

# Mobility puzzle - conceptual considerations for the interaction between children and youth travel, international youth work and student exchange

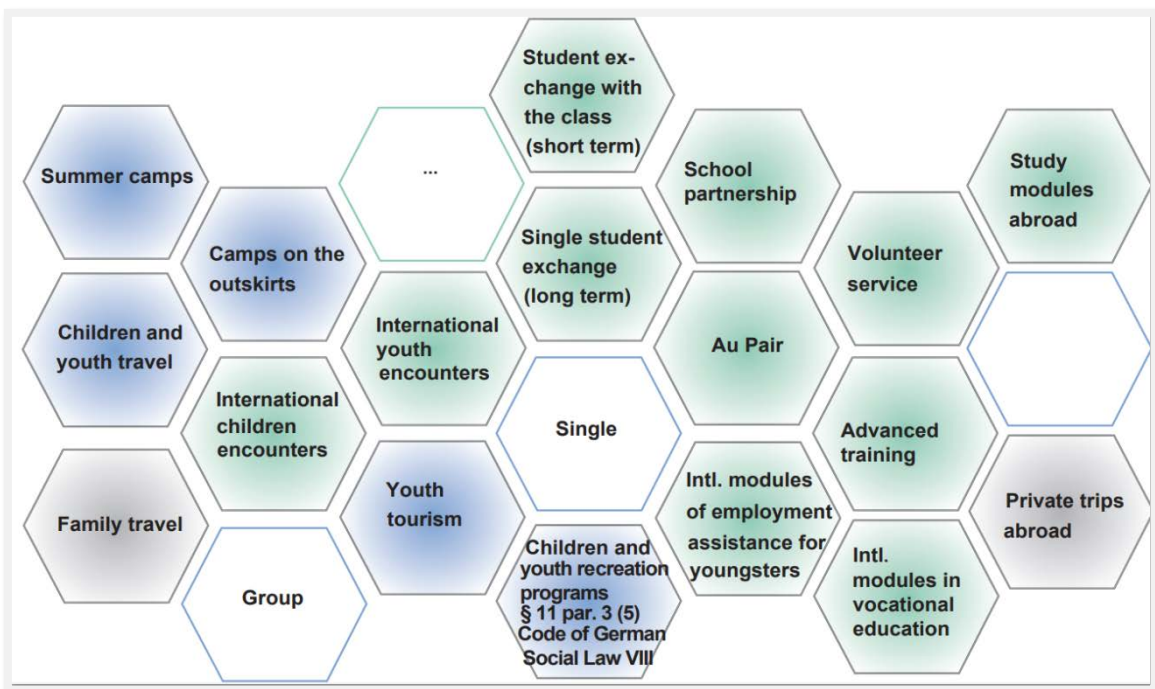
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## Abstract

In this factsheet we will present the approach of the mobility puzzle. It is an attempt to conceive the variety of travel and encounter programs as an overall concept and to interlink them. The background of the mobility puzzle is the demand to give all children and youngsters access to appropriate mobility programs, as well as to increase reachability of disadvantaged target groups.

## The model of the mobility puzzle

The mobility puzzle combines the range of educational children and youth travel programs, student exchanges, international youth work and international youth volunteer service. The field of youth work (including youth associations and youth education) focuses on camps on the outskirts, weekend getaways, summer camps, youth travel abroad and international exchange and encounter programs. In the scholastic context the relevant components of the mobility puzzle are school trips, group or school-related exchange activities, school partnerships, as well as single student exchanges. So far the activities related to travel and to international education are separately existing travel and encounter programs. The responsibility for their financing and conceptual structure is held by different political levels (municipal, regional, national and international) and by various educational working fields: on the one hand, youth work as part of the non-formal education and leisure area and on the other hand the various types of schools in the formal education system.



(Fig. 1: The mobility puzzle. Source: Compiled by the authors)

## **Entrenchment of educational children and youth travel and of international youth work in structures of youth work**

The model of the mobility puzzle allows for a systematic record of the diversity of travel and international encounter programs, which are conducted by schools, institutions of youth work as well as sponsors of educational children and youth travel and international youth work and it can thus be designed as part of a municipal youth and education architecture. Precisely a differentiated range of children and youth travel and encounter programs at the local level and enabling the access to programs at the regional, national and international level will enable to potentially give all children and youngsters access to specific mobility programs in the context of youth work and youth support. Children and youngsters from all social backgrounds and especially those from non-privileged families can be given better access to publicly and/ or privately financed activities by linking and mutual reference of the different travel and encounter programs.

Such a conceptual link requires a sustainable municipal support structure for the wide variety of possible mobility activities, regardless of their respective classification as non-formal or formal respectively independent from the respective financing arrangements. Based on first reflections on "International youth work and education, travel and mobility" (Thimmel 2015) the main research Non-Formal Education (University of Applied Sciences Cologne) in a small research study (2014-2016) in the context of research activities of "Forschung und Praxis im Dialog in der internationalen Jugendarbeit" ("Research and practice in dialogue in international youth work") exemplary worked out, how the various mobility programs are organized, networked and conceptually linked at municipal level (cf. Schäfer 2014). In the following we will take the example of the youth center JUMA, as well as the specialist department for international youth work in Bochum to show how you can implement a network of different travel and encounter programs at municipal level.

### ***Travel and international encounters in the field of open children and youth work***

Institutions of open children and youth work are a convenient provider of travel and encounter programs, as well as a cooperation partner for sponsors of educational children and youth travel and international youth work. Travel and encounter programs constitute an ideal amplification of the manifold program structure of youth centers and are a welcome variation with regard to the often place-bound everyday life in the institutions. The youth center JUMA in Bochum is one of the few institutions we know in the Federal Republic, which have a thematic focus on the area of educational children and youth travel and international youth work. Children and youngsters who frequent the youth center have plenty of options to participate in day and weekend excursions, camps on the outskirts of the city, summer and education camps, as well as international youth exchanges. The participation in smaller travel programs, such as a day or week-end trip, helps to raise the interest of children and youngsters to attend programs of international youth work, student exchanges, or international voluntary service. For many of these youngsters the programs of the JUMA are their first experience in travel and international encounters.

In addition to generally providing mobility programs at local level and giving access to international activities, the respective travel and encounter programs should also relate to each other, especially from the point of view of the youngsters. They build on each other, without creating a hierarchy between the individual programs, neither requiring the participation in a special program in order to be able to attend other programs. That is why we explicitly talk about a "mobility puzzle" and not about "mobility levels". A close link between the single travel and encounter programs, as well as

their grouping to a mobility puzzle are an essential contribution to approach the demand of youth work to make high quality education and leisure activities available to all children and youngsters.

### **Specialist departments for international youth work at municipal level**

The specialist department for international youth work at the youth welfare office in Bochum is financed by the municipality and serves as a point of contact for all young people, young adults (and their families), who are interested in educational children and youth travel and in international youth work. The task is to bundle the already in youth work existing travel and encounter programs, to restructure and to coordinate, to promote the protagonists' networking with (inter)national partners and to accompany and speed up the development of other mobility opportunities in Bochum. To do this, the department provides support and advice for private institutions and individuals in questions of application, financing, funding guidelines, rationales, objectives and implementation of mobility programs. The department also functions as an interface to the school-related international exchange/student exchange and mobility in the framework of vocational training and job-related youth social work. The department is of particular importance when it comes to searching for new partners, communicating with international partners and with respect to the sustainable support of the partnerships.

In order to offer travel and encounter programs within the framework of youth work, it is beneficial to coordinate the travel and encounter programs throughout the city. Such coordination can serve to introduce and connect suitable international partners with a variety of local institutions, as well as to open opportunities for national and international cooperation. Another advantage is that other involved stakeholders do not have to be persuaded of the relevance and benefits of international experiences over and over again, such as schools and training institutions with respect to the exemption of youngsters, or the general importance of activities in the field of non-formal education. However, the announcement of programs stays in the responsibility of the respective institution, in order not to undermine the low-threshold character and the plurality as described by the mobility puzzle.

Appropriate training measures for the full-time and freelance workers in youth work are important to provide permanently high quality travel and encounter programs. The local specialist departments can offer these training measures globally for all institutions. Moreover it is easier to implement programs of educational children and youth travel as well as international youth work, if the children and youth advisory and support service from the municipality establishes and maintains a pool of teamers. The provision of municipal teamers can reduce obstacles for youth work institutions when implementing travel and encounter programs. The development of such a pool should be the shared responsibility of the respective institutions and the respective specialist department - whether in free or municipal sponsorship.

### **Conclusion**

The mobility puzzle for the first time connects different travel and encounter programs of children and youth work in a comprehensive framework. In practice, this can help to reach new target groups and to offer programs of their interest to all children and youngsters. Due to the course of the project hitherto, this article relates to open children and youth work and with the example of the youth center JUMA depicts how open children and youth work can contribute to the entrenchment of programs of educational children and youth travel and international youth work in the structures

of youth support. In addition, the existence of the specialist department for international youth work at the youth welfare office in Bochum made it a lot easier to research not only the conditions for successful connections between educational children and youth travel and international youth work but also the identification of need for development in the area of youth support. However, with a focus on open children and youth work we certainly only captured a small part of the youth support. But at the level of the German Federal Lands we have already been able to show elsewhere that there are also manifold travel and encounter programs in the field of youth social work, which can be considered as parts of the mobility puzzle (cf. Vogt 2015). For a further development of the concept it would be necessary to conduct practical research, which depict the respective features of the programs as well as the educational and support conditions in the individual fields of work and which elaborate possibilities of interaction.

## **Literature**

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