

Learning "Nature": A cross-cultural ethnography of children's relationships to the non-human world

Initiative: Freigeist-Fellowships

Bewilligung: 13.12.2020

Laufzeit: 6 Jahre

At this time of deep environmental crisis, it is urgent to rethink our relationship with nature. We know from a large body of anthropological and psychological research that people across the world hold very different understandings of natural entities. Such different understandings have important ethical implications: whether we consider a plant as a sentient being or not, for instance, shapes the way we morally relate to it. What we do not know however is how such different experiences and understandings emerge during childhood. This project is the first large-scale comparative study to examine how specific practices of socialisation, material engagements and direct and indirect interactions with natural entities shape children's understandings and relationships with the nonhuman world. By integrating methods from anthropology and psychology, the project compares children's experiences of learning about nature in three communities committed to creating an alternative relationship to the nonhuman world: an environmentally aware urban kindergarten in Germany, a utopian ecovillage in Italy and an indigenous village in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Focusing on the cultural, social and political processes that inform children's learning about nature, the project will make ground-breaking advances in our understanding of how humans learn to attend to the natural world.

Projektbeteiligte

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