

Från miljonprogram till högskoleprogram

Plats, agentskap och villkorad valfrihet

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Abstract

This is a dissertation about young people's experiences of their journeys from a socially marginalized suburb to higher education. Many students from these areas do not continue to higher education, but some do. There is little empirical knowledge about what makes this achievable. The aim of the study is to address the question of how agency is possible and how the hindering structuring conditions associated with place can be understood and overcome. The relevancy of the study stems from a segregating urban development that puts a school system striving for social inclusion in a new situation, where the significance of place becomes of growing importance. There is, if you will, a geography of opportunity.

An interview study with nineteen informants was conducted. These informants had a variety of family and ethnic backgrounds. Criteria for the selection were that they had upbringing and schooling in a marginalized suburb and sufficient qualifications to enter higher educational studies. As it turned out, in most cases they appeared to be well on their way to successful completion of studies at university level.

The foremost result of the study is confirmation that young people have to deal with how their background from the marginalized suburb is perceived. For them, this is an identity-sensitive question that requires emotional work. This finding helps to understand agency and freedom of choice as structurally conditioned by class, otherization and place. In searching for mechanisms, the study contributes to specify the conditions that made agency possible. In order to address social inclusion, it is important to pay attention to what supported agency: A polycultural experience was seen by the informants as a strengthening specific form of cultural capital. Informants were active in generating groups positive to education within their schools, and these groups in turn had a positive effect on keeping up their high standards of achievement. Those informants without higher education had valued their parents' taking an interest in learning and providing an encouraging family atmosphere, rather than demanding performance and results. The parents had also been role models due to traits such as endurance and high work ethics. The informants' goals were not particularly cued to outside motivation and specific ends. Rather, they were characterized by self-worth, social security and perceived future freedom of choice. It was not unusual that goals were of a social character, to some extent fuelled by experiences of social class. It is evident that teacher's commitment to their students and to learning had a formative significance for students' concerns.

This study has implications for school policy in that a segregated city calls for action to accomplish equity in quality and expectations. A greater awareness of the impact of contextual differences and the importance of place and of identity work are starting points in addressing issues of social inclusion.

Key words: urban marginalization, educational barriers, social mobility, social inclusion, equity in education, place identity, critical realism, agency, sociology of emotions, sociology of education.