

Deaf Studies workshop

Events and Organisations within the Deaf Community

Deaf clubs and social gatherings

*Understanding the Role of Community, Culture, and
Connection*

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How did a deafclub come into being back then?

Direct response to:

- social exclusion
- lack of state support
- desire for self-determination within the Deaf community



Wiener Taubstummen Club "Glück auf"

1880 - 1900, 20-jährige Jubiläumsfeier



Social Isolation and Exclusion

- Many deaf individuals were **socially isolated**.
- **Few opportunities** for education or employment
- They were often seen as “uneducable”.
 - > need **to connect with like-minded individuals** was strong.



DEAF
CULTURE,
HERITAGE AND
DIVERSITY



Zur Erinnerung (1879)

In memory of the 100th anniversary of the K.k. institute for the Deaf in Vienna

Schools as Meeting Points

- Often, the first **communities formed** in or around schools for the deaf.
- Former students stayed in contact and organized **regular meetups**.
- These gatherings -> became the **organizational core** of deaf clubs.



Influence of Sign Language

- enabled **natural communication** among deaf people
- fostered the development of a **unique Deaf culture**
- desire **to preserve and promote** this language and culture -> founding of clubs





Wiener Taubstummen Frauen – Verein (1890)

Organization and Structure

First meetings:

- were organized by individual deaf people—often **well-connected** and **engaged**
- took place in **inns, community halls, or private homes**
- Over time, **formal structures developed**, with bylaws, elected boards, and regular meetings.

Goals of the Deafclub

- Promotion of **education**
(e.g., through lectures, workshops)
- Social **gatherings** and mutual support
- **Advocacy** for the rights of deaf people
- **Preservation** of sign language
- Creation of sports, theater, or cultural groups



Taubstummengesellschaft
bei Dreher Bierhalle (1896)
© Ludwig Pollak

Legal Framework



Eventually, many associations were **officially registered** (e.g., as non-profit organizations/NGOs).

This allowed them to:

- collect **donations**
- hold **public events**
- gain wider **recognition**



History of Deaf Clubs

In 1900:

1. Paris 1838
2. Berlin 1848
3. Berlin 1849
4. Leipzig 1864
5. Lüttich 1864
6. Vienna 1865
7. Dresden 1866
8. Copenhagen 1866
9. Stockholm 1868
10. Prague 1868

In 2024:

1. Berlin 1848
2. Leipzig 1864
3. Vienna 1865
4. Dresden 1866
5. Copenhagen 1866
6. Stockholm 1868
7. Prague 1868
8. Hannover 1872
9. Milano 1874
10. Oslo 1878

Evolution of Membership Dynamics

Traditionally:

- strict membership criteria
- members often **divided by work, race, or sports**

Today:

- focus has shifted to **inclusivity**
- allowing individuals to engage based on personal interests and needs
- reflective of broader societal change





Dimensions of Modern Deaf Organizations

- encompass **various dimensions**
including civil rights, citizenship, and professional development
- cater to an array of issues
-> reflecting the evolution of the Deaf community's role within society



Deaf club = deaf space

- environments where **visual communication** is central
- helps people see, sign, and interact naturally without barriers

Mixed Participation

- primarily for Deaf and hard of hearing people
- often welcome sign language learners, interpreters, and hearing allies who respect Deaf culture



What Are “Events and Organisations” in the Deaf Community?

Activities and groups created **by and for** Deaf people

- promote **culture, language, sport, social life, and rights**
- provide **support, education, and community**



Examples of Events in the Deaf Community

- Deaf **festivals** and cultural **celebrations**
- Sign language **theater** and **poetry**
- Educational **workshops** and **seminars**
- Social **meetups**
- Deaf **conferences** and **public talks**
- **Sport events** (Deaflympics, World championship, Friendly tournament)



**Educational Congress 2025 of
the Austrian „Gehörlosenbund“**

Why Are These Events Important?

- Use of **sign language** as main communication
- Encourage **community connection** and **belonging**
- **Share knowledge** and Deaf **experiences**
- **Celebrate** and **preserve** Deaf culture



What Kind of Organisations Exist?

- Deaf clubs and community centers
- National associations (e.g., National Association of the Deaf)
- Deaf education institutions
- Deaf sports teams and Deaflympics committees (Europa: EDSO)
- Youth, women's, and advocacy groups



Purpose of Deaf Organisations

- **Advocate** for Deaf rights and accessibility
- **Support** sign language and cultural identity
- **Offer services:** interpreting, counseling, education
- **Empower** the Deaf community to lead and grow

Summary

- Events and organisations help Deaf people **connect, express themselves, and thrive.**
- They build a **strong, inclusive, and empowered** Deaf community.
- They play a key role in **preserving culture and promoting equality.**

Significance of Deaf Clubs

- most important social institution for Deaf People after they left Deaf Schools
- drew in Deaf people from oral schools wanting to connect to other Deaf people
- there were **oral-only clubs but**
many became socially involved in the signing community through the larger clubs
- **“learning to be Deaf”:**
for many people it was **the first time to ever get in touch with other Deaf people**



Social Community and Sense of Belonging

Deaf individuals often experience social isolation in everyday life, as communication with hearing people can be challenging due to **language barriers**.

A Deaf club provides a space where deaf people can communicate with each other in their **natural language** – sign language.

It creates a sense of **community, understanding, and belonging**.

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TURKOOIS



Innosign

Witaf
Seit 1865 im Dienste der Gehörlosen



ISTITUTO DEI SORDI
DI TORINO

Thank you!



Resources

Padden, C./Humphries, T. (2005): Inside Deaf Culture. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.



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