



Juvenile Alcohol Scenes. Consumption Contexts, Drinking Motives, Prevention

*Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl, Alexander Bernardis,
Kurt Fellöcker, Judith Haberhauer-Stidl,
Gabriele Schmied*

Project Leader:

Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl

Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl, Univ. Prof.,
Dr., Senior Social Scientist at the
European Centre for Social Welfare
Policy and Research, Vienna
<http://www.euro.centre.org/eisenbach>

Alexander Bernardis, MAS, DSA,
Chairman – Association of Youth and Life,
Lecturer at the University of Applied
Science St. Pölten, study programme
Social Work

Kurt Fellöcker, Prof. (FH), MA,
MSc, DSA, Professor at the
University of Applied Science
St. Pölten, study programme
Social Work

Judith Haberhauer-Stidl, Mag., DSA,
Docent at the University of Applied Science,
Campus Vienna, study programme
Social Work (in the public space)

Gabriele Schmied, Mag., Researcher at
the European Centre for Social Welfare
Policy and Research, Vienna
<http://www.euro.centre.org/schmied>

Since few years alcohol consumption of youth is again discussed vigorously and controversially in the European public. On the one hand the discussion starts with the assumption that the drinking habits of young people have become more excessive and on the other hand the changed beverage preferences (keyword: alcopops) are addressed as well as the new consumption contexts (keyword: public places in urban centres, such as the Rudolfskai in Salzburg and the Rudolfsplatz in Vienna). Many media scandalize the changes in adolescent drinking whereas the changes in the drinking habits of adults are being neglected.

Based on epidemiological results an uniform increase in adolescent drinking and intoxication in European countries cannot be proven. For Austria it is to be assumed that alcohol consumption of young people has stagnated during the last decades if indeed it even has declined as with adults and that it clearly is below that of the latter. However, the beginning of alcohol consumption might well start a year earlier than two decades ago and consumption by girls has approached that of boys of the same age, though they didn't equal them. Based on representative studies also no increase in intoxication among adolescents can be proven even though the data also indicate here the convergence of genders and do not capture changes in subgroups. Hence, the changed drinking habits of adolescents are only little reflected in quantitative surveys.

The present study approaches the changed drinking habits of young people with qualitative methods. It was carried out in an metropolitan area – in Vienna – and in a provincial and rural area – in Lower Austria –, which as East-Austrian wine-growing states show a comparable drinking culture.



The conspicuous consumption by young people in groups, which are described here as ‘juvenile alcohol scenes’, is at the focus of attention.

The study was carried out by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in cooperation with the study programme Social Work at the Universities of Applied Science of St. Pölten and Campus Vienna: Students of social work were responsible for most of the field work. The study was funded by the Austrian Health Promotion Foundation, the Addiction & Drug Coordination Vienna, the Office of the Lower Austria State government, by the Chambers of Economics of the States of Vienna and Lower Austria, by the city of St. Pölten and the Lower-Austrian Fund for Health and Social Welfare.

A qualitative study of „juvenile alcohol scenes“

The original research interest was concentrated on the conspicuous consumption by juvenile alcohol scenes in the public, which was understood as free accessible spaces – such as streets, squares, green and recreational areas and shopping centres. However, based on first insights the research was quickly expanded to ‘semi-public spaces’ and juvenile alcohol scenes in various types of venues were included. And finally it also marginally and by example included conspicuous consumption in private settings, which could not be so clearly separated from public and semi-public as was first expected. Besides, the interest in drinking habits of the juvenile scenes and the self-destructive actions associated with them – such as severe intoxication – aggressive acts committed under the influence of alcohol and the (additional) use of illicit substances were studied. Further the question of whether differently conspicuous forms of juvenile alcohol scenes have developed was pursued and whether the alcohol scenes are different in the urban and provincial or rural areas. Finally, the roles of girls and boys in juvenile alcohol scenes were investigated.

The juvenile alcohol scenes were investigated from three different viewpoints and with four qualitative methods: First, based on almost 100 face-to-face and telephone interviews, from the viewpoint of their adult environment – for example, mobile youth workers, representatives of the police and owners of pubs and discotheques. Secondly, based on about 70 observations the juvenile alcohol scenes were viewed using the ‘objective’ lens of social sciences. And thirdly, the adolescents were heard in 11 group discussions and in 40 individual interviews where they voiced their opinions on alcohol consumption, its contexts, meanings and functions.



The results of these study steps formed the basis for the development of a catalogue of preventive measures. This catalogue of measures, however, also builds on the results of the analysis of prevention projects, which were carried out over the past years in Vienna and Lower Austria.

Juvenile Alcohol Scenes as Institution of Transition from Childhood to Adulthood and as 'Post-traditional Leisure Communities'

According to the literature review and to data collected in the course of the study the juvenile alcohol scenes are to be viewed as institution of transition from childhood to adulthood organized by the young people themselves, as a peer group in which gender roles are practised. That alcohol consumption plays an important role in that is partially due to the fact that gender differences can well be marked by substance consumption and that alcohol consumption is a facilitator for gender contacts: Women and men (in Austria as in other countries) still drink in distinctly different ways and use alcoholic drinks to ease relationship between the genders.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is not just today arranged by the peer group, but in the past self-organized initiations took place under the exclusion of the adult public. In view of the public character of the current transition scenes it is to be mentioned that the autonomous participation of young people in the public sphere over the past years and decades has been greatly promoted: one only needs to think of children and adolescents as consumers, traffic participants and lately as voters.

Beyond that the juvenile alcohol scenes are also to be understood as a variation of the new 'post-traditional communities', which have replaced those forms of societal belonging shaped in the context of modern social organizations especially in the area of work and politics. Post-traditional communities develop preferably in the recreational area and at selected public places and they distinguish themselves from one another by 'performance practices' and 'attributes', which their members present before internal and external observers at the respective 'scenes'. The different practices and attributes are used in the competition among the post-traditional recreational scenes for social recognition and power, where there are winners and losers and where scenes are excluded from the public through legal and police-enforced measures.



Substance consumption can be excellently configured as a specific attribute as well as an element of a self-performance in the context of a post-traditional leisure community. Following these thoughts, juvenile alcohol scenes can be understood not only as transition scenes but also as groups of young people who gather at certain, often public, places where they visibly and sometimes even conspicuously drink and get drunk or also: who with their substance consumption visibly demonstrate to others their membership in certain scenes and who sometimes do this in a conspicuous manner.

Conspicuous and Inconspicuous Scenes; „Street scenes“, „Disco scenes“ and „Private Scenes“

In the predominant majority of scenes alcohol consumption remains inconspicuous and even when consumption is intensive it is not related to bodily impairment or aggressions. Conspicuous consumption takes place only in a minority of scenes. Conspicuous alcohol scenes can mainly be observed on weekends and they take place in commercial leisure settings mostly designed for young people and offering little else than the sale of inexpensive alcoholic drinks. These are primarily selected discothèques and events as well as supermarkets, shops at gas stations and journeys.

The scenes also differ by the location of their gatherings and they are associated with different social milieus: The ‘street scenes’ which meet in parks, on squares, in the vicinity of train stations and bus stops as well as in court yards of apartment buildings attract younger ones and adolescents from underprivileged milieus. Street scenes are found primarily in city areas. The ‘disco scenes’ beside in discothèques primarily meet at leisure venues, the social background of their members is heterogeneous but predominantly middle class. They are mainly found in the provincial and rural areas. Finally there are also the protected ,private scenes’, which gather at homes but also on vacation in hotels, of which the members are more grown up young people from privileged milieus. They can be found in the city as well as in the countryside. In all three types of scenes there were (primarily) inconspicuous as well as (rare) conspicuous variations.



Observed from the angle of individual persons the types of scenes lose importance – the young women and men most often drink on several ‘stages’. Thus members of disco scenes in a private residence, a park, a restaurant parking lot attune to a joint visit of a discothèque with cheap drinks acquired in a supermarket; a circle of friends, which primarily drinks at private parties, jointly visits a restaurant or drinks together in a park when the weather is nice; and a street scene changes after collective alcohol consumption in the courtyard of an apartment building to a café.

Consumption Habits, Consequences and Motives

The consumption habits in the three types of scenes differ only gradually: In the street scenes drinking is supposedly more intense – to being intoxicated – and more often reaches for ‘hard’ drinks than in the disco scenes. An exception are street scenes, which are formed by marginalized people, as among others by punks: here extreme drinking takes place regularly. But alcohol consumption of private scenes also takes on extreme forms at least on special occasions – such as graduation journeys. With few exceptions consumption of illegal substances remains limited to the sporadic use of ‘soft drugs’ – above all Cannabis.

In all juvenile alcohol scenes, above all on weekends, more or less regular – and ritualistic? - inebriation occurs during the course of ‘going out’, repeatedly with grave bodily and psychological impairments. In the street scenes one can observe additional ‘garbagging’, noise and other nuisance of passers-by and neighbours, also isolated aggressive actions. In the disco scenes additionally violence (beatings) between young men, sexual assaults on young women and vandalism take place. The consequences of intoxication in private scenes on special drinking occasions seem to resemble those of disco scenes.

As with the consequences of alcohol consumption, the motives to drink are considerably different in the three types of scenes: In the street scenes there is drinking ‘against’ boredom and social discomfort; hence, reasons are mentioned, which when viewed in connection with the destructive behaviour against oneself and others while inebriated, are to be read as expression of the marginalized position of these adolescents. In the disco scenes alcohol consumption is a sign of being present and wanting to belong, which is to be understood in connection with the



violent confrontations in advanced drinking stages as an expression of the fierce competition to which the middle-class adolescents are exposed. In the private scenes the motives of being present and the desire to belong are joined by the 'earned reward for achievement', which in connection with the occasional violent confrontations signals that young people from privileged milieus also have to master competitive situations, yet have better chances at success.

The juvenile alcohol scenes do not only establish rules which promote intense consumption, but also develop measures to prevent undesired consequences. These 'preventive self controls' as one could call them are especially developed with the street scenes, which – as will be shown – more than others are left to take care of themselves. But at least in all scenes efforts are made to limit consumption and inebriation in order to deal with the demands of education and work and friends are addressed about it if needed. If impediments and conflicts arise common solutions are sought and drunken friends are taken to safe places or their home.

Young Men and Young Women

Young men are at the centre of the 'scene' and alcohol consumption forms an important element of their appearances: With drinking one can show strength. Other reasons for the actors to 'enact' are the payment of (drinking) rounds and different types of 'drinking games', which build on the competition of single boys or entire 'cliques' just like the beatings, which regularly follow the 'competitive' and 'fight' drinking. All types of bodily harm are expected, and sometimes even considered as part of the performance.

Next to the practising of gender roles the juvenile alcohol scenes serve for making contact with the other gender and for this alcohol consumption is also an important requisite. Under the influence of alcohol boys are encouraged to address girls, in extreme cases they attack them bodily and verbally. The young women for their part drink modestly but they too employ alcohol as facilitator for contacts to young men. Complimentary to the young men young women fear sexual assaults and violence.

The permitted alcohol consumption is an attribute of being an adult, which among others is defined by the 'legal drinking age' in the Youth Protection Laws. The young men and women currently violate these



regulations and they demonstrate independence when they more or less conspicuously consume alcohol in public before reaching the legal drinking age. But at the same time they orient themselves on the diffuse age frame, which is at present given for becoming an adult, and try out highly traditional gender roles in the juvenile alcohol scenes. The visible adolescent alcohol consumption thus can be understood as conformance and deviance, as acceptance of prescribed roles and at the same time as their rejection. After entering the 'drinking maturity' the young people of about 16 years are found in pairs. The young men then move to a more moderate however regularly alcohol consumption together with their girl friends for whom they take responsibility and who on their turn take control over them.

Reactions of Adults

The juvenile alcohol scenes are confronted by different and partially also contradictory reactions and interventions by adults. In the case of disco scenes the parents – especially the mothers – try to influence the alcohol consumption of their children – especially their sons – in that they limit their time to go out. Without much success: The young men and women assume that they can't be 'locked up' forever and that it is possible without much effort to obtain alcoholic drinks. Adolescents of underprivileged milieus on the other hand seldom experience their parents trying to influence their alcohol consumption even though they would like to be addressed on this subject. Parents of the lower class themselves are in singular cases confronted with contact searches by social workers, who are occupied with their children's (conspicuous) public alcohol consumption and demand their supervisory duties.

During the time of investigation the young people were above all addressed in public by the consumption promoting measures of the gastronomy and trade: Very often in the form of bargain offers of alcoholic drinks. Only occasionally they met preventive measures and for the young men and women they remained as ineffective as those in the family: Thus the age controls enforced in few venues and shops, were easily circumvented. In discotheques and other drinking venues also visibly intoxicated persons were served who in extreme cases – because of severe bodily or psychological impairments or destructive actions against persons or things – were put out into the parking area or on the street. In order to



manage the drunkenness of their guests in this way some large venues employed private security guards, who had not received preventive education and were only on duty to maintain order in the respective place.. .

Those taken out to the parking lot or street occasionally were picked up by the police, who notified the parents or took the adolescents home. If the police is called at the eruption of violence at the venue, or if it is continuously present – as at large events – it becomes earlier active and intervenes more often. Contrary to private security services the police also steps in for preventive reasons not in the least because no other professional group is active in this way. At street scenes, which the police meets during routine controls and to which they might have been called because of noise complaints by residents, the police presence is more reduced. Finally, the private scenes are protected from police interference. They are if at all only publicly noticeable on the way to and from their parties.

Only seldom do professional groups other than police or private security services intervene in the alcohol consumption of juvenile leisure scenes: this occurs mostly through social workers who take care of conspicuous street scenes in the context of harm reduction measures. Adults, who professionally are not engaged with young people, such as adult visitors of the same venues or also passers-by, ignore the drinking adolescents when they meet them or they try to evade them.

And only with exception are intoxicated youth taken to a hospital: this occurs mostly with young people who are very inexperienced in the use of alcohol. Adolescents fear hospital admission, which is only initiated by them in extreme emergency cases. Asked about their ideas about preventive measures many young people advocate (because? nevertheless?) a more efficient enforcement of existing consumption prohibitions for youth. But all of them – independent of which type of scene they belong to – seem to be united by the desire for measures and interventions under the sign of an integrative youth policy based on partnership.



Preventive Measures

1. In developing preventive measures for juvenile alcohol scenes first their diversity has to be acknowledged and target specific approaches have to be chosen: Interventions in street scenes associated with underprivileged milieus where alcohol consumption is a sign of exclusion are to be designed differently than interventions in commercialized disco scenes and in private scenes of the adolescents with purchasing power whose drinking has an 'inclusive' character. If the class specific diversity of the phenomenon is considered it becomes obvious that multidimensional instruments are required whereby alcohol policies should be intertwined with youth and social policy measures.
2. Secondly, with the development of preventive measures for juvenile alcohol scenes the 'scene dynamics' active in them needs to be considered, which became clearly visible during the study: If young men and women are addressed individually they are eager to talk about their alcohol consumption and they do that rather reflectively. Groups of young people when asked to talk about alcohol develop considerable resistance. It therefore seems to be more appropriate to concentrate the alcohol policy measures on the setting of the juvenile alcohol scenes instead of their behaviour. The setting also includes the drinking habits of adults and to also intervene in these, would be a multiple advantage: in the present context above all that the youth are not singled out as a problematic generation but instead would be included in a generative societal structure.
3. The third study result, which could inform the development of preventive measures, is the lacking consensus among the adults about adolescent alcohol consumption in public and the missing cooperation of the most important stakeholders of juvenile alcohol scenes. Particularly to be recommended here is the coordination of activities by the police with those of youth workers active in the public. In a further step other – private – stakeholders from the public sector such as gastronomy and trade but also the media should be included.
4. Finally, the analysis of the numerous and diverse prevention projects undertaken over the last years in Vienna and in Lower-Austria points to a fourth dimension, which should be increasingly observed in the development of future interventions: Sustainability. In order to achieve sustainability the individual prevention projects should not only be better coordinated in terms of content, area and time but the higher-rank-



ing goals and target groups should also be established in the context of a national 'alcohol policy umbrella', mandatory and unambiguously formulated and designed for the long term.

A comprehensive preventative catalogue of measures for juvenile alcohol scenes, which corresponds to the above-listed criteria, could therefore contain among others:

- Nation-wide rules for dealing with (adult and adolescent) intoxicated persons in the public
- Nation-wide rules for dispensing alcoholic drinks (key words: prohibition of bargain offers, prohibition of sale to intoxicated persons)
- Nation-wide, more simple and manageable rules for adolescent alcohol consumption in public places; non-excluding sanctions for violation; structurally established cooperation of the police with youth workers in the enforcement of the rules
- Uniform configuration of the transition to adulthood through youth policy
- Expansion of integrating measures for youth from underprivileged backgrounds
- Comprehensive, long-term alcohol prevention activities at the local level, in which youth and youth organizations are included.



Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl
Alexander Bernadis
Kurt Fellöcker
Judith Haberhauer-Stidl
Gabriele Schmied

*Jugendliche Alkoholszenen.
Konsumkontakte, Trinkmotive,
Prävention*

EUROPEAN CENTRE • EUROPÄISCHES ZENTRUM • CENTRE EUROPÉEN
FOR POLICY RESEARCH ON HEALTH POLICY • RECHERCHE SUR LA POLITIQUE DE LA SANTE

Juvenile Alcohol Scenes. Consumption Contexts, Drinking Motives, Prevention

Since few years alcohol consumption by youth is vigorously and controversially discussed by the public. It is assumed on the one hand that the drinking habits of young people have become more excessive and on the other hand the changed drinking preferences and consumption contexts of adolescents are being addressed. Based on epidemiological studies a consistent increase in adolescent excessive drinking in European countries cannot be proven, but there are numerous indicators that young men and women increasingly consume non-traditional drinks in public places.

The changed drinking habits of young people are investigated in the present study with qualitative methods, in a metropolitan area – in Vienna – and in a provincial and rural area – in Lower Austria. At the centre of the research is the common alcohol consumption by young people, the consumption in groups and groupings, which have been labelled here as 'juvenile alcohol scenes'. The study concentrates on drinking in 'public' contexts as in 'semi-public' (such as in discotheques as well as at special events) but alcohol consumption in private contexts is also addressed.

In order to gain a first overview, adults who professionally interact with (drinking) young people were interviewed – social workers, policemen, pubs and shop owners. In a second step selected juvenile alcohol scenes were observed, and in the third and fourth part of the study the young people themselves had their say in group discussions and in individual interviews. The major part of the fieldwork was carried out by students of social work.

Based on the manifold results of the fieldwork a typology of juvenile alcohol scenes was developed. Inconspicuous scenes were compared to conspicuous scenes and the characteristics of the latter were determined. The results clearly indicate that consumption contexts and drinking motives differ according to social class and gender. The consequences of consumption – such as severe intoxication and aggressive acts – were also addressed as well as the (additional) use of illicit substances.

After analysing prevention projects, which have been carried out over the last years, recommendations for prevention were developed. Thus it would be extraordinarily important to further adjust the interventions to



the target groups and their respective social milieu. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the sustainability of the preventive measures not least through a better coordination of individual initiatives but above all through formulation of consistent and comprehensive alcohol prevention goals.

Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl, Univ. Prof., Dr., Senior Social Scientist at the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna

Alexander Bernardis, Chairman – Association of Youth and Life, Lecturer at the University of Applied Science St. Pölten, study programme Social Work

Kurt Fellöcker, Prof. (FH), MA, MSc, DSA, Professor at the University of Applied Science St. Pölten, study programme Social Work

Judith Haberhauer-Stidl, Mag., DSA, Docent at the University of Applied Science, Campus Vienna, study programme Social Work (in the public space)

Gabriele Schmied, Mag., Researcher at the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna

ISBN 978-3-902426-48-2
216 S.



About the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research

The European Centre is a UN-affiliated intergovernmental organization concerned with all aspects of social welfare policy and research.

Core Functions

- An international centre of applied social science and comparative empirical research on social policy and welfare
- An information and knowledge centre providing social science-supported social policy intelligence through a think-net
- A platform initiating future-oriented public policy debates on social welfare issues within the UN-European Region

Research Focus

More information:
<http://www.euro.centre.org>

The European Centre provides expertise in the fields of welfare and social policy development in a broad sense – in particular in areas where multi-or interdisciplinary approaches, integrated policies and inter-sectoral action are called for.

European Centre expertise includes issues of demographic development, work and employment, incomes, poverty and social exclusion, social security, migration and social integration, human security, care, health and well-being through the provision of public goods and personal services. The focus is on the interplay of socio-economic developments with institutions, public policies, monetary transfers and in-kind benefits, population needs and the balance of rights and obligations.

European Centre Publications

- Book Series “Public Policy and Social Welfare” (Ashgate, Aldershot), in English
- Book Series “Wohlfahrtspolitik und Sozialforschung” (Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York), in German
- Other Book Publications, books or special reports published outside the above series, with a variety of established publishing houses and in various languages.
- “Occasional Reports”, contain conference or expert meeting syntheses, reports resulting from projects, etc., in English / French / German
- The European Centre Newsletter, in English

Geographical Domain

All governments of States that are members of the United Nations, in particular those of countries of the UN-European Region, are invited to participate in and contribute to the activities of the European Centre. This results in a geographical domain of potential Member Countries of more than 50 European nations as well as the United States of America, Canada and Israel.