Waiting for asylum in Austria: Well-being of refugee children in a phase of liminality and precarity. Towards a child-centered approach

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What to expect?

1. Aim & Research Question
2. Contextualization
3. Theoretical Foundation
4. Empirical Foundation
5. Preliminary Results (due to Covid-19-Pandemic)
6. Conclusion
7. Literature
1. Aim & Research Question

• Research interest: Conditions of waiting for asylum in Austria in a basic service accommodation with a focus on children in transition

• We define our interviewees' waiting for asylum as a phase of liminality and argue that both the children and their families experience precarity

• Research question: What are the conditions of waiting for asylum that characterize the liminal phase and are experienced by young people in a basic service accommodation?
2. Contextualization

- The quality and duration of asylum procedures vary considerably in Europe

- Austria: 15 month for asylum procedure (Network for Children's Rights 2019)

- New Austrian government program provides for a "reduction of the duration of procedures to an average of six months"

→ It can be assumed that waiting for a (positive) decision is associated with unrest and uncertainty. This uncertainty grows the longer the wait.
2. Contextualization

• Accommodation for asylum seekers is regulated by the “basic service law” (Grundversorgungsgesetz 2005)

• Each state has its own basic service law → The „Vienna basic service act“ (Wiener Grundversorgungsgesetz) was passed in 2004

• People receive e.g. health insurance, counseling, transport costs to authorities are covered and for children travel costs to school are paid and school materials are provided

• People receive 21 Euros per day + 40 Euro pocket money per month

(Grundversorgungsinformation Wien 2020)
3. Theoretical Foundation

Liminality

• Turner bases his liminality analysis on the three stages of separation, liminality and incorporation of Van Gennep's rites de passage (Van Gennep 1981)

• According to Turner (1969) a liminal phase is often shrouded in secrecy, uncertainty and ambiguity

• Waiting can be accompanied by feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and vulnerability → Sutton et al. (2011) stress that the process of waiting can be analyzed as a liminal phase
3. Theoretical Foundation

Precarity

• Bourdieu (1963) distinguishes in the 1960s between the casual workers, who he called as “the precarity”, and permanent workers

• Waite (2009) emphasizes that society as a whole becomes more precarious and is potentially destabilized

• Precarity describes a "politically conditioned state in which certain population groups suffer from failing social and economic support networks and are exposed to injuries, violence and death in different ways" (Butler 2009)

• The potential of the concept of precarity versus risk and vulnerability lies in what can be gained politically by adopting the concept

• Precarization has not only a repressive form, but also ambivalently productive moments (practice of self-government) (Lorey 2012)
3. Theoretical Foundation

(Reciprocal) Connection between Waiting, Liminality and Precarity

• The long wait what asylum seekers have to endure can be described as a liminal phase in which they experience impatience, insecurity and helplessness.

• They have a precarious life because they are in a liminal phase all the time, or precarity is produced by it.

• They must wait because their lives are precarious. According to the motto: "Only the poor/most precarious have to wait", "their time is no money"
4. Empirical Foundation

- Child-centered approach
- August & September 2020: 13 qualitative, open interviews with guiding questions & art based approaches
- Interview partners: Between 6 and 14 years; Living in a basic service accommodation in Vienna, Austria
- Interviews were transcribed & analyzed
- Research stop due to Covid-19 in October 2020

→ Preliminary results
Preliminary Results I

Fields:
1. „School Environment“
2. „Conditions of stay“
3. „Family“
4. „Wishes and future plans“

• Fields describe conditions of waiting in a liminal phase
• Contextualization with concepts of precarity and liminality
Preliminary Results II

„School Environment“

- Describes positive and negative experiences in everyday school life (high diversity, lack of language skills...)

  → Creates social security, but also gives rise to fears

  → Lack of long term perspective: Precarious existence as pupils
Preliminary Results III

„Conditions of stay“

• Describes material and immaterial conditions under which they live (positive in comparison, strong social connections, good healthcare system, also lack of space...)

→ Experiences of discrimination & racism in a liminal phase

→ Shows dimensions of uncertainty, precarity and liminality
Preliminary Results IV

„Family“

- Describes the family context of the interviewees (missing family members, duties, high level of psychological stress)

→ Situation of precarity: Children have to take responsibilities for adults
Preliminary Results V

„Wishes and future plans“

• Describes ideas the respondents have about their own future (concrete ideas, desires)

• ”What is your biggest wish?“ - ”That we get a passport so that we can stay“ (K3)

→ Liminal situation and uncertainty of waiting for asylum creates insecurity
6. Conclusion

- Waiting has lasting effect on children and teenagers (i.e. lack of security)
- Being in a stage of uncertainty and dependence of change for years (Precarity)
- At the same time: Participate in social structures
- They are „betwixt and between“ (Turner 1987)

→ This circumstances frame the children’s experience: They fear, they are anxious but, against all odds, they dream of a better life


Grundversorgungsinfo Wien, 2020


Network for Children's Rights 2019


Wiener Grunderversorgungsgesetz

Thank you for your attention!