

Article

Young Offenders on the Camino de Santiago—Theoretical Background of the Learning Walks

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Abstract: Delinquent behaviour is predominantly an expression of adolescent developmental phases, but at the same time a possible entry into criminal careers. Where socio-educational measures and admonitions no longer help, society reacts with youth detention and imprisonment as a last resort, in doing so it brings the young people into an environment of violence and power. The concept of the socio-educational pilgrimage as an alternative measure to imprisonment takes the young people out of this context and offers space for reflection and self-efficacy. In this article, different concepts of Learning Walks for young offenders are discussed and theoretically analysed.

Keywords: learning walks; hiking; socio-educational pilgrimage; delinquency; young offenders; Camino de Santiago



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1. Introduction: Pilgrimage as Punishment

While religious pilgrimage today is mainly a voluntary decision of the pilgrims (for example Heiser 2021), the idea of an imposed penance is definitely part of the genesis of this religious tradition. In the 7th century AD, pilgrimages were proven punishment of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and in the 9th century secular courts also imposed long pilgrimage as an alternative to secular punishments (Wirsing 2006). Evidence of such punitive pilgrimage dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries, although punishment for petty offences such as rioting and property crimes could be decreed as a way out of an impending death penalty (Kraume 2008, p. 25). Often, condemned pilgrims had to wear additional signs of their guilt such as heavy chains, which may have significantly increased the risk of failure—but at the same time also affected the reputation of other pilgrims (Puszcz 2018, p. 24).

The draconian punishments of the Middle Ages are, for good reasons, a thing of the past in Europe. It may come as a surprise that for some years now, adolescents and young adults have again been sent on the Way of St. James in state judicial proceedings. Since 1982, more than 700 sentenced young people in Belgium and France have had the chance to escape a prison sentence by walking the Way to Santiago de Compostela (Ollivier 2017; Smits et al. 2018, p. 5) The Belgian organization Alba has been sending young people on the pilgrimage since 1982 (Murray 2021, p. 69) and the French organization SEUIL since 2002. These young people would otherwise have to face a longer prison sentence (Ollivier 2017). In Spain, too, since 2002, offenders have embarked on the religious path as part of the penal pilgrimage program known as the Caminos de Libertad (Murray 2021, p. 69). Serious and persistent theft, robbery, and assault are the crimes of the young people who are then given the chance to apply for the pilgrimage project. In the meantime, similar projects have been established in Italy and Germany (Cortella et al. 2018; Enger et al. 2018).

In this systematic analysis, we will introduce the modern concept of a penitential pilgrimage (2) and relate it to the modern pedagogy by first describing the situation of delinquent youth (3) and then reviewing how current socio-pedagogical methods can be implemented in the context of the pilgrimage (4). In doing so, we document a possible

alternative to juvenile detention, which is considered problematic, and at the same time show which pedagogical mechanisms can be effective for other pilgrimage groups. The authors of this article analysed the method of “learning walks” in a European three-year research project called “Between Ages: Network for Young Offenders and NEET¹” (2015-2-DE04-KA205-012982), financed by Erasmus+ from 2015 to 2018 ([JUGEND fuer Europa 2020](#); [Koenig et al. 2017a](#)).²

2. Marche de Rupture/Uprooting

While prisons are mainly characterised by monotonous sitting and an atmosphere related to the offence, the socio-educational pilgrimage projects provide a framework for continuous movement and a positive engagement with society. The initially simple activity of walking becomes a challenge with increasing duration, which leads to an inner confrontation. The projects are characterised by simple rules. For example, the entire journey must be made on foot, together, and on a shoestring budget for lodging and food. The country’s law has to be respected, and any behaviour which endangers the integrity of the project or the group leads to the termination of the journey ([Boddez 2017](#), p. 12). The route mostly follows the major European pilgrimage routes, especially the Way of St. James, but routes to Rome or other destinations are also chosen. This has pragmatic reasons, as the paths are well signposted and equipped with hostels. The clear orientation towards the goal in one direction is also part of the pedagogical concept: just as on the path of life, one cannot turn back. Above all, however, the projects benefit from the positive assessment of pilgrimage in the present: the young people are no longer perceived as delinquents but as pilgrims, seekers, and as a rule this external view also shapes the young people’s self-perception. Nevertheless, the term pilgrimage is avoided in order to keep the projects connectable outside the church context. The names “Marche de rupture” and “Uprooting” refer to the goal of releasing young people from a culture characterised by deviant behaviour and preparing them for a new start in the context of a foreign environment. In Italian, this idea is clarified with the technical term “Reset”, while the German term “Arbeitsweg” (working path) focuses on working on one’s own self. In all countries, the path is preceded by a judicial instruction.

Juvenile courts may order participation in the pilgrimage and waive further serving of juvenile sentence if participation is successful. However, if the pilgrimage is cancelled, most often the young people have to serve the imposed juvenile sentences. In France and Belgium, the parent or guardian must agree to the pilgrimage. In Germany, only young people over the age of 18 have been involved in the projects to date, so parental consent has not been necessary. Due to legal requirements, the walk in Germany has been limited to a short, one-week section of the Way of St. James and is supplemented by educational exercises, e.g., on moral development, to initiate change. In the French and Belgian projects, young people walk the entire route from Paris or Brussels to Santiago de Compostela in two-to-three months. The pedagogical interventions consist of regular handwritten reflection reports. The discussion of the life plans usually happens casually in conversation with the guides or in silent reflection.

In the Belgian and French projects, one or two young people under the age of 18 are on the road with a volunteer supervisor. These volunteers take a biographical break themselves, and are not on the road as educators, but as equal companions. This is to avoid pedagogization of the way, but the professional team is available around the clock for emergencies. In Italy and Germany, on the other hand, professional social educators are on the road with a group of young people each ([Koenig et al. 2017a](#); [Koenig and Knospe 2021](#)).

In the following section, we will briefly explain the personal situation of the young pilgrims and then use different theoretical perspectives to examine how a medieval punishment can become a modern educational measure.

3. Criminal Youth and the Aim of Reintegration

On their way to adulthood, young people do not always have socially adapted strategies for coping with life. Developmental tasks and social norms pose challenges for young people. Sometimes they come into conflict with society and the law when dealing with their developmental tasks (Weichold and Blumenthal 2018, p. 171). One goal of young people is to gain acceptance from their peers. In doing so, they sometimes tend to take risks in order to impress. The search for sensations and new experiences lead to unacceptable social actions (Weichold and Blumenthal 2018, p. 173). The “Problem Behaviour theory” describes risk factors (biological, psychosocial, and social background), protective factors, and the tendency towards risky behaviour or lifestyle as responsible for problem behaviour such as delinquency in adolescence (Jessor 2016). Among the specific risk factors, Jolliffe and his colleagues include, among parents: drug use (cigarettes and marijuana), lack of guilt, delinquency, and single-parent status; among adolescents: low intelligence, low academic achievement, high impulsivity, and hyperactivity; and, on the part of the environment: poor neighbourhoods, high-crime schools, and poor housing (Jolliffe et al. 2017).

The brain is in a state of upheaval in the adolescence phase. Familiar strategies are no longer accessible and new ones are not yet available. The abilities to regulate emotions and behaviour are only learned in progressive adolescence, when higher cognitive processes succeed due to the maturation of the prefrontal cortex at the end of puberty (Steinberg et al. 2006). This temporal delay is also explained by the term “maturation gap” (Moffitt 1993). In addition, adolescents do not have the status of adults who are expected to act responsibly and independently. In order to resist authority of parents, they sometimes use deviant behaviour, which can be understood as part of adolescence and dealing with developmental tasks (Moffitt 1993).

Figures from Germany show that the incidence of delinquent behavior among males in the adolescent phase (18 to 21 years) is almost twice as high as in later adulthood. Among adolescent males, 8 out of every 100,000 are accused of a crime, after which the proportion declines steadily to 4.4 accused per 100,000 population among 30- to 40-year-old males (Bundeskriminalamt 2019). Many of these can be explained as “developmental temporary juvenile delinquency”, but this age is also the time when criminal careers begin (Ostendorf and Drenkhahn 2017, p. 29). There are two types of delinquent people: the smaller group is called “life-course-persistent offenders”. This group consists of people who remain delinquent. The other, larger group is called “adolescence-limited offenders”. These offenders usually stop their delinquent behaviour after puberty (Moffitt 1993). Accordingly, juvenile justice in Germany and other European countries emphasises aspects of protection, education, and reintegration instead of punishment. For example, in Belgium “minors are ‘non-punishable’ under Belgian law, so it is theoretically a ‘protection model’.” (Koenig et al. 2017b, p. 15). As adolescents are in between children and adults, they should be responsible for their behaviour and actions and therefore be prosecuted. On the other hand, they are not fully responsible due to their development. They are still in need of education (Scherr 2018, pp. 17–18). Therefore, it seems to be important to find a way to bridge this time in life when either temporary juvenile delinquency ends or criminal careers begin.

In several European countries, society will react to juvenile crime firstly with educational measures, training courses, and social community service (United Nations 2004, pp. 201–5), but in the end, criminal youngsters will be excluded from society in children’s homes or youth prison. Though this is the most expensive form for educating young people, the results are not very good compared to the aim of reintegration in society: more than 60 percent of young offenders in German youth prison are likely to come back to court after they have finished the imprisonment (Bundesministerium der Justiz 2014, p. 7; Stelly and Thomas 2017, p. 82). Kawamura-Reindl and Schneider define the resocialisation idea as a societal task which cannot succeed between criminal young people and professional opponents (judges, enforcement officers, and social workers), but in the confrontation with society: “Resocialisation grows out of the cooperation of a society which, based on its

fundamental attitude, committed individuals, and existing services offers assistance and support for offenders . . . ” (Kawamura-Reindl and Schneider 2015, p. 70).

It is necessary to find opportunities or take action in promoting social integration instead of punishing youth. In Germany, this is a public task and written in law, but the reality shows a lot of problems with implementation (Seckinger 2018, p. 325).

To reach the aim of resocialisation, it is suggested to use multisystemic programs which include, rather than punishment by sending to prison, staying at home and involving the whole family. Looking at effectiveness, in an American research, there is a benefit of more than USD 13 for every dollar of effort, in comparison to the 40 per cent of punished youth who end up repeat offenders (Weichold and Blumenthal 2018, pp. 186–87).

4. Theoretical Background of the Learning Walk

The learning path can be grounded very well theoretically. In Section 4.1, we will use classical social pedagogical theories to evaluate pilgrimage with delinquent youth. Then, the model of personal resources will be explained as a frame of reference (Section 4.2). In Section 4.3, we will derive concrete pedagogical measures for socio-educational pilgrimage projects. The theories that we consider to be very important are taken up in the following and their explanatory contribution in relation to socio-educational pilgrimage is highlighted. An overview is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Theories and their facts relating the learning walk.

Theory	Facts for Learning Walk
1 Seek for the ability to act	Provoke attention, self-assertion, and reaching well-being by acting
2 Theory or pedagogy of recognition	Clients are recognized as subjects of their life
3 Experiential pedagogy or adventure education	Experience is better than teaching
4 Peer education or peer involvement	Better motivation for learning process when learning with peers
5 Reframing	People can focus other parts of their life story
6 Empowerment	People need professional help to make new experiences and start the process for a better life
7 Law of effect	People realize benefit from behaviour
8 Labelling approach	People often behave like they marked
9 Biographical break	People get a delay from their life

4.1. Social Pedagogical Theories

As described, learning walks result from ideas of social training courses. As a rule, they are intended to teach young people action strategies and behavioural patterns for resocialisation. They are considered an educational measure, in contrast to incarceration, which is associated with a high recidivism rate (Kawamura-Reindl and Schneider 2015, p. 139). Therefore, methods aimed at helping young people overcome the difficulties of puberty must focus on aspects of their lives. The selected theories focus primarily on the young person and explain how walking affects them and their living environment.

(1) Boehnisch’s theory, seek for the ability to act, explains that people seek agency, including through deviant behaviour. Critical life situations and a lack of coping strategies lead to feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. Aggressive and violent behaviour is also a way to gain attention, self-assertion, and well-being, despite norm-violating behaviour (Boehnisch 2017, pp. 218–19). The conclusion is to find methods for young people to increase their self-esteem and at the same time reduce deviant acts. To do this, it is necessary to separate the crime from the person. The suggestion to achieve these goals is to build a good relationship during the intervention and to avoid focusing on the crime (Boehnisch 2017, pp. 221–22). In this point, we find great difference between the concepts in Belgium and France on one hand and the German version on the other: In the long-distance-model great effort is spent on the fitting of clients and volunteer companions during the application process and the relationship is tested in a preparation-week. To avoid the labelling of each other, non-professional companions are chosen. As an equal

relationship is considered a prerequisite for development, the companion must openly question his roles (Boddez 2017, p. 9). This leads to friendship, lasting long after the walk, which gives the youngsters a new contact, a new role model, and is something which would not be possible in a professional context. In the long-distance walk, the idea of a team solving the task of walking is one of the most important principles. While there are not many rules in this concept, the most important one is to do the hike in this team. In the German walk lasting one week, the relation between youngster and the companion is understood as a more professional one: "The attitude of the trainer towards the participants must be unprejudiced, appreciative and at the same time preserving a professional distance." (Saechsische Jugendstiftung 2006, p. 23). The program focusses not on walking as a team process between trainer and participant, but on the peer group and individual responsibility. The trainer sets the framework, directs the pedagogical tasks, and supervises the included work assignments. Of course, only the participants perform the work, as they were sentenced, while the trainer is not involved. Perhaps this can be understood as part of restorative justice (Walgrave 2013, p. 44), although reparation is not an actual goal of the journey.

(2) The theory or pedagogy of recognition (Honneth 2016) means an idea of recognition for the clients as subjects of their life, and is committed to promote individuals in developing their self-determined decision capability, ability to act, and judgment ability. Requirement for that is recognition of the individual who owns these abilities in general and making them usable by pedagogical support (Hafeneger et al. 2013, pp. 8–9). When working with young people, it is important for professionals to establish a good relationship and accept the person and their actions as part of their development. Deviant behaviour must be reflected and confrontation with social norms and values must be established (Mueller 2013, p. 240). This is part of the method in different ways: In the long-distance concept, reflection is happening on the way. Walking gives the frame for thinking and the youngsters sometimes start to talk about past and future. In addition, weekly reports have to be sent to the organization, and the only way to communicate with the families are hand-written letters which is another form of reflection (Boddez 2017, p. 9). In the short German walk, reflection is included in formal units, which take place on the evenings about personal history and aims, "Ideas of Living" and a special unit for developing moral understanding. In this unit, the "Heinz-dilemma" according to Lawrence Kohlberg (Enger and Hein 2015) is used for the discussion of morally difficult situations, while on the next walk, the participants are explicitly tasked to think about personal dilemma in their actual situation (Enger et al. 2017, p. 7).

(3) Experiential pedagogy, or adventure education, as an action-oriented way of pedagogy can start learning processes through physical, psychological, and social challenges in order to promote the development of the personality (Borchert 2016, p. 148; Michl 2015, p. 13). Grounded on the ideas of Kurt Hahn, experience is better than teaching, and education should take place in society (Raithel et al. 2007, p. 212). Working with offenders is a promising and at the same time challenging field (Schlieckau 2017, p. 58). Several-day hikes are explicitly mentioned as one of the methods of experiential pedagogy. This happens in divergence to the living world of the youngsters and so gives them the opportunity to realize something completely different (Borchert 2016, p. 149). For pedagogical success in work with offenders, it is necessary to speak and reflect the experience in the life world (Borchert 2016, p. 150; Magoltz 2015, p. 25). Personal and social resources can be learnt by this method, e.g., autonomy, decision making, regulating own emotions, raising self-esteem, perseverance and endurance, integration in groups, action in a role, and cooperation (Galuske 2013, p. 258; Raithel et al. 2007, p. 215). As a method which is similar to social training courses, group interaction can lead to more effective changing of behaviour and attitude than in the work with only one mentor (Kawamura-Reindl and Schneider 2015, p. 150). Again, here the focus is different in both the concepts: while the long-distance walk in Belgium and France focuses very strongly on mastering the path and everyday tasks, in the German model this stands back behind the pedagogical concept.

The walk in Germany is organized around hostels, which are booked before; while some meals are cooked together, most are provided by the hostels, and the main focus lies on the walking process, the community service work which has to be undertaken in the hostels, and the reflection units in the evenings (Enger et al. 2018, p. 13). In the long-distance projects, youngsters and mentors have to organize overnight places, shopping and cooking together using a small amount of money. In addition, the hike passing the Pyrenees provides many more difficulties which must be solved. Furthermore, most of the youngsters are not familiar to long distance walking (as some others might be) and both concepts lead to the mental and physical limits of the participants. In the German model, too much luggage or using a rolling suitcase on forest paths might cause problems, while in the long-distance walk, looking for overnight places and struggling with the mountains and the daily distance of 25 km will require much motivation.

(4) Peer education or peer involvement means to educate and teach people of the same age. Theoretically this leads to more motivation to learn, and the results may be successful (Borchert 2016, p. 156). In addition to social learning theory (Bandura 1977), individuals are more likely to adopt a behaviour if the model is similar to the observer and has an admired status. Furthermore, a behaviour is more likely to be imitated if it has functional value, or if the results are meaningful to the individual. To reach good results by using such peer methods, it is helpful if adults also join the activities (Borchert 2016, p. 157). Therefore, for learning walks, the recommendation is to go on the walk with a small group of youngsters, accompanied by an adult person, who has a lot of knowledge in experimental pedagogy and communication. In the way of walks by one adult and one youngster, the adult mentor can be understood as a peer as both are on the same level; they see each other equal.

(5) Reframing helps to analyse deviant behaviour in different ways. It is establishing itself as an important method in social work. The concept originates from systemic counselling and is now also used as a basis for social pedagogical work. With reinterpretation, the attempt is made to question the previous view of reality, to allow alternative explanations and to actively search for them (Haselmann 2009, p. 179). Furthermore, reinterpretation processes enable new approaches to problems and the recognition of new strategies for action (Gloeckler 2011, p. 56).

(6) Empowerment is “[...] based on an action programme of professional social work [...] and] supports processes of self-organisation and empowerment by service-users.” (Chiapparini 2016, p. 31). Chiapparini translated the definition from Herriger (2020, p. 13): empowerment is “a process of development (...) in which people gain strength, which they need for living a better life based on their own standards” (Chiapparini 2016, p. 32). To reach a better life, resources and strengths must be identified, new actions must be tried, and new experiences must be gathered to understand that changes in life are possible. Therefore, professional service such as social workers and a protective but challenging environment is necessary. In contrast to helplessness, powerlessness, and the feeling of no hope, a new supporting system can help signpost resources. Therefore, social work can help by networking to create a system of support (Herriger 2020, pp. 130–34). Empowerment is a process that takes many steps and much time. Built on the basic attitude, young people are the constructive director of their own life stories (Herriger 2020, p. 54). In the learning walks, youngsters can try, practise, and realize their new methods in coping with stressful new circumstances; they can think about ideas for their life, make new plans, and speak with the companion about further steps.

(7) Together with success and feeling the effects of the own behaviour next to Thorndike's theory law of effect and Skinner's principles of behaviour management, learning processes go along with benefits (Myers 2014, p. 300). Therefore, it is part of learning walks to reflect the daily results to realize the success and benefits of the coped difficulties. Anticipating this process, it was found important to have a “strong symbolic destination” (Boddez 2017, p. 12) for the walk. Though none of the three projects is developed in an ecclesiastical context, all three partners use the Camino in the direction of Santiago de Compostela. There are some practical advantages, such as a well signposted path with cheap hostels. On the

other hand, the aim gives the walking a direction, and every single day can be measured as a step towards reaching this aim. The walks not only aim at the destination Santiago de Compostela, but also target other places on the Camino, such as the city of Rome or places in northern Europe. There are also short versions that walk only part of the pilgrimage route, as is the case on the route near Dresden.

(8) The use of experiences with positive associations is also a very important aspect of the concept. While young offenders are often an object of a stigmatizing process, this can be turned around by using symbolic paths. The Labelling approach or labelling theory explains a stigmatizing process. “Many individuals are ‘marked’ for their past indiscretions, real or perceived, and carry with them the memories of their pasts, if for no other reason than others will not let them forget about who and what they once were (and may still be)” (Franzese 2015, p. 92). Labelling or stigmatization for individuals occurs when deviant behaviour is told to police or judges. On the other hand, if criminal actions are realized but not punished, labelling does not take place. Therefore, interaction with other individuals plays a significant role. Labelling leads to a reality for young people. Being assigned a deviant status, people often behave as they are told. This means being labelled as an offender may make the individual feel they have permission for deviant behaviour. Self-perception belongs to attribution by the environment (Boehnisch 2017, pp. 51–57).

(9) The learning walk is a “biographical break”, or a time out from the known life. This term also means “vacation from the familiar”. It offers the opportunity to try new behaviour without being remembered by others and the individual itself on the known frame. Therefore, according to the labelling approach, the “biographical break” offers the opportunity to forget the delict, and focus on present experiences and future plans without being burdened by old habits.

In summary, the theoretical foundations showed that the learning pathways have a close effect on the young people’s lifeworld, and that their actions and the resulting consequences follow a logical chain. What has not yet been answered is what advantages the learning walks have in terms of improving coping skills. Therefore, in the following chapter, we describe what young offenders can learn on the walk in terms of personal resources.

4.2. Learned Personal Resources on the Learning Walk

Beside the task to reach an “important destination”, the learning walk aims “to break the vicious circle and bring hope and new perspectives, to enhance resilience, problem solving capacities and a positive self- image . . . ” (Boddez 2017, p. 7). The importance of this concept is walking in a strange environment, the interaction with people on the way, and the reflection of the own situation. As Bandura points out: “In maneuvering through emotionally arousing situations, people have to take charge of their inner emotional life and regulate their expressive behaviour and strategically manage their modes of adaption” (Bandura et al. 2003, p. 780). Describing aggressive behaviour as a possible human reaction to unpleasant events (Krahé 2014), the focus can lead to training of alternative methods to react. Knowing special trainings support the development of personal resources such as self-efficacy, resilience, problem solving, self-management, and social support (Knospe 2019). This paper explains how personal resources are likely to be developed in the process of walking.

Based on the theory of resource conservation (Hobfoll 1998, 2002), it is important to understand that resources need to be conserved, preserved, gained, fostered, and protected, as a loss of resources will require more of them to compensate, or as Hobfoll points out, “loss will have much greater impact” (Hobfoll 1998, p. 62). One warning sign of loss of resources is stress. “Hence, stress occurs when (1) resources are threatened with loss, (2) resources are actually lost, or (3) there is a failure to adequately gain resources following significant resource investment.” (Hobfoll 1998, p. 55). Therefore, resources can be finite, and this can cause stress. This leads to the consequence that people “must invest resources in order to protect against resource loss, recover from losses, and gain resources” (Hobfoll

1998, p. 73). This is exactly what happens on the learning path. Young people experience how their resources grow and how these help them on their learning journey. In this respect, a successful completion of the learning pathway also leads to a build-up of resources from which the young people can also benefit in the future.

There is a broad consensus on important resources for coping with stress and achieving well-being. Personal resources related to stress resilience are, for example, self-efficacy, optimism, high self-esteem, sense of purpose, and social support (Hobfoll 2002, p. 309). Knospe emphasises the responsibility of individuals for their mental health and their performance in coping with stressful situations. In addition, their findings indicate that it is important to have many resources rather than just a few to work with. For example, she shows that if only one or two resources are missing from the six personal resources considered in her study, there is a ten to twenty-four times higher risk of perceiving stress symptoms (Knospe 2013, p. 130).

Following the previously named educational goals of the learning pathway, we will look at some personal resources and show that these are strengthened. This mainly includes resilience (Boddez 2017, p. 7), which is the focus of the following.

A definition describes: “Resilience means the psychological resistance of children to biological, psychological and psychosocial developmental risks” (Wustmann 2020, p. 18 translated by the authors) and can be understood as a bundle of resources consisting of 16 individual resources (Wustmann 2020, p. 115). The results of a study on resilience on the learning walk indicate that a variety of resilience resources are improved (Koenig and Knospe 2021). Therefore, learning walks are a solution to promote stress relief resources and thus for the young people to become the leaders of their lives again in the midst of society. Each additional resource makes life easier. However, gaining many resources in just a few weeks is a difficult approach. Nevertheless, the results confirmed that the learning walks work.

4.3. Successful Pedagogical Measures of the Learning Walk

After a look at the theoretical foundations and results on resilience, we next present some successful pedagogical measures of the learning path to show how (socio-pedagogical) facilitators can contribute to the success of the pilgrimage and the growth of resources. These recommendations are based on the nine theoretical concepts from Section 4.1. The recommendations were taken from experience reports and theoretical concepts from the literature. They do not claim to be exhaustive. In some cases, the theoretical analysis already described some requirements for the companions.

Based on the theories “seek for the ability to act” (Boehnisch 2017) and “pedagogy of recognition” (Hafeneger et al. 2013) the facilitators need to build a sustainable relationship with the young people. It does not matter whether the hike takes place in a group with a social pedagogue or in a 1:1 accompaniment, or whether the accompanist has a professional socio-educational background or is a volunteer. The attitude of the facilitator towards the client is important. With knowledge of communication, such as client-centred therapy (Rogers 2004) or nonviolent communication (Rosenberg 2015), it is possible to build up a relationship that is characterised by respect and avoids hierarchical differences. As deviant behaviour is usually a search for attention, the task for the companion is to give the young people recognition. For this, it is necessary that the facilitators understand the young person’s behaviour as coping behaviour and that, over time, it becomes clear that the offence is not condoned, but that there is a trusting relationship (Boehnisch 2017, pp. 221–22). In order to give recognition, the facilitator ideally has competences that promote the young people’s self-realisation in everyday life and in everyday activities. This requires, among other things, voluntary cooperation and autonomy (Honneth 2016, p. 58), or authenticity and transparency, acceptance of young people’s strengths and weaknesses, and “empathy as the ability to see the other person and their world through their eyes” (Henkenborg 2013, pp. 128–29). In addition, the client should not be given goals, as this can lead to resistance. It is helpful if the trainer prefers goals that the young person

himself names. Only in a second step should the use of network members, volunteers, or professional helpers be considered (Zobrist and Kaehler 2017, p. 92).

The advantage of the learning path, in the sense of experiential education, is that learning takes place outside of familiar school spaces. Learning is embedded by the facilitator in the everyday processes of walking and must nevertheless be planned in advance. This requires the trainer to know that experiences already have an effect in themselves and trigger learning processes. Reflection, i.e., discussions about the learning experiences, are encouraged by the facilitator; they support problem solving and the transfer to the young person's living environment. The trainer keeps a low profile and leaves the activities and co-determination to the young people (Senninger 2017, pp. 11–13). Further requirements from the experiential education approach for the trainer are the clarification of the understanding of the role and a role flexibility, as the companion of experiential education is project developer, arranger of educational processes, moderator, learning helper, and mentor (Paffrath 2017, p. 218).

When hiking in small groups, young people learn from each other. This is as people compare themselves in similar situations with similar people, i.e., peers in a similar life situation or with people with slightly higher abilities (Bandura 1986, p. 347). The facilitator is thus faced with the task of being a role model themselves and being aware of the similar situation to the young people during the walk. On the other hand, they should also recognise that the young people form a group of their own, who have more similarities to each other. Learning processes in groups prove problematic when relationship problems arise between group members. Then, it is almost impossible to work on factual issues. It is recommended that the trainer adopts an attitude of self-disclosure and gives priority to working through the relationship problems. The momentary relaxed mood of the group is a necessary condition for successful learning (Schmidt-Grunert 2009, pp. 211–12).

To use the method of reframing, it is possible to have a look behind personal weaknesses and deficits, and focus strengths (Boehnisch 2017, pp. 225–27). Clients may gain a new perspective on some aspect of themselves, the problem, or the situation (Cournoyer 2014, pp. 460–63). While walking, the young people often think about their behaviour without talking to the companion, and later they reflect on it together as the process of reframing is independent. The companion therefore needs patience and empathy in order to not disturb the process of reframing. Knowledge of systemic counselling is very helpful for the facilitator to support the reframing process.

One of the main tasks in a learning walk and the accompanying coercive context for the young people is to empower the clients for the necessary changes in their lives. This requires internal and external resources, which the young person must first access. The empowerment approach, which aims to achieve self-determination and life autonomy, provides methodological suggestions for this (Petzi 2019, p. 60; Zobrist and Kaehler 2017, p. 95). These include the recording of social network resources and resource interviews in the sense of biography work to record and reflect on personal, social, ecological, economic, and professional resources (Herriger 2020, p. 110).

In the spirit of Skinner and Thorndike, the facilitator takes on the task of reflecting on the actions, experiences, and results of the journey with the young people. In doing so, they should emphasise the positive aspects, i.e., the rewards or the difficult situations that were mastered. This helps to consolidate newly learned action strategies and new coping patterns. Due to the value-neutral statements of the companion, critical situations can also be discussed and ideas for changes can be openly discussed. The trainer also has to encourage the young people that many improvements or effects occur only after a delay. Waiting or enduring this gap until the reward has been achieved must first be learned, for which resources or action strategies must be tried out.

Concerning the learning walks, youngsters experience on their road that they are not labelled or realized as offender. A participant pointed out: "It was good to see that there are still people who do not condemn you because you have made mistakes in life and you do not treat as a serious criminal." (Enger et al. 2017, p. 13). This allows new perceptions of

their person, their life, and their self-esteem. This gives them the chance of integration and breaks a terrible, vicious circle. Feeling as a human, not as a criminal person, can offer new ideas and thoughts directly into a changing life story. Therefore, it is good if the facilitators see themselves as part of the group in order to express a similarity or affiliation to the young people to the outside world as well. This way, they can be perceived as a group of young walkers, which reduces the risk of critical or strange questions from passers-by.

A final aspect considered here is the so-called biographical pause. Here, the trainer accompanies the separation of the young people from their familiar environment. This may also be accompanied by emotional fluctuations, bad moods, helplessness, and dissatisfaction. The trainer should be prepared for this and initially be neutral towards this behaviour. Over the course of the trip, they can precisely reflect this unfavourable coping behaviour of new and uncontrollable situations with the young people. As already described, there is nevertheless no stigmatisation, so that the participants of the learning walk have a kind of holiday from their actual lives.

All in all, the walk requires a lot of professional socio-pedagogical action from the trainers. The facilitator must be aware that they are in what is called an order triangle. The actors involved in social work are (1) the contracting authorities, (2) the practitioner with their organisation in the background, and (3) the client and their social network (Zobrist and Kaehler 2017, p. 60).

By concentrating on the walk and the most basic human needs, the failures before the walk no longer play a role. In this way, the young person does not experience themselves as an offender, but finds themselves in a new role, which they can partly define for themselves. The companion, on the other hand, takes on different roles, such as leader, observer, expert, advisor, and helper. In order to achieve this, facilitators can use general principles of action as a guide when dealing with young offenders. These include lifeworld-oriented basic attitudes, lifeworld-oriented case understanding (detailed individual case understanding), everyday planning, social space orientation, integration, prevention, participation, and professional involvement in public and political discussions (Schneider 2016, pp. 295–99). In addition, these principles need to be complemented by knowledge in dealing with reactance, as the young people do not undertake the learning walk entirely voluntarily. The rejecting behaviours that occur serve the young offenders to maintain their own respect, to set limits to the values set by society and to search for their own solutions to problems (Conen 1999, p. 287). As working aids for dealing with resistance, Zobrist and Kaehler (2017, pp. 105–6) recommend, among other things, various reflection exercises, changes of focus, reformulations, approvals with simultaneous changes of perspective, freedom of choice, and control. They further point out that the companion must also accept resistance while valuing the person. The client's resistance does not lead to the facilitator solving the young person's problem, which requires friendly persistence on the part of the trainer.

Social pedagogical work also reaches its limits, as the approach of everyday orientation can only be implemented to a limited extent on a learning walk. Such a journey is too far removed from everyday life. However, plans for the future can be made and support mechanisms can be initiated. Although these findings promise success and help youngsters on their way of resocialisation, there are barriers, too. Therefore, peers can be both: resource and risk. Identity and group membership belong together and occur by compliance of group rules or authority (Boehnisch 2017, p. 247). Acceptance between the young people and the social worker, companion, or service is necessary to build a working relationship. Acceptance means respect in both ways regarding to Rogers basic attitudes (empathy, acceptance, and congruence) (Thorne and Sanders 2012, pp. 36–39). To maintain the professional attitude and distinguish the different life circumstances (dividing person and delict) professional social workers need a supporting system in the background (e.g., colleagues, supervision) (Boehnisch 2017, pp. 250, 255).

The aforementioned role conflicts, and ambivalent tasks entail various risks. For example, social workers in coercive contexts face an increased risk of burnout and a tendency to choose a different (social) field of work professionally (Zobrist and Kaehler

2017, p. 104). Therefore, in addition to a professional attitude, the acceptance of the three mandates of social work (state mandate, client mandate, and mandate of social work as a profession), self-advocacy is also enormously important, for only when the facilitators are mindful of themselves can meaningful social work succeed.

5. Conclusions

These methods have potential to alter educational policy. Young people in conflict with the law may successfully reintegrate into society, trading their deviant behavior for productive alternatives. Learning walks promote maturity and commitment to shared social values. Among possible benefits for a renewed pedagogy for delinquent youths, Borchert (2016, p. 276) lists scope for personal development and initiative, appreciation of others, self-actualization, and exposure to culture.

One risk is the great experience to have reached an aim which was far away. This is related to high feelings, a lot of motivation, and an emotional highlight in life. The question is if such a great experience can be achieved for a second time. Therefore, the youngsters must be accompanied after the walk as well, supported to avoid letdown. Thus, new concepts emphasise not only the way itself, but use this as an initial part of a longer project, which aims to develop and train a personal perspective for the young offenders (Cortella et al. 2018; Aoun 2019). Enger and Merbeth (2018) also refer to the community orientation of the sociopedagogical pilgrimage: "... through the involvement of sponsors, stakeholders and the charitable environment of the hostels (...) a social perception of young offenders can be achieved which clearly differs from the image drawn in the mass media." (Enger and Merbeth 2018, p. 285). The results underline that pilgrimage has many areas of application. Currently, it is appreciated that religious aspects overlap with secular trends. Already known new functions of pilgrimage are meaningful leisure time, fitness, and wellness experiences (Heid and Schnettler 2014, p. 221). Tourism and pilgrimage are also no longer mutually exclusive (Heid and Schnettler 2014, p. 226).

Learning walks are a method for coping with deviant adolescence behaviour due to developmental stumbles and transient biological changes. Such outings may reintegrate offenders without incarceration, save public funds, produce greater public safety, and invite young adults to a better future. Next steps will require incorporating training walks into the judicial system as a recognized form of alternative sentencing. Proof of success is made more difficult due to the need to protect participants' confidentiality and caution in interrogating minors and young adults about outcomes and recidivism. Integrating transitional processes and stages for young people in trouble can help document the success of the learning walks.

The findings of our article, which integrates pilgrimage into social work, shows the hope that the ancient pilgrimage path carries into our society, that it can be a path to (re)enable not only young people to live in our social centre. We also refer to competences that can increase the success of guided pilgrimages. In this respect, there is great potential in the pilgrimage path. In addition to the well-known religious orientation, it also offers a walking network, which can help people of all ages to take developmental steps.

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Notes

- ¹ NEET is an acronym for not in education, employment, or training. The term NEET is used to describe young people who are not engaged in any form of employment, education or training. The term has come into the policy debate in recent years due to disproportionate impact of the recession on young people (under 30 years old) (Eurofound 2021).
- ² A video-documentary is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaAZrENqupM&feature=youtu.be> (accessed on 15 December 2021).

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