

## **New Study on Youth in Dornbirn**

(September 2001)

Appreciation of past successes and important suggestions for the future

In 1992 Dornbirn was one of the first municipalities of the province of Vorarlberg to adopt a concrete framework planning to foster the advancement of youth work with unorganized and organized youth. Numerous projects have been put into practice since then.

A new youth centre in Schlachthausstraße, more practising rooms for committed and talented young musicians, promotion of youth work with youth organisations and open youth work, development of youth participation models such as the meetings of the class representatives, job creation schemes for long-term unemployed young people, a skating hall at the town's fair and exhibition site, founding of the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, sports grounds open to everybody, enlargement of the youth information centre "aha", a youth information calendar, a youth camping ground on Zanzenberg, the youth sports camp Ebnit, etc.

Last year a study on being young in Dornbirn was produced in co-operation with young people, honorary and full-time youth workers and the political committee on youth affairs. The Town of Dornbirn appointed the Austrian Institute for Youth Research to do the scientific evaluation.

The study is based on an active survey of 121 young people, hearings with youth experts in politics, administration, youth work, youth sports, with Dornbirn's class representatives and immigrant groups.

Listening to music and action with friends are top!

In the survey the 13-to-18-year-old girls and boys were asked how often they practise various leisure time activities. They could choose among 26 activities which were proposed with a scale of four categories. Listening to music (65%) was by far the most favourite activity, followed by doing things with friends (52%) and talking on the phone (48%). These data are not surprising; they confirm the findings of other studies conducted in German speaking countries.

Sports play an important role for Dornbirn's young people

The data show that Dornbirn's girls and boys are also very much into sports: Traditional leisure time sports such as cycling, swimming and playing football still play an important role for adolescents. At the same time adventure and fun sports such as snowboarding and volleyball gain importance. Fun sports have become very popular with both girls and boys during the last years and are partially established now. The young people's desires quite clearly reflect this trend. Adventure sports are more than just sports, they combine movement and lifestyle and appeal to both sexes.

Young people know and make use of Dornbirn's leisure time facilities!

The answers to the question on leisure time facilities show – as was to be expected – that the outdoor swimming pool "In der Enz", the indoor swimming pool and the Young Hall at the Dornbirn Trade Fair are known by almost all the young people. However, it is amazing how many adolescents know facilities such as the youth centre Vismut (91%) and the youth information centre "aha" (82%). The youth camping ground "Eurocamp" on Zanzenberg (17%) is relatively little known. The answers to the question if young people use these facilities report clear age distinctions: The youth centre Vismut, the indoor swimming pool and the youth centre Arena are mainly visited by 13-to-14-year-olds; the youth club Hatlerdorf, the "aha" and the cultural centre Spielboden are mainly frequented by 17-to-18-year-olds.

Dornbirn's young people are active

The youngsters were also asked about their participation in organisations and associations: Sports clubs are at the top (47%), followed by musical societies (33%), the classic youth organisations such as the Alpine Mountaineering Club, the Scouts, the Catholic youth and the association Open Youth Work Dornbirn. Cultural associations (9%), youth participation (7%), political organisations (6%), pupils' associations (5%) and new youth initiatives (2%) complete the list. It is remarkable that 25% of the young people surveyed state to be actively involved in a youth organisation and 13% say that they actively take part in the activities offered by Open Youth Work. Similar studies in German speaking countries record much less commitment in this field (3 – 7%).

Young people want to commit themselves!

Finally the young people were asked about the conditions which they consider necessary for a commitment in an organisation or association. The 14-to-25-year-olds named fun, participation and getting to know new friends as the essential prerequisites. The factors "important for society" and "earning money" figure at the bottom of the ranking and are considered least important. Having fun is especially important for girls and young women; they want to get something out of their commitment and their friends must join in. Topics and contents play an important role as well. More than half of the youngsters surveyed respond to the topic "Human rights"; the topics "Illegal drugs" and "Equal rights" (40%) have an equally prominent position in the ranking.

Girls feel more disadvantaged, boys feel mainly privileged...

Girls and boys were also asked in how far they felt privileged, disadvantaged or neither of the two in relation to the other sex in the fields of family, leisure time and society. Summarizing the results one can conclude that boys consider themselves privileged to a similar percentage that girls perceive themselves as disadvantaged. Girls clearly experience gender discrimination in family, leisure time and in society. Boys, on the other hand, state that they feel privileged in these fields. School is the only field where boys consider themselves very disadvantaged and girls see themselves as more privileged than disadvantaged. Equal treatment for girls and boys seems to be best realized in youth centres: Approximately 80% of the young people surveyed do not notice any preference or discrimination of one of the sexes there.

Satisfaction with life and values

Most of the girls and boys surveyed are quite satisfied with their current personal situation in life. They are most satisfied with regard to family, friends and housing situation. They are the least satisfied with their partner relationships (boyfriend/girlfriend). If young people are asked about their needs to be happy in life, they most frequently mention friends, family and a partner. This is not surprising even though young people are often depicted in a very different way in public (consumption, acquisitiveness, violence, ...). Good relationships (a social context) are crucial for personal happiness, as well as being in good health, having a good job and/or training, success at school and, of course, money. Love, satisfaction, fun and pleasure figure on the list as well. The value preferences of Dornbirn's youngsters reflect the tendencies towards growing individualisation and commitment to traditions at the same time. Girls are generally more preoccupied than their male colleagues, especially as far as the topics "being unemployed" and "having no prestigious training opportunities" are concerned.

Attempting to summarize:

- Tenor: Young people like living in Dornbirn and are quite satisfied with the facilities that the town offers.
- The girls and boys surveyed are very content with their personal situation in life.
- A very good infrastructure for various aspects of youth work has been developed.
- Young people in Dornbirn show an exceptionally high commitment to youth organisations and to the offers of open youth work.
- Dornbirn's leisure time facilities are well known and frequently used.
- Girls and boys intensely experience differences in treating males and females. The topics mentioned were
  1. Family: going out, looking after brothers and sisters, education and housework
  2. Leisure time: at the youth centre or youth club, sports facilities, being accepted by the public and leisure time opportunities
  3. Society: sexist treatment in public, being taken seriously, participation, work and school
- 80% of the girls and boys surveyed feel that they are treated equally in the youth centres Vismut and Arena – which is a very pleasing result.

Some potentials for improvement:

- Decentralization of youth clubs and leisure time facilities for young people
- The set of measures contains several measures which concern the creation of more space for young people, as for example a youth café in the town centre, rooms in youth clubs for various groups, opening up the schools' sports facilities at weekends.

- Gender specific youth work with boys and girls

The set of measures lists a series of examples to promote the specific target groups: For example, it is recommended to create a network of all the activities in gender specific youth work and work with this approach in existing youth organisations.

- Expansion of public transport

Public transport plays an important role for Dornbirn's youth. Four out of five youngsters regularly use means of public transport in their leisure time. A "youth-friendly" concept of public transport is proposed: Especially at weekends and late in the evening the buses in town cannot be used at all or run with very restricted timetables; additionally the prices should be cut down for young people.

- Intercultural youth work

Despite the fact that some activities in the field of intercultural work serve as models for other municipalities, it is necessary to focus on anti-racism projects at schools and other institutions. A wide variety of projects must be offered, proceeding from the young people's specific situation and supporting them to find their way in the challenging situation between two cultures.

- Development of the youth participation projects

Youth participation is an essential task for the next years. The framework for these projects has already been created. It should be continuously developed in the next years.

#### Further information

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