e.V. to each of the events and presented the study design and key findings as experts from the scientific community.

The presentation of the access study was followed by diverse and intensive discussions about partial findings. In Hanover, for example, there was a particularly lively debate about the political implementation of youth exchange at the municipal and state level, while in Halle the focus was on comparing the studies with findings from other research. Afterwards, the second half of the event focused more on the local context of the participants. In mostly two working groups, the participants focused on certain study findings and contributed their practical experiences, needs and ideas. Special attention was paid to the individual obstacles young people face in taking part in youth exchanges. In vivid conversations, the participants explored what challenges, fears and anxieties they perceive when working with young people and how they can best be supported to overcome those. In addition to the individual ones, the structural obstacles that youth work itself faces, the experiences of the participants and the need for change in local practice were also considered. The discussion was guided by the question which structures are essential for successful and accessible international youth work and what is needed to establish them. In a final brainstorming session, the most important findings from the respective groups were presented and related to each other in order to finally shed light on the perspective development of the field.

Thanks to the close cooperation with local partners, it was possible to build on the discussions of the events, analyse region-specific needs and, in a next step, develop a targeted concept relevant to the context in selected communities. The close cooperation ensures that the respective local practice is reached in these follow-up processes and that the structural implementation of international youth work is taken into account.



Simone Pleyer, Lower Saxony Youth Office:

„The symposium on the access study+ was a successful exchange between research results and practical international youth work. Various actors in Lower Saxony have networked and can now benefit from the synergy effects. International youth work has thus been strengthened in Lower Saxony.

Many thanks to the team of transfer e.V. for the successful cooperation!“

Karolina Hajjar, aktuelles forum e.V.:

„The symposium of the access study+ in Düsseldorf was a very informative event with the possibility not only to hear the results of the access study bundled, but to deal with them in depth for one day. It was exciting to deal with barriers of international youth work from different perspectives and the resulting challenges and approaches for practice. To get into a targeted exchange with professionals and to share the experiences was a great added value of this event.

Thank you very much for the good cooperation!“

Wolfgang Antes, Jugendstiftung Baden-Württemberg:

“The expert conference in Baden-Württemberg was well attended with about 40 people and largely represented the structure of international youth work in BW with representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the city and district youth departments, the city and district youth rings as well as individual agencies of international youth education.

The central finding was that young people need easy „low-threshold“ access to information that is suitable for them. They should get to know the possibilities of international youth work at an „early age“ and know how to approach their „leap abroad“. This has strengthened the importance of mentoring programs such as Youth Abroad Advisors (Jugendaustauschberater:innen) or Wanderlust Pilots (Fernwehlots:innen). In particular, the „JAB-vor Ort“ seminars are important so that young people of all school types and regardless of their background or social class can get in touch with the topic.

The second key finding is the need to increase the number of suitable multipliers in the field of youth work itself. It is particularly gratifying that in 2019, for the first time in BW, the Working Group on International Youth Work was formed, which has since adopted rules of procedure and meets twice a year as a networking structure.“

Scientific Analysis of the Regional Conferences

Zijad Naddaf, University of Applied Sciences Cologne

At the regional conferences, representatives from practice, politics and administration had lively discussions about the access study and thus contributed to the further development of the findings. Zijad Naddaf (University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Forschungsschwerpunkt Nonformale Bildung) accompanied all national events from a professional-scientific perspective in order to secure the knowledge gained. The discussions at the events were recorded, systematised in respect of content and evaluated in the sense of analysing and reflecting on the events.

The expert discussions were designed as group discussions and conducted along the following questions: „What do you think about the findings of the access study? What is needed to strengthen international youth work? What concrete contributions can you make?“

Three central themes could be extracted from the evaluation of the discussions. These are: Financing and organizational effort, cooperation between schools and youth work, formats and interests of young people.

From structural dilemma to strategic youth policy development

As has been shown, the discussions at the regionally and state-specifically organised events refer in many places to the areas also problematised in the access study. Thus, they constitute a confirmation of a structural dilemma of international youth work in Germany as demonstrated in the access study. The structural dilemma of international youth work consists on the one hand in a lack of financing for local youth on municipal and regional level. On the other hand, the dilemma is also evident at a discursive level, i.e. in the discussions about the (lack of) recognition of international youth work, its exclusive positioning as a luxury activity in youth welfare and in addressing certain target groups as disadvantaged. This means that target groups who do not participate in international activities yet are marked as disadvantaged and thus a disadvantage theme is established, instead of structural barriers.

The access study calls for a paradigm shift, which basically and generally speaking consists in a conceptual mental shift away from the individual and towards the structure - or in other words: a change of perspective from biography to conditions. Thus, it is about nothing less than shifting the focus from an individual (and attributive) level to the conditions and possibilities of international youth work, which is oriented, for example, on the basic principles of a subject-oriented youth work. Accordingly, the goal cannot be to improve the adaptation of young people to the existing conditions and circumstances, but to develop a youth policy strategy that takes into account and encompasses all levels.



Thinking about international youth work from a youth (work) perspective will thus probably only be possible if structures of (municipal and local) youth work improve. Because if international encounters should become possible for all young people, above all a strong youth work architecture on municipal level is needed. In this context, Andreas Thimmel (2019) formulates: „Program lines that claim to address not only upper- and middle-class members, but also to create offers for less privileged youth, depend on the cooperation with municipal or local youth work and youth education structures“ (ibid.: 210). However, instead of considering international, group-based activities as a complementary component of youth work, international youth work still appears „as a hermetic-exclusive field,“ as Helle Becker (2019: 207) has described it.

Due to the exclusive position of international youth work, structural barriers to access are constantly reproduced. „This includes the (false) assumption that certain young people are not interested in international youth work“ (ibid). This is because the results of access study clearly show that young people are interested in international encounters across milieus and that reasons for obstacles are as specific and heterogeneous as life plans.

The structural dilemma of international youth work, which was also reflected in the discussions of the expert events, therefore requires a new way of thinking, which brings together practice, politics and administration and is accompanied by scientific research. A youth policy strategy that addresses the framework conditions should take the following points into consideration.



Funding and organisational effort

1. In what way can existing financing flows (also with regard to funding by the EU, federal government, state, local authorities and foundations) be meaningfully revised and rethought?
2. In which way is a financial, personnel and conceptual strengthening of the local level of youth work, i.e. also youth associations, municipal youth work, youth initiatives, etc., to be realized with regard to the international?
3. Which support and funding possibilities can be developed to realise a structural and not project-related funding for a strategy on internationalizing youth work on a local and municipal level?

Cooperation between schools and youth work

1. In what way can meaningful and partnership-based cooperation between schools and international youth work be strengthened?
2. Considering the question of the recognition of international youth work, it should be taken into account that international youth work, according to its self-understanding, has to establish itself independently in accordance to youth work principles and cannot be oriented towards a formal education context. In which way can cooperation in this sense be realised and which activities or processes have to be stimulated on a structural level in order to make this form of partnership possible?
3. In which way can smart cooperation and meaningful intersections be designed while respecting the functional distinction between school and youth work?

Formats and interests of young people

1. In view of the paradigm shift, which involves a change of perspective from the individual to the structure, it can be asked whether the established format strategy, to which a funding commitment is usually tied, needs a conceptual revision.
2. In view of the problems of alignment between existing formats and the specific circumstances of young people, the question arises as to how currently dominant exchange formats (which are oriented toward foreign and cultural policy) can be usefully supplemented and enriched by formats legitimised by pedagogical motives or interests of young people.

Summing up the mentioned aspects, it becomes clear that the demanded paradigm shift of thinking about international youth work from a youth (work) perspective can only be realised if it starts on the youth policy level. The structural dilemma of international youth work requires above all a strategic youth-political development. If the shift from the individual to the structure is to take place, this means to renegotiate the conditions and the framework of possibilities of the practice of international youth work - this can only take place with the participation of all relevant stakeholders and of course only in cooperation with young people.

Summary of the International Symposia

In parallel to the six conferences held in Germany, which aimed to disseminate the findings and to discuss their implications for the practice in Germany, international dialogue was initiated as well. In collaboration with different organisations from four European countries, four events were held from May 2019 to January 2020 to exchange views from a comparative perspective on international youth work and the current state of research in the respective countries. Another objective was to discuss the findings in terms of their potential transnational relevance. Due to this opportunity the research could be extended to include a European perspective.

The conferences took place in cooperation with the following partners:

- 17.05.2019: Warsaw, Poland (German-Polish Youth Office - GPYO)
- 27.06.2019: Paris, France (German-French Youth Office - OFAJ, Comité pur les relations nationales et internationales des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation Populaire - CNAJEP)
- 17.-18.10.2019: Shengjin, Albania (Regional Youth Cooperation Office - RYCO)
- 20.-21.01.2020: Virrat, Finland (Marttinen Youth Centre)

The four events took different forms as they were specifically planned on the national contexts and the interests of the partner organisations. Common to the conferences was that the structures of international youth work in the partner country were discussed and relevant research was presented and connected with the findings of the German research. The following discussions were dedicated to the questions, how similar or different the national discourses on (international) youth work are and how local practice is related to the different structural conditions.

The discourse in Warsaw, which was jointly organized with the GPYO, focused primarily on bilateral topics, such as the question of suitable formats and the relevance of peer-to-peer approaches. Also topics as the difficulty of convincing parents and school administration of the positive effects of youth exchanges, as well as the question of how funding structures, applications, and program offers can be more transparent and accessible for professionals were discussed.

In France, a similar research was conducted already in 2015 that focused on barriers to international mobility and followed a similar scientific approach. Based on the findings of the national research, the region of Ile-de-France established a platform on counselling and information to mobility to train youth workers and provide general information as well as individual support and advice for young people. This follow-up measure was discussed at the conference in Paris with regard to its applicability and potential benefits in the German context. Special attention was paid to the need for networks of experts in international youth work, which was seen as a prerequisite for successful and sustainable youth exchange in both national and international contexts.



The event in Shengjin was organized in cooperation with the Albanian office of RYCO and therefore focused not only on International Youth Work in Albania, but in all countries of the Western Balkans (WB6), which includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Following the presentation of the access study, two main topics were discussed: First, participants emphasised that a new narrative about international youth work could help increase acceptance of the field of work and, most importantly, convince parents to support their children in participating in exchanges. In this context, the positive benefits of international youth work for local communities, for example through alumni work, were highlighted. The second part of discussion centered around the finding that formats should be more oriented towards the livelihoods of young people. In this context, a project of RPD which aims on the development of new formats through youth participation was discussed under the light of a suitable approach for the WB6.

The conference in Virrat, differed from the other professional events in the sense that young people participated. They contributed their perspectives and wishes regarding international youth work to the discussion. Some of them already had participated in youth exchanges before, others did not have the chance yet. Regarding barriers and worries of young people, the fear of failing in the context of an exchange was frequently expressed - a fear that was not formulated by the interviewed sample of the access study. On a structural level, researchers and professionals reiterated the study's finding about international youth work being seen as a „luxury activity“ which would be the case in the Finnish context as well. In addition, specific structural realities and bureaucratic obstacles that impede or even completely prevent some exchanges in Finland were a subject to discussion.





The relevance of the access study for the international context was also shown by the integration of the findings into further events hosted by the cooperation partners: In both France and Poland, the findings of the access study were presented and discussed at national events, such as the 64th Annual Congress of the Vereinigung Deutsch-Französischer Gesellschaften and the Fédération des Associations Franco-Allemandes pour l'Europe. Since the access study met with a positive response and great interest, especially in the French context, RPD translated the access study brochure into French in cooperation with OFAJ. The translation is seen as a further impetus to continue and intensify the debate on access barriers in France. Another brochure is available in English.

In addition, the international events also had an impact on other cooperation processes, for example in relation to the European Platform on Learning Mobility (EPLM). Moreover, a specific event took place with TANDEM, the coordination center for German-Czech youth exchange. In future the cooperation with international partners should be extended in order to jointly benefit from synergy effects.

Kreshnik Loka, RYCO:

„RYCO is a regional mechanism contributing to regional mobility projects since mid 2017. One of the pillar values of our work is to provide equal opportunity to young people to take part in regional exchange programs. Therefore, the symposium was a very relevant experience to RYCO and its partners to exchange practices on how to maximize accessibility of youth in learning mobility projects. RYCO benefited from the discussions organized during the event especially when various youth actors elaborated on the main challenges that are limiting young people to take part in such initiatives. Moreover the presentation of different research and surveys on youth participation and non participation in mobility projects during the symposium was a great methodology that we see possible to replicate in the region.“

Pilot processes in the context of Access Study +

Pilot processes were also initiated with two cooperation partners: Jugendsozialwerk Nordhausen and Youth Council Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

Starting in 2021, a two-year study on international youth work in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania will be conducted based on the national findings. The study will analyze specific obstacles to the establishment and implementation of international programs in the region, identify the needs of young people and organisations, and derive beneficial conditions at the structural level. The study is being carried out in cooperation with Forschungsschwerpunkt Nonformale Bildung at University of applied Sciences Cologne and Dr. Helle Becker, „Expertise & Kommunikation für Bildung“ and “Transferstelle politische Bildung”.

Furthermore, RPD accompanies the development of quality criteria for measures of international youth work in Thuringia from January 2019 to December 2021, which are developed by a working group consisting of different experts of international youth work, representatives of state associations, municipalities and the Thuringian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The objective is to approve these quality criteria and implement them in the upcoming framework for the regional budget of youth work.





Development of Quality Criteria of International Youth Work for the Thuringian Youth Promotion Plan 2021

Ines Gast, Jugendsozialwerk Nordhausen e.V.

Background of the project

„In order to take the importance of international youth work into account [...] in Thuringia, [youth policies] formulate the development and implementation of quality standards for successful international youth work as a framework and action concept.“

This need is formulated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Free State of Thuringia, a federal state in the middle of Germany, within The policy framework for youth promotion (2017 to 2021). Though it can be directly linked to the conclusions of access study.

In March 2019, the task of developing these quality standards was transferred to the working group "International Youth Work". Shortly after, a sub-working group (UAG) was created, which was established especially for the development of these standards. The group consisted of experts of international youth work and representatives of state associations, municipalities and the Thuringian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The UAG ultimately decided to develop quality criteria that would primarily serve as professional orientation and support for practitioners rather than as a basis for funding decisions.

Description of the process

The idea of a collaborative follow-up process to formulate quality criteria emerged after the conference in Halle which took place in spring 2019. In September 2019, the UAG agreed and since then a team of RPD support the process though organising, facilitating and recording meetings, coordinating the development of the quality criteria and bringing in additional expertise from the RPD network.

In order to build on knowledge that already exists in the field of international youth work in the development of the criteria, a document study was conducted as a first step to identify helpful literature for this process. Finally, the document „Quality Criteria and Indicators for International Youth Work“ published by IJAB e.V. in 2004 served as a basis for the development of the quality criteria for the Thuringian context.² In seven meetings of the UAG so far, the contents were compiled, discussed and adapted to the regional context, so that quality criteria and indicators could be formulated. The goal is to present the final document in June 2021.

² See IJAB e.V. (Hrsg.) (2004), Qualitätskriterien und Indikatoren für die internationale Jugendarbeit.

Download available here.



Concept and structure of the criteria

The final document is to be understood as a professional orientation for local youth work organisations, which are already active in the field of international youth work or want to be in future. The criteria are supplemented by indicators, which propose measures and options for action to fulfill the quality criteria. Moreover concrete examples, hints and recommendations from practice, serve as additional support for youth workers who have no experience with international youth encounters so far.

Goals and perspectives

In the long run, the final document should contribute to reflect and improve the quality of international projects without discouraging or overwhelm inexperienced professionals or volunteers by being too demanding. With regard to the structural level, the development of quality criteria leads to an increased visibility of the field and to a strengthening of international youth work in Thuringia. Especially in the light of the findings of access study, the strengthening of international youth work on a local level is a central step to dismantle structural barriers and to enable more young people to participate in youth exchanges.

This process is so far unique and can therefore be considered as a pilot. The application of the Thuringian example to other states seems possible while adapting to the respective regional contexts. RPD and all involved stakeholders are willing to contribute to future follow-up steps.

Study on International Youth Work in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Rheinhold Uhlmann, Youth Council Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

A total of 22 people participated in the conference in Schwerin, which took place in November 2019 in cooperation with the Youth Council of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (LJR M-V) and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Integration and Equality of the State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. On this day in particular, the need to discuss and deal with the findings of the access study at the regional level was underlined very vividly. On the one hand, the group of participants illustrated the diversity of the institutional landscape in the federal state, and on the other hand, specifics of the financing and structure of youth work became apparent. For these reasons, the involved organisations decided to continue the cooperation in order to consider the strengthening of international youth work in the state.

First, the exact objectives were defined in consultations with the participating research partners Prof. Dr. Andreas Thimmel and Dr. Helle Becker. It was pointed out that additional knowledge about youth work in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania is needed in order to develop strategies that help to reach more young people and provide better access. For this reason, a regional study was initiated, which focusses on organisations and professionals. The aim is to identify the needs of local practitioners, to understand them better and to reflect supportive framework conditions. The research project is being financed in large part by the Ministry for Social Affairs, Integration and Equality of the State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

The follow-up project comprises several research steps that had not yet been fully implemented at the time of this publication. Starting with a desk research, structures of youth work are to be identified especially those who already carry out exchange formats. Thereby, already known actors will be listed, but also hardly known institutions will be identified. As a second step, selected experts of international youth exchange from the federal state will be interviewed in order to gain a better understanding of the structures, existing cooperations and specifics of the local pedagogical practice. On this basis, hypotheses for further analysis will be developed. The focus of interest lies on the obstacles that prevent practitioners from organising exchange formats and on the barriers that impede a sustainable implementation. In a third step, these hypotheses will be tested with the help of an online survey, so that reliable statements can be made about the needs of professionals and perspectives for the expansion of exchange formats.

The collected findings can ideally serve as a basis for argumentation for strengthening youth work in general and for beneficial conditions and structures for international youth exchange in particular. The LJR M-V will lobby for a strengthening of international youth work in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania according to the findings. In addition, the insights will also influence how the LJR M-V supports international youth work in practical terms. Embedded in a close cooperation with the ministry, the findings can also influence the design of funding and support and thus contribute to improved access opportunities for young people in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in the long term.



Five Years Access Study and Access Study + – Conclusion and Perspectives

More than five years have passed since the project began in January 2016. Five years in which documents were analysed, interviews were held and questionnaires were collected, in which the research findings have been summarised in a wide range of articles, presented at numerous events and on other occasions, and discussed with practitioners, researchers and decision-makers. In short, the access study has accompanied us intensively for a long time. The conclusion of the project „Access Study +“ marks a provisional end to this interesting and inspirational episode. Although we will continue to deal with the conclusions of the Access Study in different contexts, we would like to take this moment to pause and say thank you.

In past years, through the analysis of framework conditions and the exchange with experts and young people, knowledge has been generated that reveals complex issues and is highly relevant for international youth exchange. In the discussion with practitioners, these findings have met confirmation, but also irritation, and ultimately have stimulated a necessary discourse on the structures of youth and educational work as well as the conditions for funding, which directs the view from the young people to structural conditions. The engagement with the access study has given the impulse for this shift, which has to be continued in future and to be lined with strategic approaches. This task has to be tackled at the national stage and needs to be accompanied and complemented by processes at the European level.

The findings of the access study provide important starting points that need to be addressed. What the discussions about cross-milieu motivation, organizational barriers, anticipated qualification questions by professionals and individual obstacles on the part of young people mean for practice and its structural conditions has been discussed in various publications, that are partly available in English and French or Polish.

- The brochure “Access Study on international youth exchange. Results of the research project” sums up the main findings and contains resonances from the projects advisory board. The brochure is available in German, English and French.
- An overview of the research design, key findings and conclusions is provided in the factsheet „Why not? Study on International Youth Exchange: Accesses and Barriers. Key Findings of the Research Project“. The factsheet is available in Polish, English and German.

The brochures and factsheet are available for download at www.zugangsstudie.de.

The follow-up project Access Study+ has enabled the RPD network to continue the important dialogue between research and practice after the end of the research process at a total of ten expert conferences.

The findings of the scientific analysis show that the knowledge about the challenges of the field was not only disseminated through the process, but also reviewed and expanded at various levels of discourse. The continuation of the processes in Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, but also current developments beyond the Access Study + stand in connection to the research findings and are dedicated to the objective of winning more young people for international exchange and consequently improving opportunities for access. Whether at the level of professional qualification, though the redesign and reorganisation of formats of international youth exchange or the strengthening of youth work as a whole - numerous processes were initiated that generate change at the political level. To summarise, the Access Study +



has made international youth exchange more visible to policymakers and practitioners as an important and highly attractive field of youth work. We would like to thank a large number of partners from practice, science and politics for their important contribution.

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„Research and Practice in Dialogue“ (RPD)

Since its foundation in 1989, Research and Practice in Dialogue (RPD) has contributed significantly to research activities regarding trends and future perspectives of international youth work. Research and Practice in Dialogue encompasses interdisciplinary and cross-organisational exchange between academia and practice in the field of international youth work.

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