

#MyEurope2017



A United Nation's Population Fund report suggests that India has the world's largest youth population; by 2020, it was reported, the average age in India will be **29 years**, with 64% of its population in the working age group. A big percentage of the youth population, and more importantly, if education and training is made available to that population, could result in a soaring economy and an unprecedented edge on the world stage. It is with this knowledge that I embarked on #myEurope2017 trip, made possible by the Schwarzkopf Stiftung Young Europe Foundation to research about the German Educational and Vocational system.

Since my trip focused on the German Dual Training Scheme, I planned an itinerary around Germany so as to focus on its various areas so as to be able to meet people from all over and gather their experiences. I went from the north-east to the south-west:



Berlin ⇒ Hanover ⇒ Heidelberg ⇒ Freiburg

Each city had its own temperament and was beautiful in different ways, and I will attempt to add my observations about them.

The Dual Educational system in Germany provides what the other countries have been struggling with for decades: a practical aspect to education. These training programmes not only focus on skill development alongside education but also involve on-the-job work experience and an almost hundred percent employment rate after finishing the course.

Case Study



To understand the entire system better, I proceeded to do a case study of the same in association with the **BDA, the Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände, or the Confederation of German Employees' Associations**, whose mission is to actively represent business interests in the field of social policy. A visit to the Deutsche Bahn Training Center in Berlin was organized for me where I could understand more about the training system.

Deutsche Bahn, or DB, is a German railway company, a private joint stock company, and the largest railway and infrastructure owner in Europe. I was invited to the training center Ausbildungswerkstatt Berlin, lying close to the outskirts of the city, for which I took the S-Bahn (a creation of the DB). Taken and shown around the premises by an employee who was kind enough to translate whatever was needed, I set to interview and seek more information.

This particular training center had recruits from around the city and the neighboring areas in Brandenburg, with a total of 270 students of all the three years. (A typical training course runs for 3 years at the DB Training Center). At the Ausbildungswerkstatt Berlin, the apprentices were from the technical areas: electricians and mechanics with specializations in IT systems, construction and infrastructure. They are called apprentices

because they do more than just study- they train, learn and work the skills each day, leading every day to be a more hands-on employee for the company.



An apprentice at the training center has three years of study and training, and he can join the center straight after school. Some recruits begin as young as when they are sixteen, and after the end of three years, ready and employable at one of the biggest companies in the world. The system is simple: everyone must take a kind of aptitude test, the score of which will assure the training center that the person has the flair for the required work. If one doesn't achieve the required score, he or she also has the option of studying for a few months for that test and then taking it again.



A typical day at the DB Training center starts from 6.30 am in the morning and goes on till 3 pm in the afternoon: in the first year of training, the recruits have one or two days of school where they study different subjects, and the rest of the days are spent at the training center learning tasks like designing a circuit to constructing a railway signal. Mostly, the recruits in this center are boys, although I do spot a few girls; I am told that the service sector attracts more female recruits. For the second and third years of the apprenticeship, the recruits are asked to also be present at the company office where they receive on the job training, so as to be ready for the real world, or what lays out there once the training period is over.



The best part of the training however is this: each recruit receives eight hundred Euros a month throughout the three years that they apprentice, which is a comfortable income for a young person to maintain themselves as they get ready to be employable.

The training programme is not as one-track minded as it is perceived to be: the recruits, at any time during the course, can quit if they don't feel it living up to their expectations and more importantly, after finishing their training, they still can choose to do something of their own. It is a matter of surviving the first few weeks of the training, the trainer tells me, for it is a challenge to bring together practical and theoretical learning and can sometimes be quite taxing. But once that is done, it is one big DB family.



The most obvious benefit over a university education lies in the fact that after three years of training, the recruits can be sure of a job. Another popular option is to learn to be a teacher for the same skill that they learnt. To understand from the students' perspective, I spoke to three students, Nico, Micy and Mattias.

Nico is 29 years old and works at DB Energy, while Micy is 19 years old and Mattias is 22 years old, and both of them work for the S Bahn. All three of them suggested that they were satisfied with their life at DB Training center and acquiesced that they get enough time after work to pursue hobbies and other interests. When I ask them how the atmosphere is like at the training center, comes Mattias' prompt reply, "I would say it is good- Nico and Micy met here and are dating!"

While Micy and Mattias began their apprenticeships straight after school, Nico did a bunch of other apprenticeships before settling onto this one. He is a great example of how one can have multiple options after the training course, I am told: because he has shown great aptitude, the company wants to groom him and will pay for him to pursue a bachelors in engineering after his training gets over.



I decided it was time to speak to the other side, so I set to interview Nikita, a trainer at the Db Training Center who trained recruits every day and who did the apprenticeship eleven years ago.

“I teach ground skills for electricians and technicians, for example techniques for magnetic plugging. I was nineteen when I began teaching and lots of students were older than me. To discipline them proved to be the biggest challenge for my career. I have to be strict with the students. When I was growing up, I couldn’t imagine sitting in an office all day, I wanted to do something with my hands. The biggest challenge we face right now, is of course keeping up to date with new electrical laws and technology.”



As I continued with my travels in Berlin, and then to Hanover, Heidelberg and Freiburg, it was clear that the dual education training as a system worked for many, and suited the economy very well as a whole by training people with skills that they would directly need. Berlin, as a confluence between eastern and western parts of Germany and also a capital city, is very multicultural and so it was easy for me to meet people there and talk to them about their journeys in life. `



I met Tim, a young professional working at Volkswagen as an engineer, and did an apprenticeship for mechanical engineering. He tries to explain to me why this training is essential while on the job.

“It’s like, if you only study theory, people don’t respect you because you don’t know the fundamentals. And without the fundamentals, you are nothing.”

His sentiment was echoed by Markus, who I met in Berlin, who trained to be a chef, but is considering a change in profession. “Right now, I don’t know what I am doing. But it was the right thing for me at time, after twelve years of study. I like it because it’s something natural, do you get me? Something that you can touch and feel, instead of reading drab over a book. I’m glad I got that chance, and I am sure I will figure my way from here.”

His friend Paul agreed, who trained to be a brewer of beer. “I thought it would be fun, learning to brew beer, but it involved a lot of Maths and Physics. Now I want to train to be a cop at a kind of police academy. I was born here, I grew up here, and I just feel like I want to give something back.”

The focus here is on the **availability of options**; while Nico, Micy, Mattias and Tim found their calling in the training courses, Marcus and Paul decided to go with something

else after finishing their training. Contrary to those was Bernard, who trained as a sculptor and then decided to study sculpture at the University of Munich.



The Dual Training Scheme is also the system in use in Switzerland and Austria and in Freiburg, I was lucky enough to meet another Tim who works in Bern, and a watchmaker no less!

“I was born in Bern, and I never had a flair for study. I started learning watch making at 17. It was 4 years of school of training, but also other classes about things like civil law, marriage law – all the practical life skills you could need for life. It prepares you for life. I think this system is the best thing ever. If you don’t want to study, you don’t study. You do something else you’re good at.”



Another case in point is my friend Martin Schindling and his brother Michael Schindling, who grew up in Scharnstein in upper Austria. While Martin, after graduating from school decided to go study law at the University of Vienna and is currently pursuing an internship in Brussels, his brother Michael decided to train as a chef when he was fourteen and has been working and training since then, and now at the age of twenty two, moved to Vancouver in Canada for a year for a hospitality programme.

There is a common perception that training for a particular job limits one's options for the future, but through my interviews, I found that there is a plethora of options even after training for particular jobs. The biggest advantages for the system are that the apprenticeships are employer funded, leave almost no student debt, and go a long way in the skill demand-and-supply. In Germany, if you're a professional who has received skill training, you will not require a degree to work. Training companies also save on recruitment and hiring the wrong employee.

India has vast untapped human resources, and to be able to tap skillfully into those would result in an unprecedented boom.

From happening and multicultural Berlin, green Hanover, postcard perfect Heidelberg and energetic Freiburg, I had a great experience traveling in Germany and researching about my travel topic. The sights, the beauty but most importantly the people summed up my three weeks in a beautiful and learning journey.