Teenage life in real time – a longitudinal study of socio-cultural development among Copenhagen adolescents

Andreas Stæhr, Thomas Rørbeck Nørreby

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Heller (2011:6) suggests that when engaging in studies of late modern globalized societies we need to turn our gaze away from stability to mobility (Heller 2007, Blommaert 2010) and focus on for example social trajectories. This could include how social actors engage in shifting social practices and how they construct relations, similarity and difference in uneven and ever-shifting everyday contexts. This paper offers insights into the socio-cultural development of three Copenhagen male adolescents with different cultural and linguistic minority backgrounds. We have followed these boys as part of a collaborative ethnographic field work throughout a period of five years. First, in their grade school (last three years of grade school), then into high-school (two years). Over these years the boys have gone through significant environmental and social transitions. In regards to the educational, cultural context, they have gone from attending the same highly culturally and linguistically diverse grade school to attending different high schools with both more homogenous pupil populations and different profiles in a socio-economic perspective.

On the basis of our ethnographic fieldwork across online and offline settings, as well as interviews and informal meetings with the boys, we study how the shift of environment affects the way they position themselves as minority boys through the use of social categories such as “Dane”, “Perker” and “immigrant”. We pursue the following questions: 1) How do the boys position themselves as minority students in two demographically different school contexts and how does this change over time and 2) what is the connection between their positionings and their self representations regarding academic competences during this period of time.

Keywords: youth in transition, linguistic ethnography, social trajectories.