Call for papers - Revue des Sciences Sociales n° 69

Rethinking Childhood and Youth Inequality in Times of Crisis.

Directed by Régine Sirota (Université Paris Descartes, CERLIS) and Sylvie Octobre (Ministry of Culture/Max Weber Center)

The interest in questions of inequality has risen sharply, both in terms of social policies and in the sociological debate. While the alarming figures that have recently been announced regarding children and childhood are based on variable indicators and constructed on “adult” models, inequality, discrimination and forms of insecurity and vulnerability, which also involve adolescents and children, are only rarely discussed as objects of more extensive theoretical discussions.

However, in the recent context of the sanitary crisis, there has been considerable demand for information on these subjects, as shown by publications ranging from the “Report of the Council for Childhood and Adolescence,” published by the High Commission for Families, Childhood and the Elderly (Haut Conseil de la Famille, de l’Enfance et de l’Age) under the title “Improved Child-Centered Public Data and Studies,” over the report of the High Commission for Public Health (Haut Conseil à la Santé Publique) entitled “Statistical Instruments for Monitoring and Researching Children’s Health: State of the Art and Proposals,” to the conclusions drawn up in the report of the National Council for Statistical Information (Conseil national de l’information statistique) with the title “Improving Knowledge of Children’s Living Conditions – Conclusion n° 3.”

Since the spring lockdown of 2020 caused by the sanitary crisis of the COVID 19 pandemic, the subjects of childhood and youth have often been the focus of attention both in the media and in public debate. In France, primary and secondary schools and universities were closed or only remained half-open during these periods of full or partial lockdown, which has put the place of this generation to the test in more ways than one, both in social and family terms. This has put inequality at this stage in life under the magnifying glass and has highlighted it both in terms of access to accommodation, food, formal and informal education, physical and psychological health, and well-being, but also in terms of vulnerability and domestic abuse.

Inequality has been linked to objective resources, but also to subjective experiences in terms of risks or opportunities, which different groups of people have lived through or perceived differently depending on their material, physical, cognitive, or emotional resources. Social inequality became particularly visible when observing the psychological difficulties encountered by young people during the sanitary crisis, which has generated strong existential and generational oppositions and similarities. A variety of virtual resources or rituals have emerged or have been reinvented by or for children and young people to maintain a social connection, whether that be within the family or with peers.

Specific quantitative and qualitative enquiries have been launched during this pandemic, which has allowed a better understanding, from various perspectives, of the dynamics that were set in motion. More generally, crisis situations, whether they be economic, social, migratory or sanitary, highlight the importance and the re-composition of inequality, which should be analyzed through innovative methodologies and epistemological reflections, especially with regards to the way childhood figures and intergenerational relations have evolved. This also applies to enquiries into the place of the child and of young people in the analysis of inequality, insecurity, vulnerability and discrimination.

The issue of inequality, which is highlighted by periods of crisis but should not be reduced to such times, requires an international and multidisciplinary perspective, because questions will be asked and answered in different ways depending on the context. In this way, the question of poverty will be central to Brazil or Portugal, but when it comes to the US, the focus will be more on ethno-racial inequality. Similarly, while childhood studies concerning Africa will look at the issue from the perspective of vulnerability, the French debate is often focused on inequality in school and education.
International comparisons can reveal the plurality of theoretical registers and can be translated in terms of economic, symbolic or cultural capital, of intergenerational (and intra-generational) conflict, or, as we have seen more recently, from the intersection of any of these perspectives. Indeed, these questions are anchored in a range of socio-geographical, socio-economic, socio-political, socio-developmental, socio-anthropological, socio-sanitary, socio-cultural and socio-educational references, and are structured around a variety of concepts: the concepts of vulnerability, discrimination and insecurity are added to or substitute inequality, and all these concepts must be questioned in their various uses and forms when it comes to applying them to young people and children. These same questions also travel, are transmitted and transposed, become uniform or are locally specified.

Here are some examples of the questions, which will be of interest for this issue:

- How has the sanitary crisis reformulated the question of inequality?
- How can inequality applied specifically to children and young people be examined? What are the tools at our disposal?
- How can an international perspective lead to a reformulation of these questions within a relationship that links the global to the local? How can the various scales of observation be defined or combined?
- How can the various methodological approaches (ethnographical, quantitative enquiry, etc.) and the different disciplines be combined to allow for a better understanding of the imbrications of inequality?
- How can longitudinal studies of inequality be carried out?
- What is the place of children and young people’s discourse and agency in understanding experiences and situations linked to crisis situations?
- Which specific resources do children and young people put in place and revert to in order to deal with the difficulties that arise, specifically in the context of the sanitary crisis, but also in social and local contexts?

Proposals for papers must rely on precise empirical corpora. These can be of various types: quantitative and qualitative analyses, secondary materials, archives, discourses of politicians, experts, the public or the media, etc. Proposals can be grounded in any of the human and social sciences or they can be multidisciplinary. Your proposal may be written in French or in English, and it can rely on international corpora.

Abstracts should be no longer than 4000 characters, spaces included, and should be submitted by 31 October 2021 to the email address of the review: rss@misha.fr. Your proposal should include the title of your paper, the theoretical framework, as well as the empirical materials, fields and methodologies that are applied. The abstract should also contain a bibliography (not included in the 4000 characters) and a short bio-bibliographical note about the author(s). If the proposal is accepted, the article will have to be submitted by 15 May 2022 to be published in the first semester of 2023.