Organisation of everyday life and materiality of places: Different conditions for the evolvement of resourceful personal communities among unaccompanied refugee minors at Norwegian residential care institutions before and after resettlement

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How may personal communities among youngsters at residential care institutions for young unaccompanied minors be resourceful in the resettlement phase, and how are organisation of everyday life and materiality of places related to the evolvement of such communities?

The concept of personal communities directs the analytical gaze towards the youngsters’ agency – how they create social opportunities; their doing – the social practices they engage in; and their participation – how they contribute to the social practices.

The data material consists of life mode inspired interviews with 15 young unaccompanied refugee minors from Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Angola and their respective professional caregivers. Interviews were conducted before resettlement when living at asylum reception centres organized as child protection care centres, as well as 8-12 months after resettlement when living in group homes, i.e. smaller care units for unaccompanied refugee minors.

The analysis shows that the personal communities the minors created with each other at the care centre, before resettlement, became particularly resourceful for the young people. Three types of practices are highlighted: Co-creating possible identities by drawing upon shared symbolic resources, making meaning of and sharing information about the specific institutions they are engaged in, and practicing emotional care for each other.

The interviews after resettlement showed that the personal communities developed at the group homes were fewer and less resourceful compared to the communities developed at the care centre, a comparison also drawn upon by the youngsters. How can we understand this result?

In this paper I explore how the materiality of the two types of residential care institutions before and after resettlement make up different conditions for the youngsters possibilities for creating personal communities. For example, the number and composition (age, ethnicity and gender) of the co-habitant youngsters and the material spaces of the institutions gave different opportunities for participating in each others’ everyday life at home and across contexts, thus creating differences in the opportunities for joint meaning making and development of shared social practices.

Discourses of individuation and assimilation are discussed as related to the organisation and materiality of the care institutions after resettlement.

Keywords: materiality, personal communities, everyday life, unaccompanied refugee minors