

Generalist Youth Information Services in Hungary in 1997

The attached pages constitute the chapter concerning **Hungary** which is part of a 17-country study completed in 1997. Each chapter provides a summary of the situation in the country at the end of 1997 concerning generalist youth information and counselling, and the methods and structures involved in its organisation and distribution.

This study was conducted by the **European Youth Information and Counselling Agency** (ERYICA), to which all the author organisations belong as “Member Organisations” or as “Co-operating Organisations”. Accordingly, the study is limited to those countries where in 1996-97 there existed functioning networks of generalist youth information centres and services which were co-operating with ERYICA.

The 17 chapters of this study, in separate English and French versions, can be consulted on the ERYICA Internet site (“www.eryica.org” - see the section “Documents”, then “1997 Study”). Each file, which is in Word 2.0 for Windows / PC (varying between 4 and 20 pages in length), can also be downloaded from the site.

More recent information about each ERYICA national partner, its activities and its network can also be found on the ERYICA Internet site:

- a) **current addresses of national partners**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”
- b) **links to Internet sites of national partners**: under “Discover SERVICES”, then “Web-sites of ERYICA Partners”
- c) (when the organisation co-ordinates a network) **links to a list of addresses of regional or local centres**: under “Discover ERYICA”, then “Members”, then “Country”.

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HUNGARY

INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 1980s, young Hungarians have of course been very much affected and influenced by the profound changes which have taken place in Hungary. Being part of the younger generation in Hungary, as in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, became more important, and the period of life which is considered "young" became longer. For these reasons it was considered more and more important that young people themselves should create the values and patterns of behaviour and lifestyle that they want.

In order to assist this process, new forms of youth work and services for young people had to be developed. In a situation where the difficulties facing young people (especially unemployment) and the range of goods and opportunities proposed to young people increased very considerably, as well as their need to know and exercise their rights, the provision of adequate and reliable information services became a priority. This also required that these new services should use radically different methods from those of the past, because they had to recognise the right of young people to obtain the information they need as well as their capacity to search for and find what they want, if the basic access and facilities are provided. This led to the establishment of youth information and counselling offices which were prepared to listen to young people, and to work with them in finding their way amid the confusing new options of all kinds which they encountered in their everyday life.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The first **Youth Information and Counselling Office** (*Obudai Ifjusagi Informacios es Tanacsado Iroda*) was created in 1984 in the 3rd District of Budapest as a local initiative. This Office, providing information and counselling on a wide range of subjects in response to the needs expressed by local youngsters, is still functioning in the Florian Subway.

The possibility to create more Offices of this type was provided in the framework of national funding competitions, organised in April 1987 and August 1988 by the bodies responsible for youth matters at that time. A total of 13 projects, most of them submitted by Municipalities, were successful in obtaining a grant which was sufficient for the launching of an Office but which the Municipality had to undertake to continue to finance for a period of five years.

The information for this text has been provided by the Hungarian Association of Youth Information and Counselling Offices (HAYICO), which co-ordinates a network of 22 centres:

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During this period and in later years around one-third of the Offices created at this time were obliged to close for different reasons (lack of interest on the part of the Municipality, and/or economic difficulties). On the other hand, by 1993 a number of new Offices had been established as local initiatives by non-governmental organisations or Municipalities, often as the result of an understanding of the positive experience of existing offices in meeting the needs of young people. Another important development during this period was the recognition by local Offices that they needed to co-operate in certain areas and to act together as a network in their relations with the national Government and with other external bodies. In 1990, this led to the creation of the **Hungarian Association of Youth Information and Counselling Offices** (HAYICO), which now brings together the 22 existing Offices and represents them at the national and international levels.

One of the features of the period following the economic, political and social changes in 1989-1990 was the disappearance of all the existing official youth structures. This meant that there were a number of forces competing to be recognised as competent in the provision of new services for young people. In the field of youth information, HAYICO was able to demonstrate that it had the necessary level of competence, as well as the will and capacity to improve the quality of the services offered by local Offices to young people.

From its creation, HAYICO attached considerable importance to the European dimension of its work. It therefore initiated contacts and co-operation with the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), with a view to developing professional contacts in other European countries and obtaining information about opportunities for young

people. In 1991 HAYICO became the Hungarian member of ERYICA, and since 1994 its representative has been a member of the ERYICA Bureau.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The basic aim of each local Youth Information and Counselling Office is to provide information and counselling on a wide range of subjects which respond to the needs expressed by the young people in its area.

These services are provided on the basis of a set of minimum standards which have been formally adopted by HAYICO in January 1995. This **Code of Professional Ethics** (Szakmai - Etikai Kodex) is based on the European Youth Information Charter but includes guidelines in a number of areas which go further than the European Charter. These guarantee inter alia that:

- the local Office is a flexible and complex unit, the sources of information are multiple and the answers given to the questions can be easily understood
- the Office deals with a person as a whole, considering that it is not able to solve many questions or problems in isolation
- in order to achieve its objectives, the Office employs the widest range of tools, methods and techniques: from the "self-service" information to personal counselling
- the Office is much more "user-oriented", than "method-oriented", ie. the key is the request of the young person, the method used should match the request
- the Office deals with the problems together with the user, strengthening him/her, and assisting him/her to be able to solve the problems of life on

his/her own; the involvement of a third party has to be agreed by the user.

Profile of HAYICO Network

National Co-ordinating Body:

HAYICO - Hungarian Association of Youth Information and Counselling Offices

Network:

- HAYICO Secretariat (national)
- 22 local Offices

Legal Status:

Local Offices are usually either a part of the Municipality (sometimes as an autonomous body) or are non-profit associations, as is HAYICO itself.

Number of Information Workers Employed in Network:

157 salaried employees

Responsible Governmental Body:

Secretariat for Youth Policy

The services that are offered by the Offices can be divided into three categories: **information** on different topics, **counselling** in various fields, and **other services**. It is important to mention that as much importance is given to the counselling function as to the information function in most Offices. The contact with users of the Offices very often goes beyond responding to a simple request for information to a dialogue with the youngster on the issues of concern to him/her, which can be termed "general counselling". In addition, all Offices offer counselling in specific fields, such as legal advice and relationships; some Offices offer counselling in additional areas such as health and the prevention of drug abuse.

HAYICO subscribes fully to the provisions of the European Youth Information Charter, which has been signed by each local Office, as well as by HAYICO itself and several Municipalities.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON YOUTH INFORMATION

The main governmental body dealing with youth matters, the **Co-ordination Council for Children and Youth Affairs**, was established by Government decree in 1994. The Council is primarily responsible for protecting the interests of children and young people by governmental decisions, as well as for providing a forum for consultation between the relevant ministries, and for dealing with problems which are related to children and young adults, problems which are simultaneously dealt with by more than one department or which - according to the present duties and competencies of all the ministries - fall outside the responsibility of all the departments. The Council is composed of the ministries which are concerned by this field, and the Secretary of the Council reports to the Prime Minister's Office.

In January 1995 the **Conciliation Council for the Interests of Children and Youth** (GYIET) was established, based on an agreement between more than one hundred children's and youth organisations, including HAYICO. The function of this tripartite body (government, children's and youth organisations, and service organisations) is to harmonise national policy concerning children and youth. The non-governmental part has the statutory right to make its position known to the decision-making bodies even when there is no consensus in the Council.

In 1996 the Government established a **Basic Programme for Children and Youth**. Both the concerned governmental bodies and non-governmental

organisations are represented in the decision-making organ of the Programme. The role of the Programme is to finance projects that support and develop children and young people, including (through a procedure of tenders) assistance for national structures that promote the interests of children and young people in a wide range of fields.

The **“Generation” National State Foundation for Children and Youth** was established by the Government in 1990 to encourage the active individual and collective participation of children and young people in determining the future of their age group and that of the country. It also seeks to develop co-operation between bodies working for children and young people. The Foundation manages the state-owned assets which were allocated to youth activities prior to 1990, which mainly consist of real estate.

The **Youth Mobility Service** (“Mobilitas”) is the governmental body responsible for promoting European integration among young people, and for supporting extra-curricular youth co-operation at the international level. It is also the National Agency for the “Youth for Europe” programme of the European Union.

Both the governmental and the non-governmental sectors are represented in the decision-making organs of each of the above-mentioned institutions.

At the present time there is no statement of official national policy in the field of youth information and counselling which, as a part of youth work, is one of the competencies which belong to local authorities. In 1997, in the framework of the Basic Programme for Children and Youth, HAYICO was entrusted with the leadership of a national **Network for Youth Programmes**. This brings together a number of major national bodies in the

youth field to combine their experience and resources. Its objectives include the creation of a national network of Youth Information Points, the establishment on Internet of a national Youth Information System, and the development of a national Youth Information and Documentation Centre. It is expected that in the near future, access to the services of the Network will be available in 60 different locations throughout the country, including the local Offices belonging to HAYICO.

LEGAL STATUS AND FINANCING OF OFFICES

The legal status of local Offices has two forms: either the Office is one of the Municipality's services (or is an "institute" depending on the Municipality), or it is a non-governmental organisation which works under a contract with the Municipality.

The staff of the Offices, even if they are employed by the Municipality (or "institute"), do not have the status of civil servants. Most Offices have three or more full-time salaried staff, some of them partly paid under employment promotion programmes; increasingly Offices are also employing conscientious objectors to military service. Some Offices make use of volunteers, as unpaid staff who provide counselling in specific fields or fulfil other functions.

Altogether 257 persons are employed in the field of youth information and counselling in Hungary, 157 on a salaried basis and around 100 as volunteers.

The primary source of funding for the local Offices is their Municipality, but the grants which they receive rarely cover more than the minimum annual costs. Thus, most Offices are obliged to seek additional funding from public and private sources. As a result, the financial situation of many

Offices is precarious, particularly if the budget priorities of the Municipality change. Through agreements with various Ministries and other bodies, HAYICO runs some national services (student legal aid, careers guidance, holiday opportunities), which provide some funding for the work done by the Offices at the local level.

TYPICAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY CENTRES

All the Offices affiliated to the HAYICO network provide information on a wide range of subjects. They do this free of charge, for any young person who visits or telephones the Office, with an informal and welcoming atmosphere.

The areas of information include the following:

- careers
- studies and training
- money matters
- employment
- sports and leisure activities
- accommodation
- organisations and clubs
- travel
- entertainment
- local services and facilities.

In addition, all the Offices offer advice and counselling in a number of areas, such as personal or family problems and legal questions. They also provide help to prepare a curriculum vitae or to complete official forms, and advise on various procedures (to find a job, to find a flat).

Above are the basic services offered by all the Offices; most offer other services which respond to local needs.

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The main way in which the Offices assess the changing information needs of young

people is by systematically recording the questions raised by users, and preparing the information needed to respond to new questions or areas of interest. If there is a change in legislation concerning young people, or some important national issue, HAYICO provides relevant information to all the Offices.

In addition, in some regions the Offices have conducted surveys of both users and other young people in their localities.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER SERVICES

As providers of information for young people, the local Offices collaborate closely with other youth-related services and with organisations that have information of interest to young people, including youth organisations and clubs.

They also maintain close contact with specialised services, to which they refer young people who need such services.

At the national level, HAYICO maintains contact and co-operation with a wide range of official and non-governmental bodies in the youth field.

HOW PLURALISM AND QUALITY ARE GUARANTEED

HAYICO and the local Offices attach great importance to ensuring that the information offered to young people comes from the widest range of sources, that it is practical, easy to understand, reliable and up-to-date, in accordance with the principles stated in the Code of Professional Principles referred to earlier.

Training for the staff of the Offices is considered a key element in establishing basic standards and improving the quality of services. Consequently, it is one of the

forms of support which HAYICO provides for its members.

Increasingly, local Offices are introducing their own methods of measuring and supervising the quality of the services that they offer.