Sharing family and household: Children’s experiences of diverse family forms and varied social and material relationships

*Ida Wentzel Winther

University of Aarhus, Denmark

Family relationships are normatively assumed to be characterized by ‘sharing’, such as living together in the same home, occupying the same place, sharing stuff, blood and biology, spending special and ordinary time together, and consequently creating shared biographical experiences. In that way, families are thrown into togetherness. At the same time, we see families in varying forms where ‘sharing’ is lived and contested differently. In Denmark, many children live in nuclear families, and many live in different variations of more than one household. For those who share household and family, ‘sharing’ will be a basic condition. No matter what, they should share life circumstances, more stories, more places and spaces, more households families with both kin and non-kin. This keynote addresses the particular of children’s experiences of living apart and/or living together in sharing families. They live in a mixture of attachment and fragmentations, in a grid of more or less stable connection lines and affinities. They live in several sets of social relationships that are bodily settled, and they live in different material worlds, with separate rules and regulations. In families where they do not share everyday life, they capture other ways to keep in contact, be close, and share sensations.

I will present some film clips from my research in order to show and clarify how shared, (dis)connected, and moveable life is made and dealt with in an everyday micro-level perspective. I want to invite you into the landscape of sensations, feelings and materiality where different kinds of movements happen. I draw on various research done over the past 15 years: about homes & households, siblings, divorced family life and everyday life. Behind this, you will find inspiration from Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘thresholds’ (1938), Doreen Massey’s concept of ‘throwntogetherness’ (2004), Jennifer Mason’s ‘affinities’ (2018), and my own ‘(ex)changeability’ (2015). They are all concepts I use to understand how the children are thrown into sub-universes, where both inter-subjective and inter-objective relationships are at stake and where they might encounter the awkward, the intangible, the unintentional and the ordinary.