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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the definition of "young people" and asserts there is no clear-cut social description of this group with societal expectations differing from culture to culture. The article analyzes the changes affecting the lives of "youth" in Germany and assesses their social attitudes and values. The contents include seven sections: (1) "'Young People in 1995'--Who Are They, What Sets Them Apart?"; (2) "Young People and Drugs"; (3) "Young People and Violence"; (4) "Young People and Unemployment"; (5) "Youth Assistance"; (6) "The Majority: Optimistic, Open and Active"; and (7) "Would You Like to Know More? (Suggested Reading)." (EH)

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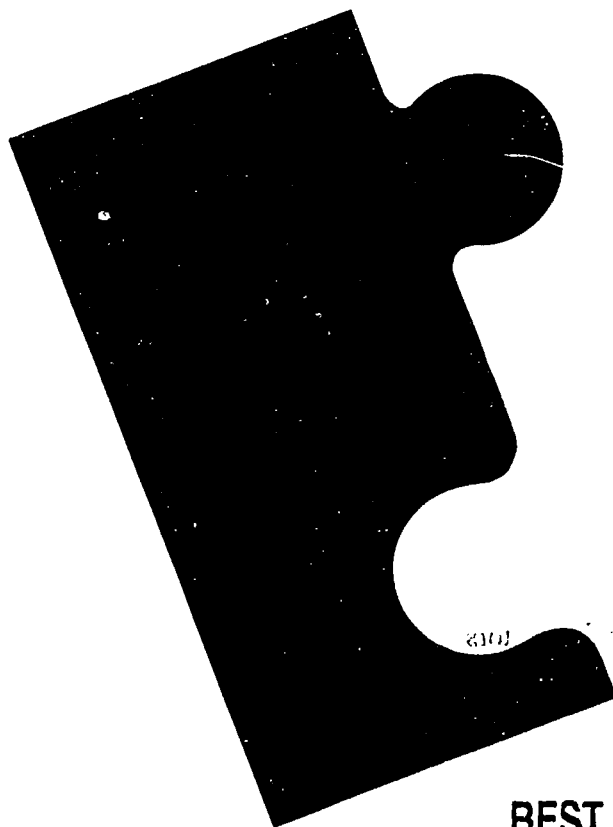
SEARCHING FOR THEIR OWN IDENTITY

Young people in Germany

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"Young people in 1995" - who are they, what sets them apart?

"Tekkno is a multicultural philosophy of life. We stop violence and fights taking place. We party with rich kids, pinkos, gays, Turks and Russians. Love, peace and happiness - that's what we want for everyone."

What Patrick (21), a fan of a new type of music, is expressing, is a joie de vivre and an unmistakable preparedness to tolerate and live together in peace: facets of an attitude to life he shares with many others of his age. However, defining something that is specific or typical of "young people" is no easy matter. When it comes to young people, the less-young frequently tend to exaggerate. Often, statements like the one cited above will give a better insight into the world of those who make them.

Traditionally, "youth" is considered to be the period of transition between childhood and approaching maturity. It thus refers to a phase in life. In Germany, the term applies to over 15 million people in a wide variety of situations. All the academic literature agrees that there is no one concept of "young people", and that in fact there is no other group in society with so many different situations, life styles and plans as that aged between 14 and 27.

With its new media and possibilities of global communications, the western consumer and leisure society has generated an expressive and colourful diversity of young styles and movements. "Autonomous groups", eco-freaks, graffiti artists, hooligans, oldies, psychos, punks, ravers, rockers, skaters, skinheads, and teds are just symbols of a highly graduated range of trends. The number of these eye-catching movements has increased rapidly since the 1950s, but those who actually take an active part in defining their styles are in a minority. Quite simply, it is impossible to categorise the majority.

The changes in the length of schooling, the growth of leisure opportunities and cultural life styles, the fact that people do not start a proper job or marry until later have lengthened the phase of youth, and since the 1950s it has increasingly become a time of finding and testing out one's identity. At the same time, it is a phase burdened with problems. Many young people have difficulties in coping with growing problems of orientation and an all-pervading shift in values. Many young people now have more scope for decision-making, but also more pressure to take those decisions.

The old values and attitudes, which were traditionally Christian and thus relatively homogenous, have been replaced by an individualisation and pluralisation of life styles and leisure styles. Youth culture today is increasingly oriented towards self-realisation. For example, attitudes towards work are no longer marked just by a wish to earn money: there is a growing demand for work that makes sense and offers decent conditions. Leisure and friends are considered important by over 90 per cent of young people.

As a result, leisure goods, fashions and facilities are very important to young people. Children and young people are being targeted increasingly aggressively by the leisure industry and its advertisements. This makes it more and more difficult for them to find and develop their own identity. They are being ever more rapidly presented with new life styles and short-lived fashions as models to live by. And the new media are also exerting an increasing influence on leisure activities. Music-based TV channels, video and computer games are very popular with young people. It has become almost natural for children to grow up with computers. The personal benefit drawn by young people in particular from using these media is primarily related to their "work on their own self-image". The broad spectrum of media availability enables young people, who frequently lack a critical perspective, to choose things that suit their tastes and current interests, as well as helping them to become detached and form their own identity.

When it comes to "working on their own self-image", things are certainly hardest for the almost two million foreign young people in Germany. They originate from almost 20 different countries. The largest groups are Turks (32 per cent) and young people from former Yugoslavia (17 per cent). Over 60 per cent of the foreigners aged between 10 and 16 were born in Germany. The Federal Youth Plan contains various programmes and measures to assist young foreigners. The Federal Government and those involved in vocational training also make considerable personal and financial efforts to promote vocational training for young foreigners. In the publication entitled "Situation of young people in Germany" (from 1994), produced by the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth, their situation is described as follows: "Many of them only know the country their parents come from from holidays, and some speak German better than their parents' native language. However, this does not mean that they have a problem-free life in Germany. Often, they are discriminated against due to their appearance or nationality. (...) Without rejecting or even despising the traditions and cultural influences of their parents, many young people

would like to share the freedoms enjoyed by Germans of the same age. The attempt to realise this and to achieve a compromise between their own interests, those of their parents and those of German society make it clear how great the demands of integration made of young foreigners are."

The growing readiness of both foreign and German young people to form cliques with their contemporaries (68 per cent in the west, 31 per cent in the east of Germany) confirms a desire to have a social sphere outside the adult world in which experience can be shared and needs can be discussed. On the other hand, fewer and fewer young people are prepared to join traditional organisations; they reject integration into communities other than their own clique. Churches, political parties, associations and trade unions are greatly affected by this development, which is also occurring in other age groups. At the same time, the young generation is increasingly alienated from established politics. For example, 51 per cent of young people today do not find it likely that the politicians are tackling the challenges and threats of the future properly. Only 16 per cent feel that the politicians can solve the problems.

However, this lack of confidence in professional politicians is not accompanied by a fundamental disillusionment with politics. "Today's youth" is anything but apolitical. In the "Shell study" of 1992, more than 75 per cent of the young people asked said that they wished to use their vote in elections; 89 per cent would sign petitions, 80 per cent would take part in referendums, and 75 per cent would participate in demonstrations. Non-governmental organisations like "Greenpeace" and "amnesty international" are very popular amongst the young. According to a survey conducted in 1995 by the Ipos-Institut, 30 per cent in western and 39 per cent in eastern Germany are hardly or not at all interested in politics.

Various studies show that younger people are clearly more critical and more upset about the global destruction of the environment than older people. Young people are very knowledgeable about environmental protection and nature conservation, and safeguarding and preserving natural resources is a high priority for them. In the "Shell study", 77 per cent of the young people surveyed described themselves as environmentalists or thought that "that sort of person is quite good".

Young people do not understand why the leading industrial countries do not provide more development aid for poor countries. They ask what the sense of war and destruction is and why there is an apparent inability to do anything against it. They fear the risks of nuclear power. They are honest and sensitive observers. They are very quick to sense whether their concerns are really being taken seriously. They do not want to have areas of life allocated to them by adults, but to decide and shape things themselves. It is all too understandable that they then have difficulty in finding their way in an over-complex world. And when they get the impression that they are constantly being spoon-fed and told what to do, they rebel.

Young people and drugs

The vast majority of young people are not interested in drugs. Surveys by the Federal Centre for Health Education show that most of them today are more critical of narcotics than was the case 10 or 15 years ago. Alcohol consumption and the number of deaths from drugs have been decreasing amongst 25-year-olds for some years now. 50 per cent strictly reject smoking. The 2000 deaths (frequently of young people) from drug taking each year compare with 40,000 (mostly adult) alcohol-related deaths and an estimated 800,000 to 1.4 million people addicted to medication in Germany; these figures speak for themselves.

Most of the young people who take an illegal drug on some occasion, usually out of curiosity, soon decide to stop again by themselves. Only a very small proportion of those trying cannabis move on to heroin and thus to inevitable addiction.

However, some young people do wish to escape the harsh realities and remain interested in drugs over a longer period. They want to test out their own limits and believe that drugs will help them cope better with stress in the future, or regard them as an escape from everyday life and loneliness. The use of drugs mostly signifies a desire to forget or a desperate call for help.

We still do not know exactly how addiction develops and what causes it. But it can certainly be said that mentally balanced and self-confident children with a stable and resilient ego have a better chance of not becoming addicted in later life. For this reason, prevention is an important means of fighting addiction. And this begins way back, when children learn with the help of their parents to work through and analyse conflicts rather than to walk away from problems.

In addition to the drugs already on the market, stimulants like cocaine and synthetic substances have become increasingly prominent since the mid-1980s. In urban areas in particular, the diversity of drugs on offer is a permanent temptation. Youth welfare departments, public health officers and drugs officers in secondary schools are available to help addicts, potential addicts, and their families. However, prevention, counselling and help on withdrawal and follow-up care is primarily available from associations, clubs and self-help groups like the "Deutsche Hauptstelle gegen Suchtgefahren" (German Centre for Addiction Prevention), the "Arbeiterwohlfahrt Bundesverband" (National Society of Labour Welfare), the "Bundesverband der Elternkreise drogengefährdeter und drogenabhängiger Jugendlicher" (Federal association of groups of parents of young addicts and potential addicts), the "Deutscher Caritasverband" (Caritas Germany), the "Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband" (German Non-Denominational Welfare Association), the "Deutscher Kinderschutzbund" (German child protection association), and the "Deutsche Behindertenhilfe, Aktion Sorgenkind" (German assistance for the disabled, child concern).

Rolf Hüllinghorst, the manager of the German Centre for Addiction Prevention, assessed the success of these initiatives as follows in August 1994: "The chances of recovery for young addicts are good. I have seen this over many years of group work with them. The pessimism about therapy is completely unjustified."

At the beginning of 1994, the Federal Constitutional Court decided that the possession of very small quantities of cannabis should no longer be punished. The majority of the Länder welcome the decriminalisation of soft drugs for personal use. In some of the Länder, methadone is even prescribed for heroin addicts as part of therapy.

The German government is aiming at a policy on drugs based on prevention, treatment for addiction and a resolute fight against the drugs mafia. On behalf of the Federal Ministry of Health, the Federal Centre for Health Education has developed a wide-ranging campaign to prevent addiction. The current campaigns in the mass media are "Kinder stark machen" (Making children strong) and "Keine Macht den Drogen" (Down with drugs).

Initiatives of great significance for the international fight against drugs have now also been taken at European level. Mention should particularly be made of the establishment of a European Drugs Intelligence Unit. As border controls in the European Union are removed, the planned formation of EUROPOL is also of significance.

Young people and violence

Violence has various causes. Fear, uncertainty, disappointment and the abuse of freedoms form the background against which violence takes place. Nowadays, even 12 to 14-year-olds are prominent. Aggressive behaviour results in about 100,000 accidents a year at German schools (according to a study from 1994 by the Federal Association of Public-Sector Accident Insurance Funds). Violent disputes particularly end with injuries at the Hauptschule, the basic secondary school. A frequent explanation given for this is the rising consumption of the media and the effect this has on young people.

Even so, people should not be overhasty when mentioning the terms "youth" and "violence" in one breath. For example, the number of young people found guilty of theft and embezzlement has clearly fallen since 1982. Girls and women are rarely the perpetrators. Most young people - 98 per cent, according to the 1992 "Shell study" - clearly reject violence. And violence occurs or is accepted in all social classes and age groups. It is just that these trends are to be found more intensely in the case of young people.

However, as in other European countries, some of the violent young people find a "moral home" in right-wing radicalism. One attempt to break up the formative extreme right-wing structures is a concept deriving from work on drugs: it is called "youth work that accepts or understands". Youth work with right-wing cliques of young people has proved successful when it focuses on the problems the young people have and not the problems they cause. For this reason, there have been many attempts in recent years not to exclude extreme right-wing youths from youth work, but to deliberately approach them and to work with them.

The majority of racist crime and violence is caused by unremarkable young people and first-time offenders who have only a low or medium level of formal education. They need to be given

support if they are to develop successful and socially acceptable modes of behaviour, as well as self-assertion and survival strategies. They need to feel secure and accepted.

In the "Situation of young people in Germany", the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth arrives at this conclusion: "If it is true that aggressive, xenophobic resentment primarily derives from feelings of being threatened, from fears of competition, from a sense of powerlessness, from a lack of orientation and self-esteem, it is vital for education and youth work to boost the self-confidence and social abilities of young people. By enabling them to cope with life on their own, they are helped to be more relaxed about unexpected and unfamiliar situations... It is also important to learn not to be afraid to get involved, to protect other people in situations of conflict and violence."

In the east of Germany, where there has been a lack of a new and functioning infrastructure specific to the needs of young people, and with several independent projects targeting right-wing youth movements springing up independently in various places soon after reunification in 1990, approximately 130 projects were funded over the last three years with a total of DM 60 million from the Federal Government Programme against Aggression and Violence. 77 per cent of these projects were privately organised, and the rest (employing over 400 people) were in the public sector. Most of these anti-aggression and anti-violence projects opted for an integrational approach, linking streetwork with history workshops, cultural centres, sport and leisure clubs. They attract between 8000 and 10,000 young people, who attend two-and-a-half times a week on average.

Angela Merkel, formerly Minister for Women and Youth, made the following point in May 1994: "Work with young people susceptible to racist, extreme right-wing and aggressive resentment is tiresome and difficult. The projects under the Programme against Aggression and Violence have proved that it is possible to work with young people who are ready to resort to violence and aggression."

Young people and unemployment

The unemployment rate for the under-twenties in Germany is one of the lowest in the European Union. The rate in December 1994 for young people between 16 and 25 was 7.9 per cent in the west and 11.0 per cent in the east of Germany.

Despite this, unemployment amongst young people and young adults has been an ever-present problem in Germany since the 1974 recession. The problems of unemployment and making a start in working life have lessened in quantitative terms for young people in recent years as a consequence of demographic developments, the increase in numbers of jobs and training places, and many other educational measures to prepare young people for work. On the other hand, it has also become clear that large groups of young people are still unable or find it difficult to complete their vocational training and to be permanently integrated into the world of work. In particular, those who have attended special schools, have not obtained a school-leaving certificate, or have dropped out of training have little chance when competing for jobs against others with better qualifications. The special educational measures run by the Federal Institute for Employment in Nuremberg intended to prepare people for work are particularly aimed at these "disadvantaged" young people. The measures are designed to pass on knowledge and skills of use in the world of work or to motivate the participants to take a further course of education or training. The courses usually last a year, or two years in exceptional cases. The young people are primarily helped by teachers, social education experts and skilled craftsmen, with the funding coming from job-creation schemes.

The varying regional discrepancies, which are particularly obvious in the east of Germany, between the supply of and demand for training places, as well as the difficulty the young people themselves have in taking advantage of the opportunities that exist for vocational training, mean that not all young people succeed in making a smooth transition to working life. The move from school to work is proving difficult in the east of Germany and in western German problem regions because economic restructuring or traditional structural weakness mean that the lack of in-company apprenticeships has to be offset by vocational training from the welfare state. However, the fears of a disaster on the apprenticeship front in the east of Germany have not been realised. In the past few years, it has been possible - sometimes with support from the state - to find a training place for every young west and east German. (Several tens of thousands of young

trainees and employees commute from eastern Germany to jobs in the west of Germany and the western part of Berlin.) Each year, several thousand unskilled young people are employed by the Federal Institute for Employment in job-creation schemes. This is supplemented by the support given under the Employment Promotion Act to training for apprentices with learning difficulties or social disadvantages. One focus of the European Social Fund is on integrating young people into working life. And no-one has to miss out on training for social reasons: that is ensured by the Federal Educational Promotion Act. About one-third of western German and over three-quarters of eastern German students are helped to obtain a university degree by an interest-free loan from the state.

Youth assistance

"Every young person has a right to receive help towards his development and to be brought up to be a responsible person able to live in society". This statement is contained in the new Act on Child and Youth Assistance. The realisation of this elevated objective represents a great challenge for all those responsible for youth policy and youth work.

The last few decades have seen a far-reaching change in youth assistance. Whilst in the 1950s and 1960s youth work very much took the form of a safety net for failed social development, it has now become an independent sector of education and upbringing. It aims to promote, assist and counsel children and young people. Youth assistance has thus developed into a modern and varied system of services for the young. It has had to and will continue to have to adapt to rapid changes in society in future.

Today, local politicians and urban planners work with the youth welfare departments to find ways for urban development to create the structures appropriate to the great variety of youth sub-cultures. The customary youth-related infrastructure in Germany consists of youth centres and self-help facilities provided by private (welfare organisations, youth associations and initiatives) and public sponsors. At the same time, new approaches are being sought so that the institutions that help young people can collaborate productively with institutions in other areas of society (labour market, training and schooling, health, etc.). Many towns and cities employ social workers as street workers to look after certain youth sub-cultures to be found around kiosks, at street corners or in parks and pubs. The street workers give help on problems with authorities, school,

parents, unemployment, criminality, drug-taking, etc. This kind of mobile youth work will usually have some rooms as a base for its employees and as a place the young people can turn to.

Since 1990, the Deutsches Jugendinstitut (German Youth Institute) has increasingly directed the research and counselling work it does on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth to cover the eastern part of Germany. Over the last four years, a large part of the infrastructure of child and youth assistance in the east of Germany has been built up with funding from job-creation schemes. At the same time, the creation and development of privately-based youth assistance has been fostered by special Federal Government programmes. Germany now has about 75,000 institutions working with young people, of which almost 21,000 are located in the east of the country.

The majority: optimistic, open and active

As the IPOS survey shows, the majority of young people in Germany in 1995 are optimistic about the future, are satisfied, are more interested in politics than in previous years, and approve of German unification, democracy and the welfare state. According to an Emnid survey in 1994, 68 per cent are happy to live in Germany. 80 per cent believe that the system of society is worth defending. Most are interested in receiving good training at school, in the company, or at college. They place value on world peace, freedom, friendship, security in the family and inner harmony. 85 per cent of them want to have children in future; the most important and trusted people in their lives are parents, brothers and sisters, or friends - this conclusion is drawn by numerous studies.

According to a survey whose results were published by the Berlin senate administration at the beginning of 1995, almost two-thirds of young people in Germany's new capital city are tolerant towards gays and lesbians. In fact, over two-thirds would like homosexual ways of life to be discussed more frequently and in more detail in the classroom.

The overwhelming majority live in peaceful coexistence with foreigners in Germany. According to a survey conducted in 1993 for the Federal Ministry of Women and Youth, 66 per cent of those questioned in the west of Germany said they had foreign friends. Only 3 per cent found the idea inconceivable. Because there are not many foreigners in the eastern part of the country, only

19 per cent there said they themselves had foreign friends. But a further 64 per cent could imagine having them.

International youth exchanges help greatly to promote tolerance and the reduction of prejudices in Germany and thus to foster peaceful coexistence. Every year, about 4000 international youth exchange programmes are supported by funding from the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth. Recent years have seen a growing interest, particularly amongst young employees and trainees, in meeting other young people in other countries.

The "Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk" (a Franco-German youth agency), which was founded in 1963, organises exchanges between some 160,000 young French and Germans each year. The "Deutsch-Polnisches Jugendwerk" (a Polish-German youth agency), set up in 1993, promotes understanding with Germany's eastern neighbour. Youth exchanges with Turkey are being expanded and are to be placed on a formal basis. Germany's various Länder and local authorities also participate in international youth exchanges via their own programmes, e.g. school partnerships, inter-regional exchanges, cultural events and teacher exchanges. The last few years have particularly seen the establishment of numerous partnerships with central and eastern European countries.

In addition to this, the continuing European integration is leading to a large number of new opportunities and options for young people in particular. There are good reasons why over 70 per cent take a positive view of the process of European integration. Many young people enjoy travelling and use the opportunities and the educational programmes available in the European Union (EU). Since 30 June 1992, every EU student has had the right to study in another country in the Union. In the 1994/1995 academic year, almost 17,000 young people from Germany alone were taking part in the EU's ERASMUS student exchange programme - double the number in 1991/1992. In return, German universities will host 17,000 foreign ERASMUS students.

The EU also promotes the deepening of a common European awareness in programmes entitled SOCRATES (general education) and LEONARDO (vocational training), which replaced the "first generation" of EU training programmes at the beginning of 1995. Since January 1994, the EU "Youth for Europe" programme has been open to young people from all the EFTA countries and is already in its third phase. The EU provides almost DM 3 billion for the three programmes.

A large number of young people do sport. Soccer, gymnastics, body building and tennis are very popular. 37 per cent of 14 to 27-year-olds in western Germany are members of a youth club, as are 19 per cent in eastern Germany. Several thousand young people participate each year in competitions like "Jugend forscht" (young people research) and "Jugend musiziert" (young people make music). Well over 100,000 young people, mostly female, have worked a "voluntary social year" in the last 30 years. This is intended to give young people aged between 17 and 25 the chance to get to know welfare, caring and teaching occupations. Since the end of 1993, it has also been possible to work a "voluntary environmental year" - an offer that is meeting with a particularly good response in the east of Germany. Many young people do work for others and join clubs and initiatives to help tackle problems of environmental destruction, developing countries, human rights, etc. 52 per cent actually feel responsible for what is happening in Germany (cf. the 1994 Emnid survey). In the Federal Youth Plan, the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth promotes a number of youth groups (including "BUND-Jugend" (the youth branch of the BUND environmental group), "Naturfreundejugend" (the youth branch of friends of nature), "Jugend des Deutschen Alpenvereins" (the youth branch of the German Alps Association)) whose work is focused on environmental education.

In conclusion, it can be said without exaggeration that, as in other countries, "young people" in Germany are better than their reputation. It is also remarkable how amazingly well the majority of young people in the east of Germany have coped with the upheaval in their life caused by unification. After all, they were suddenly confronted with a whole range of risks: money problems due to unemployment or short-time work for their parents, uncertainty about whether they would get apprenticeships, adjustment to a new availability of consumer goods, uncertainty and a reorientation of values, models and ideals, and the influence of radical groups and sects. In this upheaval, they are still largely dependent on themselves, because the adults (parents, teachers) and the newly created social and state institutions have not yet found their way into their new roles either.

In return, young people in eastern Germany now share the freedom enjoyed by their contemporaries in the west to travel whenever and wherever they want. They can strike and go on demonstrations for and against whoever they want. They can speak and write freely, without censors

looking over their shoulder. They can vote freely in elections. They are learning to cope with these new-found freedoms and their dangers, and thus to take on more responsibility.

(IN-Press)

Would you like to know more? (Suggested reading)

- Jugend '92, Lebenslagen, Orientierungen und Entwicklungsperspektiven im vereinigten Deutschland, edited by the Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell AG Hamburg, Opladen 1992, Leske und Budrich Verlag

- Youth in Germany today, compiled by Volker Thomas, Bonn 1993, also available in French, German or Polish, Inter Nationes Bonn

- Die Eigensinnigen, Selbstporträt einer Generation, edited by Thomas Huetlin and Cordt Schnibben, SPIEGEL special, Hamburg 1994

- Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene in Deutschland, results of a representative survey of the population in eastern and western Germany, carried out on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth by the Institut für praxisorientierte Sozialforschung (IPOS), Mannheim 1995