”De förstod aldrig min historia”
Unga vuxna med migrationsbakgrund om skolmisslyckande och övergångar mellan skola och arbete

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvaret i Hörsal F, Humanisthuset, fredagen den 3 juni, kl. 13:00. Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

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Abstract
This study aims to deepen knowledge of young people with a migration background in Sweden, particularly those with non-European backgrounds, and their transitions from school to work. The focus is on young people with uncompleted upper secondary education (USE), drawing on their life stories, and exploring their perceptions and experiences around school failure, entering the labour market, and/or not being in education, employment or training (NEET).

Theoretically the study analyses individuals’ career decisions from an agency-structure perspective, drawing on careership theory, in particular the notions of pragmatic-rational choices, routines, turning-points and horizons of action (Hodkinson & Sparkes 1997), combined with theories on ‘otherness’ (Hall 1990; 1999, Anthias 2002, Balibar 2004, Trondman 2007), and the notion of socio-geographic space (Bourdieu 1986a; Bourdieu 1999, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996).

Methodologically, the thesis is based on narrative research, and the empirical material comprise life stories of twenty young people (men and women) about their lives, school experiences and time after leaving school. The careers of the young people were developed in fields where they had subordinate positions, based on their family's mostly limited social, economic and cultural capital, their own short education and limited experience, and the otherness they encountered. Against this background, their educational and labour market career choices are understood as pragmatic-rational, enabled and limited by the resulting horizons of action. However, the collected narratives suggest that their horizons of action developed from the time they left school when they made different pragmatic-rational choices that changed their positions. Nevertheless, career choices were often made within a bounded agency and reduced opportunities as a consequence of school failure and their own scarce resources. The learning and interaction taking place within the routine periods are both crucial for understanding processes that result in school failure and the subsequent extended period of establishment in working and adult life, and change of horizons of action and habitus.

The narratives of the young people showed that school failures and dropout are complex and extended processes that are related to education and family, as well as access to power and capital. They also encountered difference-making through the predominant images and discourses of ‘immigration’ as a social problem and by being located in a specific socio-geographic space that limited their possibilities for action. The family was highly significant and, in most cases, represented security and continuity. The family's present situation and future was crucial to the young adults, which affected their choices. Hence, their own horizon of action also included the family's opportunities and horizon of action. The study indicates that there is sometimes reason to speak of a collective horizon of action rather than just an individual one. Institutional and informal support together with young people's agency may enable positive career development in spite of a lack of resources provided to the young, particularly if schools and other institutions would provide more professional and timely support. The overall conclusion is that it would not have taken much investment of resources and effort to have prevented school failure for a large proportion of the twenty young adults in this study. That is the good news.

Keywords
School-to-work transition, school failure, dropout, careership, otherness, socio-geographic space, life story, career development, migration, young adults, ethnicity, Sweden, narrative, NEET