

Reviews

KNAPP, Gerald – LAUERMANN, Karl (eds.): Jugend, Gesellschaft und Soziale Arbeit. Lebenslagen und soziale Ungleichheit von Jugendlichen in Österreich

Klagenfurt/Ljubljana/Wien : Hermagoras 2012 (Youth, Society and Social Work. Living Conditions and Social Inequality of Young People in Austria). 1st edition, 750 pp.

The just released collective volume is part of the series “Studien zur Sozialpädagogik” (Studies in Social Pedagogy), edited by the Institute for Educational Studies at the Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt in Austria. The voluminous book combines sociological, social pedagogical and social psychological approaches and provides a comprehensive presentation of young people and their lives with a strong focus on living conditions and social inequality as well as on social work. The specific topics that are addressed do not simply report the authors’ empirical research but provide an analysis of key concepts and approaches that inform youth research. The book’s contributors are well-placed theoreticians and researchers in this field and represent different disciplines.

The volume is divided into several chapters that each shares a more specific topic. After the introductory chapter which provides an overview on the book, Chapter II presents “Youth and History” (articles by Gerald Grimm, Erik Adam, and Josef Scheipl), starting with the very beginning of “youth” in history and describing youth as a product of modern industrial society. In the following chapter, the focus is put on history of youth research. In Austria, the history of youth as well as youth research at the beginning of the 20th century are strongly related to Siegfried Bernfeld who was not only one of the pioneers of psychoanalytical pedagogy but also one of the founders of the first youth cultural movement (“Deutsche Jugendbewegung”, also known as “Wandervogel”). A further article of this chapter reflects on more recent Austrian youth research to date and portrays its main institutions, studies, and publications.

Chapter III presents youth from different theoretical and disciplinary approaches in social work. (“Youth and Theoretical Discourses in Social Work”). Eva Dreher et al. provide an overview on central concepts of development psychology pointing out central developmental tasks (such as identity work or formation of relationships) and transition processes that young people undergo in different stages of youth (from juvenile transition to early, middle and late adolescence and to emerging adulthood), concluding with

concepts aiming at supporting young people to develop “life skills”. Stephan Sting explains transition processes and related developmental tasks from a social pedagogical perspective, discussing school-work transitions as well as family-peer transitions. Zoe Clark et al. present new approaches towards a critical understanding of social work. One of the basic concepts, the capability approach, focuses on the well-being of the individual instead of trying to fit individuals into society or forming individuals suiting the needs of the market. Lothar Böhnisch and Wolfgang Schröer focus on potential dangers that young people face in coping with their lives and developing their biographies. They discuss that such potential dangers are found in young people’s transition management into adulthood. This touches the educational system and the transition into the labor market, addresses that young people have to overcome concepts of masculinity, and points to media, social prevention programs and social segregation. Ulrich Deinet and Ahmet Derecik use concepts from the sociology of space to investigate young people’s need for social space. Thereby they consider youth-countercultural occupancy of space as well as social space in educational institutions and discuss implications for educational pedagogy and politics. The article by Hans-Günther Homfeldt finally shows that health has become an increasingly important aspect of social work which also asks for more cooperation between different public actors.

The following Chapter IV, “Youth, Society, and Culture”, contains analyses regarding young people’s status in society, youth values, youth cultures, gender, and young people with migration background. Michael Winkler shows how youth as social group loses its meaning through political and educational politics as well as through social change. “Youth” is, above all, defined as “problem” but at the same time everybody wants to feel young and uses youth cultural artifacts, so what does it then still mean to be young? Ingrid Kromer presents her main results of a large Austrian youth and value survey. Her typology of value dimensions shows that young people react in heterogeneous and plural ways to the challenges of processes of modernization. What they share is the importance of family, peers and free time. Natalia Waechter focuses on youth cultures in context of social change and provides an overview of theoretical concepts as well as of historical and contemporary youth cultures, thereby distinguishing between youth cultures that are either oriented towards music, sports, ideology, media or fan cultures. She challenges new approaches in youth cultural research which neglect the meaning of social categories and shows how gender still affects the way young men and woman participate in youth cultural activities. Erol Yildiz addresses young people with migration background and criticizes how in public, in media and partly even in science they are mainly perceived as having deficits and as creating problems which strengthens their stigmatized and marginalized status. In order to overcome

discrimination in the educational system and the labor market as well as more subtle forms of discrimination, he pleads for new social policies which need to consider the realities of young people. Helga Grafshafter analyses youth in rural areas from a gender perspective and detects several processes where a structural discrimination of young women happens, above all, regarding their education and transition into the labor market. She shows that gender sensible programs for job orientation have helped to increase the share of young women in engineering schools.

Chapter V addresses “Youth, Fields of Socialization, and ‘Life Worlds’”, with each article focusing on one of the main fields of socialization: family, peers, school, work, media, and free time. Gerald Knapp and Gerald Salzmann describe how *family* is still to be considered the most important agent of socialization for children and young people. More specifically, they outline the role of the family regarding the development of young people’s identities. The following article by Gerald Knapp addresses *school* which also represents an important agent of socialization, not only for educational matters but also for the young people’s planning of their own biography. The article also discusses potential social problems related to school and the educational system such as social inequality, truants or violence in schools. Eva Dreher shows how *peers* have increased their importance as agents of socialization and describes how they provide essential resources for the young people’s development. Reingard Spannring analyses *work* from an intergenerational perspective. Using much empirical data, she first outlines the young people’s transition into the labor market, unemployment and precarious employment, as well as attitudes towards work. Then she shows how the structure of the late modern employment centered society has changed, how the transition from school to work has changed and how these changes affect the young generation. Rainer Winter focuses on young people, *media and counterculture*. He shows that young people use media as a resource for expressing themselves, for connecting with others and organizing their lives and that they are political actors through their cultural production and countercultural activities. Referring to the theory of subculture as developed in cultural studies, he analyses ongoing forms of youth counterculture and political resistance such as the anti-globalization movement or “Occupy”. Bernhard Heinzlmaier discusses young people and free time under the condition of capitalism, describing how the forces of the market are even determining young people’s free time which is supposed to be “the time of self-determination” and a time free of obligations. He also provides some data on young people’s favorite leisure time activities and on youth scenes in Austria.

The topic of Chapter VI is “Youth, Living Conditions, and Fields of Conflict”, covering youth poverty, violence, right extremism, youth with

special needs, and health. Elisabeth Niederer addresses several aspects of youth, poverty and social exclusion and describes how youth poverty results in disadvantages regarding education. Typically, poverty leads to an early entry in the labor market which in turn decreases chances to break out from poverty. The first article of Gerald Knapp discusses youth and violence in relation to social work, social change, and specific triggers of violence. Triggers of violence can be found in major institutions of upbringing and education: families, the educational system, as well as peer groups. He concludes with possible prevention policies in order to overcome youth violence. Hannes Krall relates youth and right extremism to social work. By presenting several case studies he shows how social work may establish a working relationship between the social workers and the young extremists who typically do not manage well to cope with their lives and living conditions. In his second article Gerald Knapp addresses youth with special needs and their difficulties entering the labor market which involves several social problems. He presents “good practice” examples of organizations and programs that aim at social integration of youths with special needs and asks for an extension of such measures. Gerald Salzmann reflects on health and social inequality under the condition of social change. He provides empirical data on health and well-being as well as on behavior that is dangerous to health and shows that young people do not have equal opportunities to stay healthy.

Chapter VII addresses several aspects of “Social Work, Youth and Politics”. Beate Grossegger addresses the future prospects and the future role of young people in our society. Based on empirical data she shows that the gap between winning and losing youth will continue growing. Concluding, she discusses how social work and youth work can contribute to decrease social inequality for young people and to compensate biographical risks. Orger Autrata and Bringfriede Scheu write about youth and the formation of social relationships. They show that social work has to understand young people as social actors who make their own decisions and form their own relationships. The editors of the volume, Gerald Knapp and Karin Laueremann, address perspectives and developments in youth welfare, starting with a description of the system of youth welfare and its legal foundation in Austria. Further they develop new perspectives for a future system of youth welfare which should meet the new requirements that come along with social change. Karin Laueremann’s following article addresses specifically children and youth work as a category of social work. She explains that (in the future) youth work has to focus more on its contribution to the children’s and young people’s education (“Bildung”), on an understanding of youth, on strengthening young people’s personalities and their resources, on gender issues, and on youth work in project milieus. Heidi Eerdetschnig and Hannes Krall reflect on mobile youth work in the

region of Carinthia. They present an overview on street work in the region and “good practice” examples in mobile youth work and show that mobile youth work addresses and reaches people who have less access to traditional programs and institutions of social work. The final chapter of the book, written by Maria Beyrl et al., is about youth and politics. Based on empirical data the authors show that the majority of young people in Austria reports being interested in politics and that they criticize political parties and politicians but are in favor of the democratic system.

The volume is of great value for academics, researchers and advanced students and may serve as handbook of youth and social work. It is providing information on the state of the art regarding many aspects of youth and connecting them to theoretical key concepts important for youth research. In addition, many articles conclude with policy recommendations and recommendations relevant for social work. It is not a textbook for undergraduate students but can be helpful for lecturers in the field. Its focus clearly is Austrian youth, however, the theoretical concepts as well as the social processes described in the book connect to the international state of the art. I have no doubt that the German speaking community in youth research will be gladly using the book, whereas, unfortunately, international scholars without any knowledge of German have to miss out on it.

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