No crisis but a paradigm shift? German youth policy between continuity and change
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In Germany, the impact of the economic and financial crisis in general and on youth policy in particular is not as severe as in other European countries. Nevertheless, child and youth welfare currently is subject to restructuring. We argue that the crisis is used to legitimise an already ongoing policy change towards an activation model of welfare, although it is not clear yet to what extent current changes imply a path change. A particular aspect of recent reforms in Germany is the introduction of all-day schooling which has considerable consequences for child and youth welfare. The paper describes the structure of youth policy and particularly of child and youth welfare in Germany. Furthermore, recent changes are highlighted with regard to both statistical development and dominant discourses with regard to education, prevention and economisation in child and youth welfare. A special focus is laid on the field of youth work.

Keywords: Germany; child and youth welfare; youth work; youth policy; activating welfare state; all-day schooling

1. Introduction

Germany’s public finances are improving. Helped by robust economic growth in 2011, Germany has reduced its budget deficit to 1% of GDP … In other areas, reform efforts have been limited, particularly as regards labour market participation, education and services … The performance of the education system can be improved, in particular with regard to disadvantaged groups. (European Commission, 2012, p. 3)

In comparison to many other EU member states, Germany has apparently been only marginally affected by the financial and economic crisis present since 2008. Certain factors have contributed to Germany’s relative success, including the moderate public deficit and an active labour market policy that subsidises underemployed workers’ wages in order to keep them employed during the crisis and to maintain domestic consumption. Presently, Germany’s successful weathering of the crisis is reflected by the country’s central role in EU’s debate about the fiscal consequences of the crisis, while both its economy and labour market still appear to benefit from a positive dynamic. In 2011, the overall unemployment rate was 5.5%, and for young people under 25 years of age, it was 8.9% (compared to EU average of 21.4%; cf. European Commission, 2012, p. 25). Unlike other countries, public spending, including in areas of education, social, and youth policies, has only been marginally reduced as a direct reaction to the crisis. According to Eurostat data, public expenditures for families and children have only been marginally reduced as a direct reaction to the crisis. According to Eurostat data, public expenditures for families and children have been rising constantly both in absolute figures and in percentage of the GDP (3.1% in 2009). At the same time,
however, poverty among young people has risen by 20%. Fifteen per cent of children and young people under 18 years of age and 21.1% of 18–24-year-olds are at risk of poverty (Datenreport, 2011).

In this paper, we interpret these apparently contradictory signs of changes in both the life conditions of young people and the policies that address them not as evidence of the effects of the crisis but of a long-term shift towards an activating and investive welfare state. Here, the crisis serves to legitimise policies that consist of replacing social rights with individual responsibilities. Against this background, this paper aims to identify recent developments in German youth policy, focusing on child and youth welfare. First, the structure of youth policy in Germany is briefly outlined and contextualised in a comparative perspective, with reference to the model of life course regimes. Second, recent reforms in German child and youth welfare services are discussed before the backdrop of three dominant discourses: education, prevention/control, and economisation. The following section illustrates how these trends have affected the field of youth work. Finally, we discuss the extent that current trends can be interpreted as a regime or pathway shift towards a more liberal model of child and youth welfare in Germany.

2. Youth policy in Germany

Understanding youth policy in Germany first requires considering the federal structure that determines how public competencies are divided between the national level, the federal states, and the municipalities (not to forget the increasing role of the suprastatal level of the EU or OECD). With regard to children and young people, competencies are divided as follows:

- **Formal education** is a competence of the federal states (in fact, there are 16 different school systems in Germany), although both the national ministry of education and research and the municipalities have currently gained influence. Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Compulsory education in Germany is rather selective as differentiated tracking begins at the age of 10, leading to specific qualifications and thus unequal access to vocational training and/or higher education.
- **Employment** is a national competence that cooperates with the local branches of the centralised Employment Agency. For young people, this includes the provision of career guidance, the mediation between school leavers and training providers as well as the funding of pre-vocational training schemes and job centres for young adults up to the age of 25.
- **Youth welfare services** are regulated by a national law, the Child and Youth Welfare Act (‘Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz’, from 1991), which is implemented and funded by municipalities. The national level is also responsible for quality assurance and monitoring. It covers childhood (0–14 years), youth (14–18 years), and young adulthood (18–27 years).

In the following, we will outline the structure of children and youth welfare services as the central branch of youth policy. The Child and Youth Welfare Act from 1991 represents a rather unique framework as it comprises a larger range of tasks, services, and activities than most other EU member states, including:

- **Childcare** (‘Kindertagesbetreuung’) currently being expanded to provide places for newborns and children up to the age of 3. This service is partly subsidised, while the parents’ contributions are based on their income.
- **Youth work** (‘Jugendarbeit’) is divided into ‘open’ youth work (e.g. clubs or centres addressing the entire youth population of a neighbourhood), ‘associative’ youth
work providing theme- or group-specific activities (e.g. scouts and church-related youth groups), and ‘mobile’ youth work (e.g. outreach measures).

- **Youth social work** (‘Jugendsozialarbeit’) covers selective measures with regard to social integration for young people categorised as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘at risk’ in the realm of school, training, housing, or labour market integration.

- **Public care** (residential and foster care, ‘Hilfen zur Erziehung’) ranges from preventative models of family assistance, social group work or day care to foster care in families, and residential care primarily organised in small groups with a family-like everyday life structure.

- Other cross-cutting tasks organised in the Act include child protection, work with young offenders, adoption, and educational counselling for parents.

An important recent change in the institutional framework of growing up in Germany has been the introduction of all-day school, which was implemented in response to the poor performance of German pupils and students in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and to the fact that school achievement is far more dependent on social origin than in other OECD countries (cf. OECD, 2001). The extension of the traditional half-day model has had implications in terms of new tasks for schools such as offering lunch, support for homework as well as the provision of non-formal learning. Schools have responded to this by increasing cooperation with external actors, ranging from voluntary staff and sports associations to child and youth welfare (Amos, Parreira do Amaral, & Treptow, 2012; Steiner, Arnoldt, & Fischer, 2011).

Child and youth welfare in Germany can be located somewhere in the middle of the continuum between cross-sectoral and specialised youth policy (cf. European Commission, 2001; IARD, 2001), while the term ‘youth policy’ has only a marginal role as it is limited to national pilot programmes and youth councils at the local level (cf. Hornstein, 1999). With the exception of childcare, family education (‘Familienbildung’), and youth work, child and youth welfare is compensatory and subsidiary depending on the evidence that socialisation in the family or at school is at risk. Key concepts involved in regulating access to support, such as ‘disadvantage’ and ‘child well-being at risk’ (‘Kindeswohlgefährdung’), represent individualised and deficit-oriented categories requiring assessment and diagnosis of each individual case.

This highlights a series of contradictions in the German Child and Youth Welfare Act. On the one hand, the Act is inspired by the idea of providing services for children, young people, and their families, while on the other, the term ‘Jugendhilfe’ (literally ‘youth aid’ or ‘youth assistance’) reflects a historical path of dependency in a model that considers children and young people primarily as vulnerable rather than as citizens with their own interests and rights. Paragraph 1 of the Act states that children and young people have the right to be supported in their individual and social development. In most cases, however, it is not the youth themselves but their parents who are eligible to request assistance. Although participation is one of the key principles formulated in the Act, it is limited by the conditional addendum ‘depending on their development’ and even more so in practice.

The professionalisation of child and youth welfare has been strongly influenced by the discipline of Social Pedagogy (cf. Kornbeck & Rosendal Jensen, 2009), which deals explicitly with these contradictions in research and theory. The concept of ‘service and user orientation’ (‘Dienstleistungsorientierung’; Otto & Schaarschuch, 1999) stems from the assumption that person-centred services require a co-production between users and professionals and thereby imply a participatory relationship. Even more influential for the professionalisation of child and youth welfare has been the concept ‘life-world
orientation’ (‘Lebensweltorientierung’; cf. Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009), which relies on an interactionist understanding of social reality that implies that it is constantly negotiated and constructed. Professional support therefore needs to recognise and respect individuals’ orientations and routines in coping with their everyday life. Both concepts imply a critical stance against diagnostic assessment but advocate basing professional support on intersubjective recognition and negotiation. More recently, the work of Foucault has also been referred to in order to establish a critical analysis of the aspects of control and normalisation in social work in general and child and youth welfare in particular (cf. Kessl, 2009). The different approaches share the insight that ‘critical reflexivity’ is an essential principle of professional practice.

In order to contextualise structures and debates about child and youth welfare, it is also important to take the specific configuration of the German child and youth welfare tradition into account. Here, we draw on the comparative model of life course regimes (Walther, 2011). This concept refers to social configurations of socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors that structure individual life course trajectories and have departed from comparative welfare analysis of varying access to institutional support. Esping-Andersen’s (1990) model of ‘welfare regimes’ has served as a reference point for comparative research on young people’s transition from school to work (Walther, 2006), models of youth policy (IARD, 2001; Loncle, Cuconato, Muniglia, & Walther, 2012) as well as of constellations of social work professionalisation (Lorenz, 2006). All these studies distinguish four regime types in (Western) Europe: a universalist regime in the Nordic countries where children and young people enjoy individual social rights; a liberal regime in the Anglo-Saxon countries characterised by a residual safety net and heavy control mechanisms; a conservative or employment-centred regime in continental countries where social rights vary according to family and employment status; and a sub-protective or familistic regime in Southern Europe characterised by a structural deficit in welfare and social services.

Germany is classified as a conservative and employment-centred regime. This means that access to social security depends on family and employment status rather than on citizenship. Most young people under 27 who have not yet contributed to the social insurance system are excluded and therefore depend on their families or on the social benefits allocated to the family. Differentiation of social security entitlements corresponds to a segmented labour market that is reproduced by the above-mentioned selective differentiation and standardisation of education and training. For child and youth welfare, this is reflected in an orientation towards securing socialisation that leads people to a ‘normal’ life course implying the dominance of protective over participatory rights and mechanisms (cf. IARD, 2001; Loncle et al., 2012). This configuration is secured by the corporatist structure of the welfare ‘subsidiarity’: publicly funded services are delivered by non-statal welfare agencies connected to social milieus such as the churches, the Red Cross, or the Labour Movement, which are referred to as ‘free providers’ (‘freie Träger’).

In recent years, this constellation of child and youth welfare has been challenged not only by the introduction of all-day schooling but also by other reforms that have contributed to what might be interpreted as a paradigm shift, which is illustrated below.

3. Continuity and change in the German child and youth welfare

In the following section, we argue that current changes and reforms are economic in nature, such as financial cuts or shifting budgets between different areas of child and youth welfare, but are also combined with a shift towards investment, prevention, and control,
thereby reflecting the ideology of an ‘enabling’ or ‘activating’ welfare state (cf. van Berkel, de Graaf, & Sirovatka, 2011).

Child and youth welfare statistics show an overall positive trend of increasing expenditures and employment. However, this general statement requires differentiation: while funding for childcare and school-related youth social work is increasing, it is declining for open youth work and residential and foster care (cf. Pothmann, 2012). It is important to note that there are immense regional differences, especially between Western and Eastern Germany (cf. Fuchs-Rechlin & Rauschenbach, 2012, p. 2).

**Staff:** since the 1990s, the number of employees have increased (from 509,924 in 1998 to 638,570 in 2010–2011), which is much greater than the effective volume of work in terms of full-time equivalents (from 421,687 in 1998 to 497,033 in 2010–2011) due to a rise in part-time employment (Fuchs-Rechlin & Rauschenbach, 2012, p. 2). This picture can be further qualified by illustrating the significant investment in childcare resulting in stable employment or even staff shortages in this sector, while, in the context of public care, services for young people with disabilities and especially in youth work employment has declined. In youth work, employment in terms of full-time equivalents decreased by 40% between 1998 and 2006, which was accompanied by an increased number of fixed-term contracts (cf. Schmitt, 2011, pp. 23–24). Additionally, professional staff is replaced by volunteers to the degree that between 2002 and 2006, the number of youth centres without professional staff has increased by 30% (Pothmann, 2008, p. 5). This trend towards de-professionalisation is evident not only in youth work but also in youth social work or public care largely as a result of economic restrictions as well as different political interests and focuses.

**Expenditures:** according to child and youth welfare statistics between 1992 and 2008, the expenses per every young person under 27 have increased by 40% (Rauschenbach, 2010, p. 27), a trend that is still unfolding today (cf. Schilling, 2012, p. 5). However, it is important to note that this effect does not apply to the entire child and youth welfare sector, as it is only true for distinctive areas. The biggest and still increasing share of the budget goes to childcare (57.9%) while public care accounts for 26.1% and youth work for 5.5% (compared to 7.3% in 1998). Statistics also reflect the current policy focus on child protection. Between 2009 and 2010, the expenditure in this sector increased by 13.5%, a much greater rate of increase than the amount recorded for other areas (9.9% in childcare, 4.7% in public care, and 0.6% in youth work; Schilling, 2012, p. 6).

With regard to the economic aspect of child and youth welfare, it is important to consider that – in the framework of subsidiarity – most funding comes from municipalities, which in recent decades have been affected by an increased number of tasks and decreased access to resources (mainly due to policies of reducing local taxes). In the period between 2002 and 2007, municipalities contributed 70% of the expenses, while federal states provided 29%, and the national level accounted for 1%. At the same time, services are increasingly funded on a project basis from other funding sources such as the European Social Fund (Schilling, 2011, p. 73). The municipal expenses for child and youth welfare have increased by 65% between 1992 and 2007 (compared to increased overall spending of 32%) arriving at 11% of overall municipal expenses in 2007 (Schilling, 2011, p. 74). This growth can largely be attributed to the expansion of childcare and child and youth welfare provision in the form of all-day schooling. As such, municipalities seek to secure influence in the knowledge society whereby importance and funding are shifting from welfare towards education. However, cuts in other areas of child and youth welfare resulting from these shifts are legitimised by external constraints as the following bulletin from the German Association of Municipalities states:
In 2010, the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis are becoming more noticeable. Revenues are collapsing while expenditures for social services are rising more and more rapidly. Without financial scope, municipal social policy is limited to a mere repair system. (Deutscher Städtetag, 2012, pp. 1–2)

The statistical changes documented above can be considered elements of an ‘investive’ turn in child and youth welfare in the sense that the state, as a preventive measure, is addressing more children at a younger age (Olk, 2009). The apparent ‘normalisation’ of child and youth welfare, as it moves away from merely addressing disadvantaged children and young people, however, requires differentiation: the increase in childcare seeks to improve the possibilities of reconciling work and family, and at the same time, it aims to include a higher number of children from disadvantaged families – especially families with a migration background – in order to improve their preparation for school, for instance in terms of language skills. The implementation of all-day schooling requires the integration of new measures and services into a school whereby child and youth welfare has become the school’s regular cooperation partner, although this primarily occurs in more deprived areas and at the lowest track of secondary education (‘Hauptschule’) that is mostly attended by children from disadvantaged families and families with a migration background.

Here, three discourses in politics, practice, and research that seem to be separate entities at first glance turn out to be closely interconnected: the discourse of education (‘Bildung’), the discourse of prevention and control, and the discourse of economisation.

The expansion of childcare and all-day schooling reflect the discourse of education, which has held a dominant role since the publication of the first PISA study in 2001. This discourse is contradictory as it underlines the social conditions of school success and suggests increased social support and non-formal learning in relation to school. At the same time, education is interpreted more and more explicitly in terms of human capital and has replaced normative reflection on what young people should learn through skills and knowledge towards an emphasis on measurable learning (cf. Olk, 2009). For child and youth welfare, this implies increased pressure to prove its effectiveness with regard to children and young people’s competence development and school performance in order to prevent a further shift of funding towards school-related services and to resist increased competition with other actors who offer non-formal learning (Otto, Polutta, & Ziegler, 2008).

Fuchs-Rechlin and Rauschenbach (2012, p. 4) have drawn attention to the fact that higher investment in childcare as well as child protection manifests an increased child orientation at the risk that youth as a target group is increasingly neglected. This shift towards early investment is referred to and justified in terms of prevention. In the context of an activating welfare state, early investment is considered more efficient than other forms of social benefits and services (cf. Olk, 2009). However, when compared to a model of general prevention aimed at improving structural aspects of life conditions, prevention takes on a greater selective connotation with an increasing emphasis on control (Lutz, 2010, p. 37). Recently, it is not only the media that has begun to interpret ‘child protection’ as a call for massive intervention in (disadvantaged) families’ lives. Furthermore, an amendment to the Child and Youth Welfare Act has removed formal barriers for control and intervention. Merchel (2011, p. 120) argues that present notions of prevention primarily represent forms of control at an earlier stage, including early assessment of competencies and behaviour.

A third line of discourse refers to the economisation of the social (Buestrich & Wohlfahrt, 2008, p. 17) and to the emergence of fiscal and managerial mechanisms in child and youth welfare as a result of both limited resources at local level and the logic of
investive welfare. For example, legislative changes have introduced contract management between municipalities and providers thereby reinforcing competition as well as leading to increasingly precarious work conditions (cf. Fischer, 2011). Another effect of this development was some federal states’ attempts to replace individual entitlements for children, young people, and their parents for support by requiring municipalities to provide an ‘adequate’ range of services – with a focus on services connected to the school – in order to reduce costs (cf. Langer, 2012).

With these discourses in mind, Fischer (2011, p. 142) identifies that the current paradigm shift and restructuring within the child and youth welfare sector result from economic pressure on social welfare providers on the one hand and the activating welfare policy on the other. On the basis of the findings from a study of municipal youth welfare authorities, he concludes that despite the described shifts within social welfare, child and youth services are still operating within their traditional ‘corporatist’ manner, despite the fact that the political context has changed. This reveals the importance of carefully distinguishing between current policy discourses and actual changes in child and youth welfare and the impact of historically grown pathways of social welfare provision and ways of supporting young people in the field itself. Both current discourses and actual change mechanisms of path dependency are effective for contemporary child and youth welfare. In fact, they merge and create hybrid normalities between the old and new conditions of growing up in Germany. On the one hand, activation breaks with principles that have been considered self-evident for a long time, while on the other, activation has to start with the growing and existing corporatist structures of child and youth welfare (cf. Walther, 2012). The following section analyses these tensions in the field of (open) youth work, an area of child and youth welfare that has traditionally considered beginning with young people’s interests and participation as one of its basic working principles.

4. Recent trends in youth work

The overview of statistical trends in child and youth welfare presented in the previous section reveals that open youth work has been particularly concerned with shifts in funding towards childcare and school-oriented social work, which is reflected by a decrease in staff numbers and full-time equivalents as well as by de-professionalisation. One reason for this is that – in contrast to childcare or public care – the status of youth work in the Child and Youth Welfare Act is that of a discretionary provision and is therefore more likely to be affected by budget cuts. Another reason, however, is found in the structural changes that stemmed from the introduction of all-day schooling which have subjected leisure activities and non-formal education to the scrutiny of their contributions to competence building and human capital (cf. Amos et al., 2012). Accordingly, in many municipalities, staff have been moved from youth work into areas such as childcare and school social work. Apart from this, however, indirect effects such as changes to services and offers within (open) youth work itself are also present.

Before discussing the changes in ‘open’ youth work in depth, it is important to outline the recent professionalisation of youth work in Germany (for an overview of different histories of youth work in Europe, see Verschelden, Cousséé, van de Walle, & Williamson, 2010). Following the Second World War, the Allies introduced youth work activities as a means of democratic education for the younger generation in Germany. After turning into a means to get disadvantaged youth off the streets in the 1960s, the idea of youth work as an infrastructure for young people representing their rights to participate in a democratic society were reinforced in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Böhnisch & Münchmeier, 1999). This is
reflected in such theoretical concepts as emancipatory or interest-oriented youth work and life-world orientation that lead to an understanding of youth work as a pedagogical measure that has provided social space and is itself embedded in social space. The ‘spatial turn’ especially in ‘open’ youth work reflected both the idea of a provision for all young people in a municipality or neighbourhood and the pedagogical assumption that young people develop their identities by appropriating social space by filling it with meaning and concrete relationships (cf. Spatschek, 2010; Thole, 2000, pp. 225–256). Consequently, youth work has developed self-understanding as an enabling space that is ‘beyond obligation and expectation where young people can find their own roles and identities and develop [their] own values and attitudes’ (Rauschenbach et al., 2010, p. 213).

As a result of this professional development and the corresponding theoretical perspective, youth work was traditionally distinct from the school. The definition ‘extracurricular education’ (‘außerschulische Jugendbildung’) not only reflects the function of closing the ‘socialisation gap’ that had been caused by the traditional structure of half-day school (cf. Merchel, 2005, pp. 190–192), but also includes a move towards interpreting education (‘Bildung’) in terms of emancipation, personal development, and social learning as opposed to school education that focuses on measurable knowledge and skills (Ahmed & Höblich, 2010).

The consensus that open youth work is an important educational space that enables the social and cultural integration of children and youth in terms of both participation and identity that has existed since the 1970s is apparently being reinterpreted in the context of all-day schooling. In a temporal and spatial sense, not only is open youth work constrained to adapt its activities and time schedules to the schedule of the school and children and youth’s increasingly limited leisure time, but it is also expected more often that municipalities cooperate with schools to facilitate an all-day programme. This implies providing afternoon activities within the social space of the school – instead of the youth centre – and complying with the school’s social norms and disciplinary rules as well as its learning concept (cf. Merchel, 2005, p. 195). At the same time, there is evidence that external pressure affects how youth work interprets its own tasks. Even in genuine youth work contexts, leisure activities and the traditional ‘open’ approach are being gradually replaced in favour of school-related tasks such as assistance with homework or the provision (and supervision) of lunch (cf. May, 2011; Schmitt, 2011).

Most providers of child and youth welfare in general and open youth work in particular are involved in partnerships with schools aimed at a joint long-term conceptualisation of all-day education. Nevertheless, there is a lack of structural integration of external partners in the organisation of all-day school (cf. Arnoldt & Züchner, 2008, p. 643). Cooperation is primarily dominated by schools, while youth work and its potential are not fully recognised. The lack of ‘cooperation on equal footing’, as a result of the discrepancy between school-oriented and youth-work-oriented organisational goals, cultures, and patterns of action, is also evidence of the power differentials that are constant features in publications about the cooperation between schools and youth work (cf. Merchel, 2005, p. 182). This is a challenge for the fundamental principles of youth work, such as openness, voluntary access, and participation, which contrast school-based standardisation, assessment, and selection and can therefore only be realised in the relative autonomy of youth work (cf. Deinet, 2011). In some federal states, however, all-day schooling is largely facilitated by volunteers, whereby professional youth work is being made doubly redundant: young people are being kept in school, while non-professionals offer non-formal education (cf. Merchel, 2005, p. 197; Rauschenbach et al., 2010, pp. 224–231).
To date, empirical evidence on the effects of all-day schooling is limited and rather ambivalent. In the main evaluative study, the findings focus on school achievement and social behaviour with effects varying for each single school while reproducing a narrow, school-oriented concept of education (cf. Fischer & Brümmer, 2012; Steiner et al., 2011). Despite the fact that there is a lack of empirical knowledge on the effects of youth work in the context of all-day schooling (cf. Coelen, 2008), there are indeed side effects for the users of open youth work who are primarily children and youth from disadvantaged social contexts (whereas middle-class youth is over-represented in associative youth work; cf. Prein & van Santen, 2012, p. 76). The decline of open youth work and its increasing instrumentalisation for all-day schooling implies that the social spaces in which these children and young people may experience processes of participation and emancipation are increasingly limited. As such, cooperation with all-day schools not only impacts the professional and institutional landscape of open youth work but also reflects changes in the reproduction of social inequality. Forms of compensatory education and support in school are increased, while spaces and opportunities for self-determined experimentation and development are reduced.

The externally imposed changes have resulted in the emergence of a significant academic and professional discourse about youth work that is concerned with reflecting these developments and discussing new legitimisation strategies without omitting the particular logic of open youth work. It is characterised by the struggle against being subsumed under the prevailing educational logic of selection and outcome measurement, and the limited power of youth work in this discourse arena.

Youth work has increasingly sought to place itself as an actor in the new educational discourse and to complement the focus on school-based outcome assessment (cf. Lindner, Thole, & Weber, 2003). A primary concern has been positioning youth work as an actor and as a context for non-formal learning that complements the narrow, standardised, and cognitive concept of education prevalent in schools by developing a more holistic concept of education. The focus lies on social, emotional, and aesthetic development that corresponds to a holistic approach to education that considers it to be personal development and an assignment in societal integration in a comprehensive sense (cf. Deinet, 2011; Merchel, 2005).

At the same time, youth work has – partly – accepted the challenge of redefining its function in the knowledge society. Rauschenbach (2009) refers to ‘everyday-life education’ (‘Alltagsbildung’) as a cluster of informally and non-formally acquired competences that serves to stimulate public recognition of the otherwise unknown and unseen effects of youth work (cf. Düx, Prein, Sass, & Tully, 2009; Rauschenbach et al., 2010). While many scholars would indeed argue that it is impossible to standardise and problematic to measure the non-formal learning offered by youth work, calls to translate informal and non-formal learning into competencies and to develop instruments to assess these competencies have increased in recent years. As such, youth work risks reproducing the dominant outcome-orientation logic, which would result in reducing public education to measurable skills and knowledge instead of youth work’s former rejection of such logic of standardisation. There are also, however, calls from both practice and research to oppose such compliance with the expectation that youth work should prove its social (and economic) usefulness by means of measurable outcome indicators, as they argue that a quantified assessment of non-formal competences accelerates the instrumentalisation of youth work. Authors such as Scherr (2003), Winkler (2006), or Müller (2010) insist that the meaning of education is indeed personal development (‘Subjektbildung’), which requires access to strictly participatory and non-instrumentalised spaces as a fundamental
right of young people in individualised and democratic societies, and that this has been realised in open youth work more than in any other educational field.

In sum, the decline and stagnation of funding and employment as well as the increased cooperation with school in the context of all-day schooling can be interpreted as signs of a fundamental long-term change in the field of youth work. This trend undermines the autonomy of youth work as an independent sphere of socialisation for children and young people while introducing mechanisms of outcome orientation and an ideology of human capital building. In fact, the educational turn in youth work can be interpreted as a shift from general or primary prevention towards selective or secondary prevention; youth work has moved from its existence as an infrastructure for all young people towards a form of youth social work – a ‘social fire brigade’ concentrating on compensatory education for the so-called ‘disadvantaged’ youth (cf. Müller, 2010).

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we have attempted to reconstruct recent developments in German youth policy, focusing on child and youth welfare, particularly the field of open youth work. It has revealed that although neither expenditure nor employment have been reduced, noticeable shifts between the different fields of child and youth welfare are evident. On the one hand, childcare and school-related measures are growing, while public care and especially youth work are decreasing and/or stagnating, and on the other hand, youth work has been particularly challenged by the increased expectation of cooperation with schools within the framework of all-day schooling. It seems that a shift has occurred, as policy moves from providing infrastructure for all children and young people towards compensatory and normalising measures for youth at risk. This paper contextualises these shifts with regard to three dominant discourses in child and youth welfare, which are related to education, prevention/control, and the economisation of the social. However, the political legitimation of respective cuts tends to refer to the economic crisis rather than a fundamental policy change.

Following Prein & van Santen (2012), the way in which social welfare constructs and addresses social problems and regulates access to respective measures affects the reproduction of social inequality. They highlight that ‘open’ youth work, which implies open and unconditional access, is primarily used by young people from families with limited educational and financial resources, including youth who come from a migration background. In contrast, associative youth work structured by membership and recruitment from specific civic or religious milieus attracts more middle-class young people who tend to have a higher educational level, and thus tend to be more selective. The trends outlined above suggest that, in contrast to ‘normalisation’ of child and youth welfare, rhetoric provisions that adhered to a universalistic logic, as is the case for open youth work, are currently under pressure.

What does this mean in terms of a general assessment of these recent changes? Does this represent a paradigm shift? Or is it merely evidence that German child and youth welfare continues to represent the corporatist and protective configuration of youth policy implied by a conservative welfare state, that is an employment-centred life course regime? On the one hand, this trend can, and has to be, interpreted in terms of a neoliberal agenda of investment in human capital, which is the core of the active or activating welfare state. However, on the other hand, the history of youth work indicates that there have constantly been moves between general youth work and youth social work, that is between a focus on participation or emancipation, a focus on the integration of youth at risk, or, as Cousséé
The introduction of activating welfare policy represents a fragmented governance model that combines aspects of path dependency from the conservative model with (neo) liberal traits. This confirms the findings of comparative research on young people’s transitions from school to work that reveal the simultaneity of convergence and divergence in policies for disadvantaged youth. Inasmuch as the welfare models represent growing and deeply rooted configurations of social integration and normality, societies cannot simply leave regime pathways. The fact that budget shifts and cuts are legitimised by reference to ‘the crisis’ may be interpreted as a sign that policies cannot simply break with traditional norms and procedures. This also reveals that a comparative analysis can further contribute to our understanding of changes in youth policies.

Notes
1. See http://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat
2. See http://www.kinder-jugendhilfe.info/en_kjhg/cgi-bin/showcontent.asp?ThemaID=0

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