

Abstract of Contribution 1157

ID: 1157

Symposium Final

Related to main conference topic: Refugee and migration Movements - Challenges for Education and Social Work

Research methodology: qualitative, theoretical

Research area: Social Pedagogy/Education and Social Work

Keywords: Mobility Studies, soziale Probleme, Sozialpädagogik

(Im)Mobilities in Social Problems Work: Exploring Mobilities Studies for Social Pedagogy

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The symposium analyses how movements are constitutive for pedagogy and education by looking at the entanglement of (im)mobilities in understanding and organizing social problems work. The mobility paradigm as a rising perspective opens up perspectives for the academic reflection of social work/ social pedagogy. Folding a "mobile lens" onto social problems work, the symposium asks, if and why it is indicated to make use of mobilities studies and what it is possibly good for, e.g. with regard to heuristic, methodological or theoretical developments by bringing together scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds. What does it do to social problem work if it is linked to certain forms of (im)mobility? What kinds of knowledge is invested and created in the context of these forms of movement and stillstand, of fluidity and fixity? How are these aspects linked to organizational structures and institutional shape of forms of socio-pedagogical interventions as a professional enterprise?

Presentations of the Symposium

Looking at 'cultures of mobilities' as a gateway towards mobile lives and their problematization

Anna Lipphardt

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Research on mobility often starts from the normative perspective of sedentarism. Thus, it alienates movement as an exceptional or suspect form of living and working. In contrast, starting from the life of professional and social groups with a long history of (mandatory) mobility that even predates the modern state (e.g. travelling artists, Yeniche) reveals how people understand and experience (im)mobility in a differentiated way. Hence, as part of their ways of living and working, mobile people have created and relied upon communities, networks and infrastructures in coping with (im)mobility regimes of all kind. These cultures of mobilities entail experience and knowledge about how being on the move as well as making a halt in transit or permanent sites becomes socially and legally problematized and policed. In particular, research on cultures of mobility allows for gaining different knowledge how people face and deal with educational and pedagogical demands, such as schooling or parenthood. Likewise, such a perspective enables us to look into the space-related, place-based and state-centered conditionalities of social security systems, e.g. welfare institutions, as well as to gain insights into the conditionalities of "alternative" arrangements for social protection.

Researching social work through a mobile lens

Harry Ferguson

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It is mostly taken as a matter of course that professionalized social work and social pedagogy takes place in specially produced spaces, such as offices, advisory centers, or youth clubs. This presupposes a more or less voluntary movement of "clients" towards these spaces. Only few areas of work are considered to require physical mobility, e.g. when professionals have to enter the everyday environments of their addressees, such as in street work or outpatient educational assistance for families. Generally, current social problems work displays a tendency towards a clinical development of social and educational interventions in specialized institutions with "clean offices" separating professional helpers from the "messy" everyday environment of their clientele. Hence, only very few studies consider the mobility of both professional helpers and of social work clients, including the movement and positioning of bodies, as well as the movements and standstills of both clients and professionals during the course of a day. Up to now, mobile methods and mobile research have almost not been used to analyze how professionals actually do social problems work. Hence, the paper explores social work practices through a mobile lens, presenting results from data collection "on the move", e.g. while driving with professionals or moving in and out of private homes.

Trajectories of poor Roma youth in Europe: Balancing the complexities of spatial, social and educational (im)mobility.

Stefano Piemontese

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Within a social work and educational perspective, youth is considered as a very dynamic, both risky and adventurous life stage which is "normally" located and embedded in a nuclear family with a stable residence in one nation-state. However, research on mobile trajectories of poor Roma youth shows how complex three dimension of mobility are entangled in their life: transnational mobility (i.e. between Romania and Spain), intra-urban mobility (due to evictions from squatted houses) and educational mobility (due to their ambition for post-compulsory education). In other words, spatial, social and educational (im)mobility of these young people are intertwined in an ambivalent and risky way and thus call for cautious balancing. While their autonomous mobility projects can be considered as an attempt to escape socio-economic inequalities and to take up the challenge of social (upward) mobility, the case of transnational Roma youth also reveals how both educational institutions and social assistance organizations they encounter are structured around normative assumptions concerning rootedness, fixity and (im)mobility.

The regimes-of-mobility approach: addressing mobility and stasis within unequal fields of globe-spanning power

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Mobilities studies emerged as a critique of the tendency to ignore either past or present histories of human movement and relatedness. However, considering the growing role of (supra)-state institutions and nationalism in regulating (im)mobility and maintaining both

internal and external social inequality, we have to ask: How can we overcome binary thinking between fixity and motion and yet not oversee the differential barriers to movement? The Regimes-of-Mobility approach offers a theoretical framework that neither normalizes fixed relationships between people and territory ("methodological nationalism") nor naturalizes or glorifies movement. It explores the relationships between the privileged movements of some and the co-dependent but stigmatized and forbidden movement, migration and interconnection of the poor, powerless and exploited. Hence, it calls for a global perspective on diverse and differentiated forms of (im)mobility - physical and social, upward and downward – on a variety of scales. Looking at intersecting regimes of mobility in a historical, transnational and global perspective helps us to understand how the movements of some "travelers" are normalized while ventures of others are criminalized. Applying such a framework to social work and social pedagogy can be a rich resource in understanding how social problems work requires, conditions, brings about and regulates specific forms of both mobility and immobility.