

# THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL PERSPEKTIVES ON THE VALUE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

**Sandra Biewers Grimm<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Weisz<sup>2</sup>, Anita Lutz<sup>3</sup>**

*1,2,3 Department of Social Science (DSOC), Centre for Childhood and Youth Research (CCY), University of Luxembourg*

## **Abstract**

International studies such as Pisa have shown an increasing social inequality in our education systems, which is often determined by social origin and migration status. This is especially the case in Luxembourg, with its above-average migration rate and its multilingualism. As a consequence, those voices have become louder that point to the enormous educational potential of out-of-school learning settings and see a possibility for improving the situation in a stronger complementarity of formal and non-formal education within the framework of local educational landscapes. In this context, open youth work in particular comes to the fore as an actor and approach of non-formal education. Due to its principles of voluntariness and openness, but especially because of its diverse offer of experiential and subject-related educational opportunities, open youth work is increasingly seen as having a special potential in supporting the acquisition of key competences. But which educational opportunities are meant here and how are they actually perceived by young people? What form of education are we talking about here at all? These are the questions addressed by the qualitative-reconstructive study "*Educational Experiences in Non-formal Settings*", which is being conducted at the Centre for Childhood and Youth Research (CCY) at the University of Luxembourg. The study examines the subjective educational experiences of young people in open youth work on the basis of ethnographic observations in 8 youth centres, in problemcentred interviews and group discussions with 35 young people as well as a supplementary quantitative survey (n=101).

The study is based on an understanding of education that follows the tradition of subject-scientific theory (v. Humboldt, Koller) as well as the recognition theory (Honneth) and discusses education with concepts of self-determination and maturity in dealing with social norms and routines. The starting point of this consideration is that education can be determined as the transformation of the relationship to the self and the world. It is also linked to the theoretical work of Albert Scherr (1996), who defines the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, self-determination and thus ultimately subjectivity as the central educational goals of youth work. Empirically, it is thus not primarily a matter of investigating processes of knowledge acquisition, but rather of describing "innovative moments in the development of individual ways of thinking and acting (Koller, 2018, p.112). To this end, the study is oriented towards approaches of ethnographic-reconstructive social research in combination with grounded theory.

The results of the data analysis show a differentiated description of youth-related educational occasions and marks small-scale experiences of the appropriation of personal, social and everyday life references. They also highlight moments of expanding young people's ways of thinking, possibilities of action and dispositions in the context of open youth work. The high importance of social recognition as a basic prerequisite for educational processes (among the young people involved) becomes visible.

The presentation gives an insight into the context, the methodology and the results of this study.

**Keywords:** *(non-formal education, youth work, reconstructive social research, youth research, educational theory).*