

Child and Youth Travel: Essential and Valuable for Everyone!

A position paper of the BundesForum Kinder- und Jugendreisen (German Federal Forum for Child and Youth Travel) on the educational value of child and youth travel in Germany

1 Introduction

Child and youth travel is and will always be an important component of non-formal and informal education in a pluralistic society. In this form, it offers unique and outstanding opportunities for young people to explore and shape new behavioural patterns and skills while they are away from their normal, everyday surroundings (parents, school, peer groups etc.). Accordingly, youth travel makes an important contribution to personal development, identity formation and the process of setting (life) goals.

For various reasons (financial, cultural and family-related), not all children and young people in Germany are able to participate in travel programmes. The question of to what extent these children and young people are disadvantaged and what effects this has on their (educational) careers has yet to be answered. One possible explanation for the lack of research in this area is that, in society's perception, child and youth travel is more often associated with "fun and entertainment" and no longer considered to be an important experience in a young person's biography.

In this position paper, we will explain why child and youth travel, with its wide variety of programmes and services, is so much more than pure "fun and entertainment", and should instead be viewed completely justifiably as an important educational opportunity – child and youth travel has educational value!

2 Child and youth travel programmes as settings for non-formal and informal education

The term "education" describes a person's development into an autonomous and self-aware individual. This process occurs through the acquisition of knowledge and cultural skills and the exploration of oneself and one's environment.¹ Education, in the purest sense of the word, does not pursue a specific aim. In some areas of travel, e.g. a language stay, education can also be associated with certain learning objectives. However, during travel programmes that are not planned with a specific objective in mind, educational processes that promote general personal development and maturity generally unfold in the non-formal and informal area.

In this context, formal education is understood as "the entire hierarchically structured system of school, professional training and university education organised in successive stages [...] with a largely compulsory character and unavoidable certificates of achievement."² Accordingly, places where formal education occurs are institutions that pursue pre-determined educational objectives and at which the educational process is organised in accordance with established standards and, in part, legal requirements.

¹ See Ricken, 2007, p. 18.

² Statement by the Federal Youth Panel (Bundesjugendkuratorium) December 2001, p. 5.

Non-formal education,³ by contrast, can be understood as “any form of organised education and training that is generally voluntary in nature and has the character of an offer.”⁴

Non-formal education takes place in settings that do not pursue educational objectives in institutionalised form. Unlike formal education, the learners’ participation is always voluntary, and they have an influence on the design and planning of the processes.

Informal education “is understood as all (conscious or unconscious) forms of practised learning that occur outside of formalised educational institutions and educational events [...]”⁵ In this sense, informal education (or informal learning) can occur at any time of day in the learners’ free time, in their peer group or family. According to the definitions quoted above, the difference lies in the extent to which the learning is intentional (non-formal) or unintentional (informal).

In recent years, the subject of non-formal and informal education has become significantly more important in the educational discourse. In response to the results of the OECD’s PISA studies, there has been a considerable increase in interest in the issue of where young people are being “educated”. Based on the interpretation of the results, it is clear that, in German schools, the required knowledge and skills are not being taught in a manner that is internationally competitive. This situation has also deflected attention towards all extracurricular learning processes. As a result, the interest in non-formal (extracurricular) educational opportunities has increased significantly. Since then, the benefits of extracurricular learning have essentially been taken into account to a greater extent in pedagogical considerations. These learning arenas are referred to as “non-formal” or “informal”.

Travel has always had an informal educational character. In addition, many youth travel services fall into the category of intentionally planned educational travel programmes (non-formal education).

In order to describe why child and youth travel is a setting in which the conditions for non-formal and informal learning are especially favourable, it is helpful to refer to the five dimensions of non-formal and informal education that were outlined in the “Conceptual Basis for a National Education Report”⁶:

1. Taking on responsibility
2. Experiencing the impact of one’s own actions
3. Designing and organising spaces and making them one’s own
4. Adopting and shaping cultural practices
5. Coping with the challenges of

In the context of child and youth travel, young people are put into situations in which they have to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. In “normal” everyday situations, it is often the parents who determine how the young person’s time is to be organised and what decisions are made. Far away from these everyday situations, without their parents nearby and in the open-ended situation of the travel setting, children and young people have to make decisions independently, organise their days and take responsibility for their actions. In child and youth travel settings, young people often have to perform certain tasks (such as helping with meal preparation etc.). In this context, they must assume responsibility for things that are often done for them at home. In a group of travellers, young people can experiment with new roles and patterns of behaviour, because they are outside of their familiar surroundings. Through the group structure, direct feedback processes occur, and young people experience the impact of their own actions. In travel situations, new spaces are occupied, be it a camp site, a youth hostel, a hotel etc. These spaces must be explored by the children and young people and transformed into their temporary living space. By travelling to a different cultural space, young people are able to not

³ Often also referred to as “non-formal learning”.

⁴ Statement by the Federal Youth Panel (Bundesjugendkuratorium) December 2001, p. 5.

⁵ German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), 2004, p. 29.

⁶ German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), 2004, pp. 24-25.

only reflect on their own cultural practices but also learn about and adopt those of others. On the whole, child and youth travel represents a setting in which children and young people have to cope independently with the challenges of life, away from their families and their familiar surroundings.

Travel takes people away from their everyday lives, “reactivating the sensibility of the traveller and creating sensitivities that make it possible to experience the present-day world in its presence.”⁷ If we succeed in creating moments like these in the context of travel, then “it has something to do with education, because it has effects on our relationships to the world, to the community and to ourselves.”⁸

In a historical sense, youth travel programmes have developed from educational trips motivated primarily by career plans to holiday travel in the context of tourism.

Against this historical and social background, learning processes take place that determine the actions and relationships of young travellers and that hinder or promote the acquisition of social skills. In their dealings with people while travelling, [young people] must learn not to take themselves more seriously than others, i.e. to put their personal issues into perspective in order to adapt their behaviour to the requirements of the environment. The social function of travel and the resulting adaptability of adolescent behaviours justify the attempt to interpret these behaviours from an educational perspective.⁹

Horst Opaschowski, who taught Educational Science at the University of Hamburg for many decades, wrote: “Travel makes a significant contribution to the ‘education’ of the young person.”¹⁰ Opaschowski made references to two educational aspects of travel: first, that it allows for personal encounters with the world, thereby contributing to an understanding of the world, and second, that in every interaction with other cultures and languages, young people are compelled to rethink their own basic attitudes and practice democratic behaviour by living together with young people from the other culture. In his opinion, these are important steps towards the socialisation of individuals who act in a socially and politically responsible manner.¹¹

3 Child and youth travel: definition and classification

3.1 Definition

In the book *Wegweiser Kinder- und Jugendreisepädagogik* (Guidebook for Education through Child and Youth Travel), child and youth travel is defined as

qualified travel programmes for children, adolescents and young adults between the ages of approx. six and 26 with educational guidance and resources that is methodologically supported and led by trained – full- or part-time or volunteer – team members (mentors, guides). The upper age limit is derived from the German Social Code, Book VIII – Child and Youth Services (Sozialgesetzbuch Achtes Buch Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, SGB VIII). Youth travel is organised primarily in groups, and in this context the communal experience is a central component. With the exception of certain cases, like leisure travel on the outskirts of a city, it is generally associated with a change of scenery and with overnight stays at locations away from home.¹²

On the basis of this definition, it can be said that, child and youth travel offers a unique combination of leisure and recreation on the one hand and education and the promotion of social skills on the other. It provides opportunities for young people to have experiences that can shape their lives. The special situation – travelling and being part of a group – opens the door for new experiences in an intensive form.

7 Meder, 1999, p. 72.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 165 f.

10 Ibid., p. 175.

11 Ibid.

12 Drücker, Fuß, Schmitz, 2014, p. 13.

3.2 Legal classification of child and youth travel

Germany's social legislation confirms that child and youth travel is educationally relevant and not simply "fun and entertainment".

Section 11, Paragraph 1 of the German Social Code, Book VIII – Child and Youth Services (SGB VIII, Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz) reads as follows:

Young people must have access to the youth work services that are required for the promotion of their development. These services should appeal to the interests of young people and be jointly agreed upon and shaped by them, enable them to become self-determined individuals and encourage and guide them to social responsibility and social commitment.

In the subsequent list, "child and youth recreation" is specified explicitly under number 5 as a priority of youth work.

Following the mandate of designing services to appeal to the interests of young people and involving these young people in the planning and implementation, an especially great variety has developed in the field of child and youth travel, in terms of not only the programmes and formats, but also the service providers (see below).

The corresponding programmes are also important for families, as described in Section 16, Paragraph 2 SGB VIII:

Services for the promotion of education in the family are in particular family-education programmes that address the needs and interests, as well as the experiences, of families in various circumstances and educational situations, that strengthen families in their health literacy, that make families better able to support the work of educational institutions and forms of self-help and neighbourhood assistance and that prepare young people for marriage, partnership and living together with children [...].

Child and youth travel, with its variety of programmes for the whole family, accomplishes this. Particularly educational institutions and youth hostels often offer special family programmes; in times in which social skills in families must be strengthened, these services become even more relevant.

In the context of youth social-work services in accordance with Section 13, Paragraph 1 SGB VIII, child and youth travel can promote school education, vocational training, integration into the labour market and the social integration of young people as an important means of compensating for social disadvantages or for overcoming individual impairments.

Child and youth travel also offers a wide spectrum of extracurricular learning experiences in this context, e.g. in the form of individual holiday trips, language stays and experiential education programmes, as well as programmes in the area of school and class trips.

School and class trips represent the legal basis for child and youth travel as a direct complement to formal education. In numerous state decrees on school trips, youth travel is described as an important element of extracurricular learning, and its implementation is at least recommended, or in some federal states even mandatory.

3.3 Financing

In general, it is the responsibility of the child or young person, or their family, to cover all, or at least most, of the expenses associated with their participation in child or youth travel programmes.

In spite of the aforementioned legal basis, states have not managed to ensure that all young people are able to participate in child and youth travel programmes through their own resources. At the municipal level, child and youth travel programmes are often treated inappropriately as voluntary benefits, because although they are defined as mandatory tasks in accordance with Section 11 SGB VIII, no amount is specified. In recent years the funding for such programmes in many municipalities has been reduced or even eliminated. At the state level the percentage of the total child and youth work funding that is dedicated to child and youth travel programmes has been decreasing for many years. At the national level practically all funding in this area is used for

conceptual tasks. The government's withdrawal from its responsibility and the reduction or elimination of subsidies for child and youth recreation measures inevitably leads to an increase in participation fees. It goes without saying that this situation has a direct impact on the ability of certain children and young people to participate.

Formally, Section 90, Paragraph 2 SGB VIII offers additional financial support with the possibility of having the competent youth welfare office cover participation fees. However, this option is often not applied in practice owing to bureaucratic obstacles. In addition, different decisions are often made by the state or even the municipality, or requests are simply forwarded to another office, like the employment agency. The "Benefits for Education and Participation" ("Leistungen für Bildung und Teilhabe") provided by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) also do not provide an adequate solution for guaranteeing that all children and young people are able to take part in travel programmes. Although in the Education and Participation package it is possible to apply for funding for participation in educational programmes, the maximum amount available in this context is €180.00 per child per year, and these funds may also be required for other cultural and educational programmes. In this sense, child and youth travel programmes are forced to compete with these other opportunities.

3.4 Diversity of programmes and providers

In accordance with the guidelines of SGB VIII, the implementation of child and youth recreation measures "should appeal to the interests of young people and be jointly agreed upon and shaped by them." In order to satisfy these requirements while, at the same time, responding to the existing demands and the interests expressed by the children and young people, a very diverse "youth travel scene" has developed in Germany over the past decades – with respect to not only the programmes and formats, but also the providers and structures.

3.4.1 Diversity of formats and programmes

In the guidebook *Wegweiser Kinder- und Jugendreisepädagogik*, the BundesForum Kinder- und Jugendreisen writes:

In this sense, the term [child and youth travel] is associated with a variety of activities, including holiday programmes, camps, international youth exchanges, visits to cities, trips to memorial sites, youth recreation measures, class trips and stays in youth hostels, youth education centres, school outdoor centres, Friends of Nature houses and other youth accommodation sites.¹³

Although the diversity of programmes is already apparent in this short list, it becomes even more evident if we look at the orientations, priorities and themes of the individual programmes. For example, there are language stays, sport camps, experiential education programmes, travel programmes for children and young people with special needs, trips for fixed groups, group programmes for individual travellers, trips within Germany, trips abroad, educational trips and programmes through which children and young people from different countries can meet.

This broad spectrum of programmes is indicative of the extent to which the providers strive to offer all children and young people the widest possible variety of programmes for learning and experiencing new things, thereby supporting their personal and social development. At the same time, it also shows the great need for diverse programmes, because the demand for all of these formats has remained consistently high.

The diversity of programmes also makes it clear that not every programme in the field of child and youth travel is designed to satisfy indicated educational objectives; or in other words, not every programme can be classified as non-formal education. In these cases, where learning is unplanned and incidental, the programmes fall into the category of informal education.

¹³ Drücker, Fuß, Schmitz 2014, p.15.

In total this classification is irrelevant, as, based on a broad definition of education, equally great importance can be attached to both informal and non-formal education. In this sense, child and youth travel is educationally relevant twice over – at both the non-formal and informal levels.

3.4.2 Diversity of structures

The diversity of providers, of their organisational and thematic structures and of the ways in which they position themselves between education and tourism is also characteristic of the provider landscape of child and youth travel.

Child and youth travel programmes are offered by government-funded structures, commercial operators and mixed forms. As a result, they can be either an independent area or embedded in year-round youth work.

Traditionally, holiday programmes have been offered in the context of municipal youth work and youth association work. Many municipalities and nearly all youth associations and youth organisations of charitable associations offer their own holiday programmes. At the same time, a number of non-governmental organizations specialise in the organisation of child and youth travel programmes. The child and youth travel market includes not only non-profit organisations and associations, but also commercial providers and specialist travel agencies, e.g. in the areas of accommodation, educational institutions, school trips, language stays and experiential education programmes.

The increasing complexity of the structures and providers can also be explained by the fact that ever more frequently travel programmes are being organised cooperatively by various partners. Accommodation, educational programmes, recreational activities, travel to and from the destination, on-site support and guidance – it is now quite rare for all of these tasks to be performed exclusively by a single provider.

Various professional associations have been established at national and state levels with the aim of improving quality, exchanging best practice, strengthening cooperation and working together to further develop the field of child and youth travel. The BundesForum Kinder- und Jugendreisen is a network of organisations and associations active throughout Germany. Its members and partners, with their variety of structures, financing and philosophies, work together with the aim of improving the quality and safety of child and youth travel services and guaranteeing that they are safe programmes that offer enriching experiences for all participants.

The cooperation between various organisations creates added value in terms of quality. Child and youth travel has evolved into an important market. According to a study published by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs (BMWi) in the context of its project on child and youth tourism “Zukunftsprojekt Kinder- und Jugendtourismus”, 14.4 million children, adolescents and young adults travel at least once a year, and youth travel in Germany ensures the livelihood of around 550,000 individuals.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Zukunftsprojekt Kinder- und Jugendtourismus, BMWi, 2014.

4 Conclusion: Child and youth travel programmes make a relevant educational contribution to personal development and to society.

Travel programmes for children and young people are settings for informal and non-formal education, where participants can learn with and from other children and young people and develop their skills away from their school and home environments. These programmes not only promote personal development, but also provide unique, formative communal and learning experiences that play an important role later in life, both on the individual and societal level. Child and youth travel programmes with educational guidance and resources offer relaxation and recreation, along with opportunities for participants to be actively involved in the planning and design of the programmes. They promote social and democratic behaviour, inclusion and diversity. Young travellers gain an understanding for and acceptance of different social and national backgrounds and learn about nature, the environment, culture and their preservation.

However, in the context of education through child and youth travel, the primary learning process often does not follow a pre-determined curriculum, but instead is determined by the children and young people independently or as a group. The focus is not only on qualifications that will be applicable in professional contexts, but also on social skills, intercultural learning and community life [...].

Child and youth travel programmes are learning sites for participation, globalisation, intercultural awareness and social skills. Decision-makers in politics, in schools and in child and youth services should be made aware of these programmes – and in particular of the fact that child and youth travel is not a luxury, but a necessity – so that travel opportunities can be made available to as many children and young people as possible.¹⁵

Education in this sense is not designed to achieve an objective or to be applicable in any certain way. Child and youth travel contributes to the education of children and young people. It should be viewed as an end in itself and does not necessarily have to pursue educationally or politically defined goals.

¹⁵ Drücker, Fuß, Schmitz, 2014, p. 15.

Providers in the field of child and youth travel fulfil a mandate of public education!

It is essential that this work be supported and protected!

Therefore, this position paper includes an urgent appeal

to parents and legal guardians:

- Enable your children to take part in youth travel programmes, holiday programmes, camps, language stays and similar travel opportunities!
- At your children's schools, argue for the continued organisation of school and class trips, as well as extracurricular programmes, for the strengthening of the group and every individual!
- Take advantage of the wide variety of tour operators and formats in order to find the appropriate programmes for your children!

to responsible stakeholders and decision-makers in the field of child and youth work:

- Incorporate youth travel as educational opportunities in your programmes!
- Take advantage of the competencies and experience of the many different providers in the implementation of these programmes!
- Contact your municipality in advance to find out about funding opportunities – and if necessary, actively demand this funding in accordance with Section 11 SGB VIII!

to political leaders and government officials:

- Provide sufficient financial support to enable all children and young people to take part in at least one travel programme per year. Youth travel programmes must be accessible to everyone – no one should be left behind owing to access or financial limitations!
- Ensure that school and class trips are an integral part of your schools, and create the necessary framework conditions!

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The BundesForum Kinder- und Jugendreisen e.V. (German Federal Forum for Child and Youth Travel) is a network of associations, bodies and organisations that are active in the field of youth travel throughout Germany.

Their cooperative work is characterised by diversity, open-mindedness, mutual enrichment and equal communication. The aim is the promotion, development and strengthening of child and youth travel.