

REPORT: STUDY VISIT IN BERLIN, THE “CASVISITS SCHOOLS” PROJECT SUPPORTED BY ERASMUS + ČESKÁ ASOCIACE STREETWORK, Z. S.

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INTRODUCTION

The study visit took place from the 4th of October to the 8th of October 2021 in the Berlin-based organisation Gangway e.V.; a total of five workers from the Czech Republic took part in the study visit. Germany is a federal republic and Berlin is both an independent federal state and the capital city. It is important to understand that in the context of social policy, Berlin is governed by laws that may be different from other federal states. Political representation thus strongly influences the way in which these organisations operate. At the moment, the system there is influenced by the Social Democrats and the Greens who are more supportive of social services and perceive their importance and contribution to society. Social services in other parts of Germany (primarily in the Eastern part) are often underfunded and workers are poorly paid, according to the staff we met. We were also told that streetwork is not sufficiently covered in rural areas. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are funded by the city and Berlin city districts and a small part is paid by donors.

Gangway focuses only on outreach social work and has been operating for around thirty years (since 1990), it employs about 120 people and is the largest streetwork organisation in Europe.

The director of the organisation has been working in her position for many years and has made a significant contribution to negotiating good working conditions for the organisation and for the employees. The management is represented by the director and three managers. Workers in the teams feel that the management trusts them and they are given quite a bit of freedom in their work, for example they can flexibly adjust their working hours and their working times are not dependant on registration of services as it is in the Czech Republic. They write a report on what is happening in the locality every month and they create annual statistical reports, whereas we report on all our interviews with clients. Gangway produces one report for the whole organisation.

Not only social workers but also other professions such as educators can work with the target group in the organisation. However, the organisation primarily employs social workers and they are paid according to their level of educational attainment. According to the current law, workers must achieve a certain level of education or complete courses to be able to work as streetworkers, otherwise, they have a lower salary.

Gangway primarily works with young people aged 14 to 27, although this age range is only indicative and they can work outside it. Within the organisational structure there are twelve teams who work in almost every city district in Berlin. Sometimes two teams work in one district (such as in the largest district Mitte with 40 – 50,000 inhabitants). Every city district is different; for example, East Berlin has a higher population density and not as many cultural opportunities but there is a lot of 'street life'. West Berlin was created by the unification of villages in the 19th century, and is made up of different communities with a lot of foreigners. The area called Treptow-Köpenick is home to many socially disadvantaged people and is also a popular city district for students and people living alternative lifestyles ("hipsters"). Berlin as a cultural centre is vibrant and ever-changing.

Gangway does not itself operate any clubs (i. e. low-threshold centres for children & youngsters), as other organisations in the Czech Republic usually do, however, it cooperates with other organisations that do run such clubs. The basic principles that workers observe are free will, anonymity, empowerment of clients, non-cooperation with the police, and if the client wishes, cooperation with their parents. These are quite similar to the principles we follow in the Czech Republic.

In some districts Gangway work a lot with young people of Arab and Turkish origin, however, it is quite difficult to find streetworkers who have the relevant language skills. They often address the topics of racism and xenophobia with clients.

Gangway works on projects focussing on various areas, these include:

Street College

Street College is aimed at young people who are struggling to complete their education or who have not completed a school education. The project helps clients to complete their studies outside the mainstream educational system; without this support clients would have no educational qualifications and would face difficulties on the labour market. **Street college is based on the individual needs of clients. They can choose any subject in which they need support (mathematics, languages, etc.) with the goals of the collaboration based on their individual needs.**

More of the good practice is described below.

JobInn

JobInn is a project where workers help clients to prepare for employment: they offer help with CV writing and with job searches for suitable positions.¹

¹ **Note Gangway:** This work happens in a streetwork context as well, but is focussing on job perspectives.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES

Gangway also cooperates with other organisations and institutions, for example they organise workshops and meetings focussing on various practical topics (e. g. substance use, etc.). According to the workers this type of cooperation works well. However, they do not consider the cooperation with schools sufficiently good, which will be described at the end of this report.

Gangway staff can accompany clients to employment offices, to police stations or to Youth Welfare Offices. In Germany the “Youth law” (i. e. “*Protection of Young Persons Act*”) is divided into work with young people in clubs and social work with young people. The *Youth Welfare Office* reports to the Federal State of Berlin. If workers see that violence is taking place against a child, they are obliged to report it to the Youth Welfare Office. This authority then investigates the case and decides whether it is necessary to contact the police. The *Youth Welfare Office* is responsible for people under 18 years² of age (especially for housing and education). Streetworkers work with them when clients are living on the streets or in danger of becoming homeless.

They also work with the *Crisis Intervention Centre* when clients are in acute danger - the clients are able to stay for a while in the centre and don't have to immediately find alternative housing. The Intervention Centre usually works with youngsters under 18, but the above mentioned institutions are able to work with people up to the age of 21 if necessary.

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

This section of the report will detail the experiences we gained during our study visit, describing what we did on the individual days.

STREET COLLEGE

² Note Gangway: This can be extended until the age of 21, if needed.

Street College was originally set up as a 3-year project with private funding, and is likely to be subsidised financially by the government from January 2022. As part of this project, workers support young people to complete their schooling; for example, by preparing them for exams. Clients can choose their field of study and when they feel ready they can take the exams (which are held twice a year). Mostly they assist clients who are living on the streets, children traumatised by the school system, young mothers and refugees (these are often refugees from Syria or Afghanistan who do not speak German well). The project is not known throughout the whole of Berlin, as it is not well publicised (they do not have the capacity for it), but children and young people from all over Berlin and beyond come here – to talk, meet new people and get to know the environment. Different classes are organised for clients based on demand (there must be a minimum of three people to open a class) and these include: song writing, electronic music production, singing, audio, film making, acting, drawing, graphic design, “image building” (if they want to become influencers on social media). They also organise summer camps for clients.

They also cooperate with the juvenile prison and the project NY Bronx connection³; they organise exchange stays and discuss topics such as racism, etc. In addition, politicians regularly come to the college to discuss the school system and the need for change. Street College combines school, youth work and cultural work, which is quite difficult to fund. They have no contract with their clients, who instead enrol on different courses via an online form. However, they generate daily statistics documenting activities, conflicts and their resolution or group conversations. Most children pass the first level and a few fail the second level, but everyone eventually gets an education. There are three tutors in the Street College, they are employed on a work performance agreement (they are not paid as much here as they would be for one-on-one tutoring elsewhere), and they also work a lot with volunteers. In Germany it is possible to work as a volunteer for a year after graduation and be paid from public funds. Once a week a meeting is organised with the tutors and the volunteers. which is focussed on their personal growth. There

is no strict hierarchy in the centre – everyone works according to their own discretion and capability.

COOPERATION WITH SCHOOL AND CLUB - Hohenschönhausen Region

Grüner Campus Malchow (school social work) / Hohenschönhausen region

Even though Gruner Campus Malchow is the largest school in Berlin with 1,700 pupils, from Gangway only a team of nine people work there, of which four are social workers and five are educators who focus more on leisure time. They work a lot on the basis of systemic therapy; some workers have undergone training and some have only a basic knowledge. Workers with therapeutic training work with children only through counselling; unfortunately there is no time to provide therapy to pupils. According to the social worker, it would be useful for each child to have a social worker dealing with daily life and a therapist for specific problems, which is useful when working with trauma. Pupils are often referred to follow-up services in psychology and therapy. The school has a cafeteria for pupils and teachers, staffed by social workers. There is also a room for counselling if pupils want to deal with something individually, or practical sessions that take place in the cafeteria kitchen. They strive to work as a team, without strictly divided responsibilities, everything is driven by the needs of the young people. If a child is not attending school then they hold team conferences with teachers, the head teacher and social workers.

Social services employ the social team, who often work with families as well. The city allocates the budget for workers directly to the school, and the school then decides who should receive the funding (e. g. they can terminate cooperation with them after one year). For example, they run projects such as “young carers” designed for children who have to look after ill or disabled parents, providing support for children so they are able to talk to someone about their situation. They first educate teachers to be able to recognise such children in the classroom and then contact social workers. Prevention weeks are organised in the school where external organisations or institutions are invited and topics such as drug prevention are discussed. More and more teachers are now consulting with external experts. During the time of Covid-19 restrictions, the school provided tutoring for children from socially disadvantaged families.

Fullhouse (youth centre)

We visited this low-threshold centre for children and youth for only a short time. The worker gave us a brief tour of the club (including the kitchen, gym and bike repair shop) and explained to us how the club works. It seemed to be based on very similar principles and values to the clubs in the Czech Republic. The club worker shared with us his experience from the Covid-19 pandemic when various measures were introduced. Clients had to register and wear face masks when attending the club, which discouraged some clients (hence it led to a loss of clients). The club is strategically located in close proximity to the school, but it is frequented by children and young people living in the neighbourhood rather than by pupils of the school. Some clubs had decided to close during the Covid-19 pandemic and hold community events outdoors instead.

COOPERATION WITH SCHOOLS AND GANGWAY

As part of the cooperation, Gangway implemented social skills workshops (e.g. violence prevention by the team Hohenschönhausen) for seventh to eighth grade elementary school students. The Gangway team “Hohenschönhausen” employs an additional worker for violence prevention (unfortunately this position is only paid from year to year). They introduced this project but found it difficult to transfer streetwork experience to the school system, especially the principle of it being the child’s own free decision to participate, as, for instance, children often consider youth workers to be teachers. They eventually reconsidered the workshops and terminated the regular cooperation. The original intention was to visit classrooms once a month. The schools are grateful when anyone from outside comes up with an activity for the pupils. A lot of energy was put into the project, but the result was not favourable. For example, they created group prevention activities, but it was difficult to reflect the experience in the school premises in a way that created a sufficiently confidential environment.

They cooperate with schools in other ways: with social workers, or by organising workshops for children who are interested, e.g. in the club, but after school hours. They cooperate with clubs in the same way, if clients are interested in given topics. ⁴For example, one of the prevention activities proved to be a good practice, where workers prepared a bag with imitations of different addictive substances and children took them out of the bag randomly and workers asked what they took out and what it meant to them, how they felt about it. Gangway also organises different trips for clients, prevention days and presentations of the service in schools, similar to the practices in the Czech Republic.

COOPERATION WITH BERLINER JUNGS

In Berliner Jung (an independent organisation), we met workers who work with sexually abused boys or those who have experience with some type of sexual violence. The organisation tries to work with children's homes, refugee camps, clubs and other entities. The workers emphasised the importance of their work as sexual violence is mostly associated with girls, not boys. Thus, part of their work includes breaking down this stereotype and the taboo around the issue of sexual abuse among boys. Sexual abuse often manifests itself in clients through increased aggression, non-communicativeness and is generally related to changed behaviour. These boys can contact the organisation, if needed. The workers also run workshops and counselling sessions for professionals (teachers, social workers, etc.) within their city district.

The other three city districts in Berlin receive extra funding for the organisation and employ an additional worker; they are the only ones in Berlin who work with boys in this way. The workers usually visit the clients. A similar project has been set up for girls and it is a bit more well-known. They create prevention activities, such as sex education in schools, clubs and refugee camps. The purpose is to explain that consent is required for any act associated with sexual context. A similar type of education is provided in the Czech Republic by the *Konsent* organisation.

⁴ **Note Gangway:** The whole concept here has changed, we don't offer "social skill workshops" any more. Instead we focus on drug prevention and safer use and offer workshops or counselling in youth clubs.

Berliner Jungs was originally a project in the 1990s working primarily with children at-risk (street boy prostitution). Then, as part of a university research project, the experience of young boys on the street with sexual violence and harassment was surveyed. They discovered that many boys were confronted with this issue. According to yearly statistics, the number of young boys is increasing, which is probably related to the fact that the topic is more known and talked about. Boys experience sexual violence in institutions (churches, schools, etc.). We also addressed the topic of cooperation with the police. According to the workers, it is sometimes better not to cooperate with the police, however, sometimes the young person themselves want it. Meetings with the police usually take place twice a year. According to the workers there is not enough evidence when investigating sexual violence, usually only 2% of the crimes are punished. There is a risk of re-traumatisation of children and the whole investigation process may take years. Neither Berliner Jung nor the child often has information about the investigation and has no control over when the police are involved. In Berlin, there are so-called "open flats" – apartments where children and young people can stay or live with the permission of the owner/landlord (an adult), nevertheless staying in these apartments is associated with many risks (sexual abuse or substance abuse). For example, in one case a man accepted a teenager to his apartment where they were abusing substances; these young people were also visiting the club. Social workers then informed Berliner Jungs about it. Workers often deal with complicated cases where children do not know what to do, are poor and have nobody else to help them. Some don't even want to talk about their situation because they are afraid of the police and of getting in trouble.

Workers are obliged to report cases only if they become aware of credible information of crimes being planned, not about past crimes (which is different in the Czech Republic). Perpetrators can be punished in Germany for up to 30 years after the crime occurs; however, this is difficult to prove when sexual violence is involved.

Sex education takes place through role playing, which is effective for building good relationships with children and they may experience how difficult it is to tell an adult what is going on. Children learn that they can say no, leave or ask for help. It is important for them to know that they are

not to blame for what is happening. Berliner Jungs informs other organisations that it is possible to call them anytime when they feel any child is in discomfort. They do not cooperate with self-help groups; according to workers, there are quite a few of them in Berlin. Victims organise themselves in the organisation and counselling for parents is also provided. If anybody wants to work in this organisation, they must be qualified as streetworkers, social workers and have attended a course on working with traumatized children. However, this is not a therapeutic training. An internal rule states that only workers who have attended this course may provide sexual violence counselling; others may provide sexual education only. An annual report of thirty to forty pages is the only report they produce; their work is more flexible.

STREETWORK

An example of good practice – streetwork represented an integral part of the study visit. The principle is that workers go out in pairs. In the Czech Republic, different services work differently, but the recommendation is that streetwork is better done in pairs. In Berlin we made a “walking tour” in an area called Neukölln. However, this was not an example of direct work with clients. The Neukölln district is known for its diversity; many people of different ethnicities and nationalities live here, as well as many artists. It is quite a popular part of Berlin. Within the city district, we walked through different informal places where children and young people may be present. We were told that especially younger children who are alone in the city feel threatened by other groups of people (e. g. people under the influence of substances). For this reason, many children do not travel by underground train, for example.

STREETWORK Treptow-Köpenick

Another example of good practice was streetwork in the Treptow-Köpenick area. This is the site of “Fan project”: every football club in Germany in the first, second and third division is obliged to have a team of about three social workers. It was established here in 2014 for the young fans of the 1. FC Union Berlin football club. Every big club has a team and these teams mediate processes with the police. A gradual de-escalation of conflicts is being achieved. The teams work with

groups of so-called ultras fans (they visit other parts of the city with them and are present at youth events). Fans can come to see them at the stadium. The project is funded by the German league and it is usually funded in thirds in other German cities: one third funded by the city, one third by the league and one third by the federal state. The fans then contact the workers themselves and invite them to various events. The fans, i. e. this target group, are mainly socially disadvantaged Germans, people who are at risk of poverty and are being pushed out to the more peripheral parts of the city.

There are many “forgotten and abandoned places” in this city district (such as a bunker, tunnel, etc.). Young people experiment with addictive substances in these places. Gangway rents a gym at a school for clients every Friday afternoon (they organise sporting events, especially in the winter). Young people between 18 to 27 years of age do not receive any special assistance from the government and they have fewer opportunities to get funding from the Labour Office compared to those under 18. The team is currently working here with about four larger groups and about 20 clients with individual support. Some teams work with more groups and communities. For example, their work resulted in a street football tournament with Neukölln. Normally, these “fans” would not meet each other at all (as there are many foreigners in Neukölln). They also once took a client who is an extremist on a trip to Neukölln to “see foreigners with his own eyes”. Clients often don’t even look beyond their own district, they don’t have any personal experiences. Alternatively, they take clients on trips abroad to experience being “foreigners” themselves.

CONCLUSION AND COMPARISON

The study visit in Berlin was a really beneficial experience that revealed some differences as well as some common practices. We believe that the approach of how they work with clients and the principles of social work are practically similar. However, the context in which they work is different, i. e. the social cultural context as well as the political situation in the area. Social work in the Czech Republic is often criticized by the public; the profession is not prestigious or well rewarded (financially or symbolically). Clients, as well as social workers in the Czech Republic,

may feel stigmatised and unsupported by wider society. We perceive that in the Czech Republic there is a lower level of trust in the social policy system and the instruments are burdened with unclear funding or too much bureaucracy and administration. It has been beneficial to share our work experience with other actors; we were particularly interested in the Berliner Jungs organisation, which is quite unique in its focus, but also determined by the size of the area it operates in.

It was interesting to note that there is different legislation - if workers in Germany become aware of a crime, they are only obliged to report it if it's in preparation, they are not obliged to report crimes that have already been committed.

Berlin and the individual city districts enjoy a greater degree of public trust, leading to a greater degree of freedom in terms of the fulfilment of the tasks. Czech social workers must keep careful records and consistently report every contact with clients; they must constantly justify their work. In the Czech Republic, social work is underfunded; support from the political representation is lower. In Berlin, the Social Democrats and Greens are represented in politics and strongly support this area. However, Gangway is a large organisation with a long tradition, and the workers themselves emphasised that the position was earned by the director. Workers pointed out that the city in which they operate is multicultural and very diverse. Other ethnic minorities, migrants and asylum seekers are more widely represented in Germany. The Czech Republic has a rather restrictive migration policy and the diversity is much less evident here. Czech society is rather hostile towards foreigners and also towards minorities that have lived in the territory of the Czech Republic for more than several generations (e. g. Roma, but also Ukrainians, Vietnamese and others face prejudice). The Roma in particular are at a greater risk of poverty, lack of access to education in the Czech Republic and segregation in large cities. However, workers mentioned that their clients also encounter various prejudices, stereotypes and xenophobia.

It was really positive to see that social work in Berlin is at such a high level and that workers can fully focus on work with clients (focusing less on administration). Of course they also face different challenges, as we saw when we visited one of the local schools. Based on the

experience, it is quite difficult to set up suitable cooperation with schools, as the schools themselves and the education system may be outdated, fossilized in some respect. However, our study visits gives us hope and also a meaning that sharing experiences and good practice is one of the paths everybody takes.