

# Proposal for a full presentation at the conference „MIGRATION AND EDUCATION“

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## **“The Learning of Others: How ‘Locals’ Make Sense of Their Mentorship for ‘Unaccompanied Minor Refugees’**

Commonly, research at the intersection of “migration” and “learning/ education” (Bildung) focuses on the “individual migrant”. Thus, it takes for granted that education and learning becomes relevant primarily for mobile people in the context of border crossings. Such a perspective does not only resemble biased ideas of “immigration”, (unidirectional) “integration” or “assimilation”. It also reproduces methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) and ethnic-national-racist “groupism” (Brubaker 2004; 2013) in educationalist knowledge production.

However, our contribution starts from the assumption that processes of learning in the context of “migration” or “flight” are related to a number of different people in highly diverse situations. They take place at multiple sites and are fostered and shaped by a number of settings and actors, including institutions. Following this relationalist line of thought, we look at a group of people who are trained and serve as natural mentors for “unaccompanied minor refugees” in Austria. This training of future mentors as well as the matching of mentors and mentees takes place in the context of a pilot program run by a regional ombudsman institution for children and young people in Salzburg. The few scientific contributions in the Austrian context exclusively look at individuals labelled as “unaccompanied minor refugees”. On the contrary, our research project asks how different actors who are involved in this pilot project make sense of newly established relationships between young “refugees” and “locals” on the biographical level of everyday life.

Methodologically, we use qualitative research to conduct semi-guided, narrative interviews with voluntary mentors. In the first wave (still ongoing), we have collected data after they have been trained by the ombudsman institution as “godfather” or “godmother” (the native term for the mentoring position), but before they get into close contact with “their youngster” (the frequent term they apply to their mentee). We have asked them for example how come that mentors engage, how their environment perceives of this, what they expect to be for their youngster or what they have in mind with regard of concrete joint activities.

Our first impression and overview of the collected data is that at least a number of mentors use this new function as an opportunity to work on their biographies and give shape to their individual development. Hence, they take stock of their lives up to now (e.g. with regard to their social positioning, individual achievements or their family track). Some reorient things they find important, envision activities and functions they would like to achieve for the “unaccompanied minor refugees”. Others prepare for intricacies they might be confronted with if they engage deeply and on a social and emotional level with an “unaccompanied minor refugees”, especially if the young person still lacks a secure residential status. In our second wave (starting in February/ March 2016) we want to do follow-up interviews with the same mentors, asking them about the experiences they will have made up to that point. Though proper data analysis is still pending at this moment (December 15<sup>th</sup>), we expect rich results on a topic that is neglected in the field of migration studies, but highly relevant for an educationalist contribution to mobility studies.

The proposal intersects with two of the proposed topics, namely (A) „*Migration bildet Menschen*“ and (F) „*Migration bildet Gesellschaft*“. Possible languages of presentation: German, English.