

Uncertain Futures – Education and Biography in the Context of Social Upheaval

Annual Conference of the Commission Qualitative Education and Biography Research

**06–08 September 2023
at Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg**

One of the key concerns of qualitative educational and biographical research is reflecting on the relationship between education, biography, and societal change. In light of the complex (global) social, political, and cultural upheavals of our time, this concern has become more and more pressing. These upheavals include the political, economic, and social consequences of global ecological catastrophes as well as digital and socio-ecological transformations; migration movements as a result of wars and conflicts over resources; the challenges to democratic societal models and struggles over political and cultural hegemony. In his analysis of the present, Lessenich (2022) also describes the confluence of these phenomena as a “society on the verge of a nervous breakdown”, given that the (imagined) normalities and certainties of the last few decades are changing, shifting, and dissolving more and more. In the context of these upheavals, uncertain and threatening scenarios for the future are unfolding that might be significant when it comes to collective and individual experiences of (limited) agency and biographical calculability. Now, biographical plans for the future are destabilized not only by structural uncertainties and insecurities due to the pluralization and individualization of life in reflexive modernity (cf. Giddens 1990) or risk society (cf. Beck 1986), but increasingly also by threatening scenarios for the future that affect social coexistence and planetary boundaries, and whose stirrings are also reflected in educational processes. At the same time, however, new forms of action and protest as well as new social movements for emancipation and solidarity have emerged, some developing in reaction to or being bolstered by these upheavals.

With its broad methodological repertoire, qualitative educational and biographical research can contribute to a more differentiated understanding of these developments, to rendering visible the (unequal) social conditions under which they are experienced and dealt with, and to reflecting on their implications for constructions of biography. However, this calls for theoretical perspectives (from social theory and subject theory) and methodological approaches to address contemporary social upheavals and ‘the biographical’ in their interplay (cf. Dausien 2022).

The conference is an invitation to engage with current processes of upheaval from the methodologically broad spectrum of qualitative educational and biographical research and to focus more precisely on different dimensions of ‘the biographical’.

It focuses on issues such as *individual and collective experiences* of social upheavals and the attendant processes of learning and education as well as ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’ biographical designs for the future. On a related note, questions about the *institutional forming*, standardization, and “processing” of biographies in the context of current upheavals and discourses of transformation, e.g. in educational policy discourses, institutions of learning, or political movements.

Likewise, questions about (new) *biography-based practices* and *doing biography* in the face of societal upheavals (e.g. as a result of digitalization). Furthermore, questions about the implications of current social transformations *for the cultural format “biography”* (cf. Hahn 2002) itself come to the fore, and last but not least the need to question how methods are applied and developed in qualitative educational and biographical research with regard to their theories of the future, which often remain implicit.

Scholars at all levels of their careers are cordially invited to participate in the conference with contributions to these and other questions. This year’s annual conference will take place in cooperation with the Center for Social World Research and Methodology Development (ZSM) at the Otto-von-Guericke University (OvGU) in Magdeburg. The ZSM is well known in the field of qualitative educational and biographical research, through the Magdeburg Methods Workshop and more. With its many activities and formats, it has, for many years, contributed to developing qualitative research in education and the social sciences, as well as promoting and supporting scientists in qualification phases.

The following questions can serve as orientation for abstracts:

(1) Development of theory and methods at the horizon of uncertain futures

- What can qualitative biographical and educational research contribute to the analysis and reflection of social upheavals and their meaning for education and biography in the face of uncertain futures?
- Which (socio-)theoretical references seem promising with regard to conceptualizing ‘the biographical’ in the face of current social upheavals and uncertain futures?
- Which methodological approaches allow for an empirical examination of biographies and biography-based practices in the context of social upheavals and uncertain futures?

(2) Institutional and organizational forming and standardizations of the biographical

- How are social upheavals and future scenarios negotiated in and through discourse and institutions? What are related (new) norms and spaces of possibility for biographical constructions?
- How are organizational practices of biographization changing?
- What (new) demands on biographization crystallize in light of current social upheavals and future scenarios?
- What significance do the multiple upheavals of our times hold for forms of biographical narrative (within organizations and outside)?

(3) Biographical educational and learning processes and concepts for the future.

- How are social upheavals experienced and biographically processed in the context of different social positions and affiliations?
- What are the roles of biographical experiential knowledge and intergenerational processes of learning and education?
- What is the relevance of (biographical) designs for the future in the context of precarious and uncertain futures? How can these be taken into account methodically?

(4) Biography-based practices in the context of social upheavals

- Which (new) practices of biographization can be reconstructed, as a result of e.g. digitalization processes and in the context of algorithmized regimes?
- How are social upheavals and references to the future negotiated, e.g. in the context of social protest movements, and which (collective) biographizing practices are developed in the process?
- How is “biographical knowledge” generated, accessed, and employed interactively in educational settings in the context of social upheavals (e.g. new refugee movements)? How are power relations consolidated, undermined, or thwarted in the process?

Please send your abstracts by **April 16, 2023** to:

qbbf-2023@ovgu.de.

We welcome submissions of

- proposals for **individual papers**, 2,500 characters max.
- proposals for **working groups**: three thematically related papers, 10,000 characters max. in total (2,500 characters per paper plus 2,500 for joint framing).

We are looking forward to your submissions!

QBBF board

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Beck, Ulrich (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Dausien, Bettina. (2022): “Aus Geschichten lernen” – Biographieforschung als wissenschaftliches Programm jenseits der Methodenfrage [“Learning from stories” – Biographical research as a scientific program beyond the question of methods]. In: Fuchs, Thorsten/Demmer, Christine/ Wiezorek, Christine (eds.): *Aufbrüche, Umbrüche, Abbrüche. Wegmarken qualitativer Bildungs- und Biographieforschung*. [Awakenings, upheavals, break-offs. Milestones of qualitative educational and biographical research]. Opladen: Budrich, pp. 71–97.

Giddens, Anthony (1990): *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hahn, A. (2002): Lebenslauf und Biografie [Life story and biography]. In: Hahn, Alois: *Konstruktionen des Selbst, der Welt und der Geschichte. Aufsätze zur Kulturosoziologie* [Constructions of the self, the world, and history. Essays on the sociology of culture]. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, pp. 97–115.

Lessenich, Stefan (2022): *Nicht mehr normal. Gesellschaft am Rande des Nervenzusammenbruchs* [No longer normal. Society on the verge of a nervous breakdown]. Berlin: Hanser Verlag.