



Youth Work International –
Experiencing Diversity



Strengthening international youth work at the local level

Recommendations of the German youth policy
initiative 'Kommune goes International' for
policymakers and authorities

What the local authorities' umbrella organisations say about Kommune goes International:

“**Kommune goes International** has strengthened local-level international youth work and given disadvantaged adolescents and young adults from the immigrant community better access to international youth work activities. The local-level networks have produced several creative approaches to this end. It's an innovative and highly promising way to assist young immigrant community members in becoming more integrated by helping them to participate in international projects and in turn, broaden their personal horizons. The experiences they have in these settings don't just help them to integrate in society and understand their own local communities better, they also develop an awareness of the needs and concerns of young people in other parts of the world. Through these projects, they become more tolerant, open-minded and independent.”



Kommune goes International

While international youth work has benefits for a diverse range of target groups, the advantages of these non-formal educational activities are particularly tangible for disadvantaged young people and young members of the immigrant community in that they help them to integrate more easily in society. By taking part in international exchanges or other international youth work projects, the young participants become more aware of their own identity, acquire valuable skills and strengthen their understanding of what it means to be European. Experiencing mobility in this way gives them an opportunity to make some profound positive changes in their lives.

Experience has shown that disadvantaged young people from a variety of cultural backgrounds can benefit in particular measure from activities offered at the local level. This is where Kommune goes International (KGI), which was launched in 2011, comes in: Over a period of three years, local authorities of varying sizes and structures have worked with local partners to strengthen local-level international youth work over the long term and make it accessible to all young people.

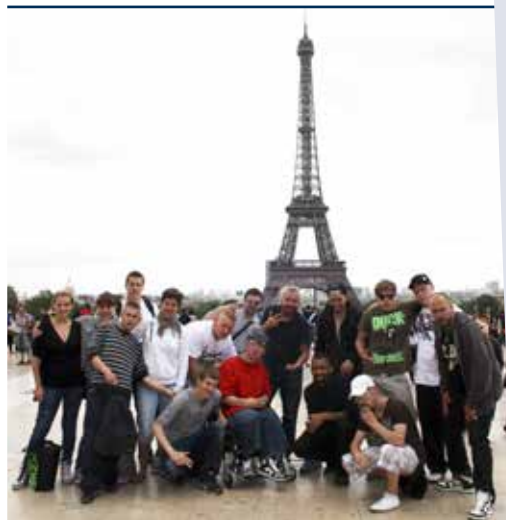
The initiative was supported throughout by practitioners and a group of researchers (from the Institute for Social Work and Social Education, Frankfurt am Main). The results encourage other local authorities to follow suit and strengthen international youth work at their level. In this venture, the local-level youth offices have an important coordinating function.

International youth work and its impacts

International youth work is reflected in all areas of child and youth services and offers cross-border learning opportunities for young people and experts alike. International youth exchanges give young people a chance to spend a period abroad, accompanied by educational experts, to meet and interact with young people from other countries. Such an experience encourages greater mutual understanding, tolerance and openness and helps them to acquire intercultural skills, accept responsibility, become involved in the community, and learn a foreign language.

International expert exchange programmes motivate and qualify experts to organise international youth exchanges of their own, as youth exchanges must be accompanied

by experienced experts who can provide professional support to the young participants. In addition, expert exchanges are an opportunity for professionals to learn from colleagues in other countries and reflect upon the child and youth services in their home country and their own practices.



Recommendations for strengthening international youth work

Over a period of three years, the towns and districts that participated in Kommune goes International collaborated to strengthen international youth work at the local level over the long term and open it up to all young people. The twelve-step process, described below, is intended to be an inspiration for other local authorities.

Step 1:

Identify the driving forces – A venture of this kind needs stakeholders that are convinced of the benefits of international youth work.

Step 2:

Make the benefits of international youth work visible – Experts, decision-makers and the public must be made aware of the positive impacts of international youth work.

Step 3:

Gain the backing of decision-makers – Political support helps to strengthen international youth work locally.

Step 4:

Create a network – Inviting new partners on board makes it easier to gain access to the target groups.

Step 5:

Set up a steering group – A steering group coordinates the network and keeps processes on track.

Step 6:

Design a local development plan – The network jointly draws up a development plan with four elements: current situation, needs analysis, objectives, and planned measures.

Step 7:

Train experts – Motivated, well-trained experts are crucial to the success of international youth work.

Step 8:

Broaden the network – Incorporating a wide range of experts from various organisations in the KGI network allows all network members to share the expertise that everyone brings to the table.

Step 9:

Implement the local development plan and associated projects – For instance, this can involve setting up a service unit for international youth work, training mobility counsellors, putting organisations in touch so they can organise and manage youth exchanges, or organising local events for experts.

Step 10:

Have good PR – Communicating one's activities in the press and in the public at large helps to support the process.

Step 11:

Evaluate projects and activities – Reflecting on one's projects and activities with participants, the teams and the local network is a major quality criterion.

Step 12:

Build sustainable structures – The development of sustainable local structures for international youth work should be a concern from the very beginning.

Dr. Michael Schwarz, director of the Youth Office of the Land of Bremen:

"It's fascinating to witness the positive changes in young people as they return from an international project. Working in education, it's not all that common to see such strong impacts. Raising awareness of these positive effects and of the significance of international youth work is a major objective for us; in fact it was one of the reasons we decided to join Kommune goes International. Participating in KGI has been well worth it for us. We've made good progress and expect to move much further ahead in the years to come."

**Christa Markl-Vieto, district councillor for youth, health, the environment and civil engineering in Steglitz-Zehlendorf, Berlin**

"I'm delighted about Steglitz-Zehlendorf district's new local development plan for international youth work. International youth work has always been very important to our district and receives support as an integral part of our child and youth services. Our local development plan will be implemented in cooperation with our partners in the network. The agreements we've signed with the participating youth services organisations require all of them to organise a project with an international theme at least once a year. In return, the organisations receive financial support."

The KGI network:

Members can exchange experiences with their colleagues via the national KGI network. In addition, there are workshop events and information packs on specific themes to encourage an intense dialogue and support local processes. Other local authorities that wish to join the network are most welcome. IJAB – International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany coordinates the KGI network and is the point of contact for all interested local authorities.

Information and inquiries:

IJAB – International Youth Service
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Godesberger Allee 142-148
53175 Bonn, Germany

Bettina Wissing
tel.: +49 (0)228 95 06-107
e-mail: wissing@ijab.de oder

Maria Schuille
tel.: +49 (0)228 95 06-126
e-mail: schuille@ijab.de

www.jive-international.de

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Responsible: Marie-Luise Dreber

Editorial team: Cathrin Piesche, Bettina Wissing

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