

Youth associations – united in diversity

Youth associations are democratic forms of self-organisation and representation of young people's interests. They reach, organise and represent millions of young people. They take their resulting responsibility for the maintenance and further development of democracy very seriously. As part of civil society, they play a self-evident and active role in the formation of social will and decision-making.

Accordingly, the youth associations take note of the current political developments with great concern and by no means indifferently: racist attacks, anti-democratic demonstrations and corresponding political activities are increasing massively in Germany, Europe and worldwide. There is a threat of a social climate characterised by intolerance, exclusion, authority and hostility to democracy.

Youth associations and their associations, the youth councils, are also exposed to this development. Time and again, for example, the legitimacy, participation rights and state support of individual youth associations and councils are questioned or even denied by individual parties or elected officials. This is only because the youth association in question has a certain value basis or because the youth council has decided on the canon of cross-association values such as plurality, democracy and freedom and also represents and lives them against resistance. The youth associations and councils in all their diversity stand united and in solidarity against these tendencies.

Self-organisation as a matter of principle

The work of youth associations is enormously important for the commitment of young people. Youth associations enable young people to gain practical experience of democratic self-efficacy. They are places of lived democracy and, on the basis of their constantly new experiences with personal responsibility and co-determination, also provide impetus for the entire civil society.

Young people come together voluntarily and self-determined according to their interests and values. This self-organisation and thus jointly responsible and designed (youth) work is the basis and guiding principle of all youth associations. The self-organisation of young people is therefore not limited to the question of "what an association does", but is much more aptly captured in the question of "what constitutes the association". The youth associations as a whole are therefore characterised by a great plurality of values. The commonality of all youth associations is at the same time the cross-association commitment to democracy and freedom as well as the common work on a world in which all people can be different without fear.

In concrete terms, youth associations define their goals and tasks in their own decision within the framework of their association's democratic structures. This is what constitutes their statutory life of their own. Within this framework, the individual associations act on their own responsibility. They are therefore free in their choice of services and their internal structure and accountable only to their members.

Interference out of conviction

The nature of self-organization also includes the confrontation with interests, goals, positions and values. Young people in youth associations therefore not only shape their work collectively, but also independently formulate individual needs and interests as well as the concerns of their generation. Youth associations carry these into the discourses of society as a whole and communicate them to political parties, elected representatives, the administration and other social groups and organisations involved in political decision-making.

They thus assume responsibility in and for society. They provide answers to basic social questions and react to changes. In this way, youth associations contribute to the maintenance and further development of a democratic civil society based on solidarity.

Plural and solidary...

The diversity of the youth associations stands for the broad spectrum of youth interests and their commitment: Religious, ecological and cultural associations are just as much a part of it as workers' youth associations, humanitarian associations, scout associations and associations of young migrants. The different social, political, ecological, trade union or confessional values of the youth associations associated with this characterise the character of the respective youth association work. In its entirety, youth association work thus makes an important contribution to the diversity of institutions with different value orientations and to the socially desired diversity of institutions, contents, methods and forms of work enshrined in Social Code Book VIII, the Child and Youth Welfare Act.

As plural and diverse as the youth associations are: Together and united, youth associations and councils stand by their democratic value base, which spans all associations; of course, it is also lived in Europe and internationally. In this way, they contribute to breaking down boundaries in people's minds and building mutual understanding.

... and therefore to promote

Society and the state have recognised the importance of youth associations and taken it into account under federal law with the obligation to promote in § 12 SGB VIII. Because in youth associations, youth work is organised by young people themselves, jointly organised and co-responsible.

The law also lays down important principles of promotion. This includes the acceptance of one's own life in accordance with the statutes as well as the recognition of personal responsibility and self-determination as a constituent element of youth association work. Conditions imposed by the sponsor which attempt to intervene in the internal structure of an association or even in its objectives and tasks are accordingly inadmissible. Another funding principle is the characteristic "created for the long term". If the legislator assumes that self-organised forms of youth work need a binding framework and a longer-term perspective, this must be reflected in the type and conditions of support.

However, youth associations experience that these principles of youth association promotion and their political and value-based participation in the legislative and executive branches are not always unconditionally supported by the federal, state and local governments. Sometimes their independence and thus their contribution to a living democracy are even fundamentally questioned. This dangerous development is becoming even more acute in view of the anti-democratic tendencies and attacks on youth associations and councils described above.

The youth associations and councils expect and demand from politics and administration at all federal levels, in the interest of diversity of values, independence and the importance of youth association self-organisation for the democratic decision-making of our society, to end this practice and to consistently return to the principles of the promotion of SGB VIII.

Cooperation between youth associations and their associations, the youth council, is based on mutual respect between their members. Irrespective of political, religious, ideological and cultural differences, all youth associations and councils see all hostilities and attacks against individual organisations from their ranks or their self-determination as an attack on the community of youth associations or all their members on the basis of their common democratic values. They will be united, united and resolute in their opposition to this.

Decided unanimously by the DBJR Main Committee on 31 May 2017 in Berlin.