

Berlin, Germany

- Capital of Germany and also its largest city
- Covers a very large physical area for a European city – almost 900 km²
- Population: 3.29 million

Berlin during the Cold War

- After WWII, Germany was divided in two:
 - An Eastern region under the occupying control of the Soviet Union
 - A Western region occupied by the United States, Great Britain, and France
- Berlin itself was also split in two
- As tensions grew during the cold war, so did the divide within the city – culminating with the construction of the infamous Berlin wall.

Although the wall came down in 1989, the remnants of this great fissure within the city remain visible today.



Immigration to Berlin

After WWII, Germany was in need of intensive reconstruction. This led to the introduction of the “Guest Worker” programs:

- Active recruitment of an unskilled industrial labor force from other countries – primarily from Southern Europe and Turkey - to come on temporary work visas to Germany
- Proved to be an effective way for German industry to meet its workforce needs, and the program continued into the 70s
- Many workers chose to permanently settle and raise their families in Germany
- This has led to political, economic, religious, and social conflict as well as general inequity amongst the overall population (Haisken-DeNew & Sinning 2010)

Project Information

My time in Berlin was spent learning about and exploring some of the innovative ways that social work is being carried out in the city. I was primarily connected with people working with Gangway and YAAM, where I shadowed various people in their day-to-day work, attended workshops, and helped out with projects such as cleaning up the youth space at the new YAAM location.

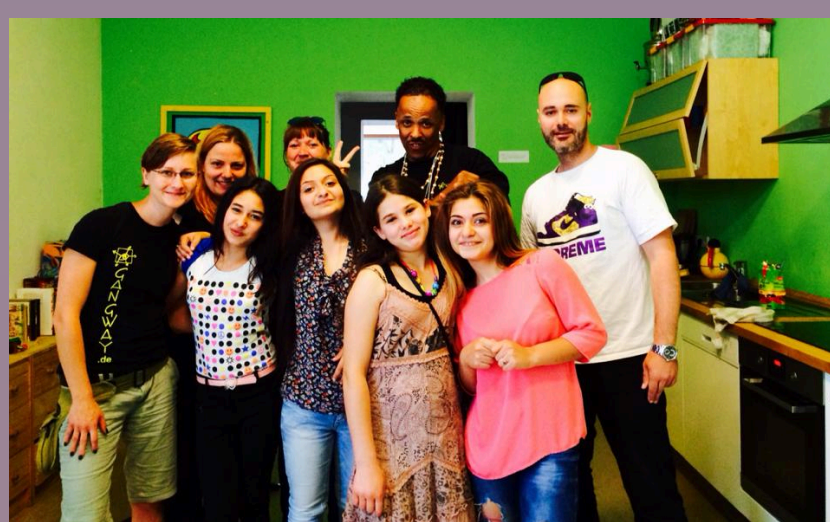
Agencies

Gangway:

- Berlin’s oldest youth-focused street worker program
- The social work staff is comprised of largely autonomous teams of 4-6 street workers, assigned to a specific district. They spend the bulk of their working hours walking the streets of the area, meeting and building trust-based relationships with local residents, and helping to connect them to support and services, as needed.
- The program is based entirely upon the **trust** between social workers and community residents. For this reason, Gangway social workers have a strict policy of not engaging or interacting too closely with the police.
- Gangway has a number of other programs, including a non-traditional education program – “Street College,” an extensive hip-hop program that includes exchange partnerships with youth organizing groups in Paris and New York City, as well as job-readiness services and training

YAAM:

A Reggae beach bar and club, YAAM began as a community gathering and recreation space and grew into a thriving business. The organization also offers extracurricular programming for young people and their families. Activities include boxing lessons, group outings, and family barbeques.



Gangway Beatz Workshop
Photo Credit: Olad Aden



YAAM Youth Space – under construction in the new locale
Photo Credit: Charles

Outcomes

In my two short weeks in Berlin, I encountered and learned a great deal:

- I gained a better understanding of the structure and philosophy of youth-focused social work activities in Berlin, as well as of the resources and support available in Germany for youth issues and social services in general
- I engaged as a participant observer in neighborhood-based youth work
- I explored and reflected on the historical context of the city and German society and how those impact social work today



Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe



The Topography of Terror
Photo Credit: Manfred Brückels

Skills Developed

- Practiced **cultural humility** as well as cultural responsiveness and **adaptability**
- Practiced **entering communities** with respect and **appreciative inquiry**
- Practiced my **German language skills** and **multi-lingual communication**
- Practiced **networking** and being a **self-guided learner**

Classroom Connections

Some courses that I felt were particularly helpful and/or informative to my Special Studies placement:

- SW 530 Introduction to Social Welfare Policy and Services
- SW 647 Community Services & Policy
- SW 713 Integrative Approaches to Community Organization
- PUBHLTH 510 Intergroup Dialogue on Race, SES, & Health Inequity

Lessons Learned

Some valuable takeaways from this experience for me include:

- The importance of *timing!* August is vacation time in Germany
- History of people and place are deep and complex: it takes humility, tact, and a willingness to ask questions – and to take initiative in seeking out answers, as well

Career Connections

- Learning about social work in Germany will inform my conceptualization of social work in the USA
- I will also continue to explore the possibility of seeking employment in Europe in the future

Advice

- Do not hesitate to explore possibilities for following your passion through the global special studies program!
- Take initiative in seeking out appropriate activities and contacts – this is your education!



Gangway Neighborhood Event – photo credit: <http://www.gangway.de/>

References

- Berlin Official Website: <http://www.berlin.de/>
- <http://www.berlin.de/775/en/city-of-diversity/diversity-in-berlin/2558-3757-gastarbeiter.en.html>
 - Haisken-DeNew, J. and Sinning, M. (2010). SOCIAL DEPRIVATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN GERMANY. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 56: 715–733.

Acknowledgements

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