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## **Learning beyond the classroom: Coping with illiteracy in urban literate environments in Bolivia, Benin and Germany**

### Description of the Interdisciplinary Research Project of the chairs of Social and Cultural Anthropology and Psychology at the University of Bayreuth

Literacy, a concept that travelled successfully around the globe and set standards all over the world, today is understood as a basic need and a fundamental right. However, in most of all literate contexts, many people still move through without reading and writing competences and forms of new illiteracies are observed, seemingly failing to achieve 'development through education'.

We see 'new' illiteracies as being related to and constantly produced by ongoing global processes that mainstream western-oriented literacy through schooling. The project aims to test this assumption by studying processes for coping with illiteracy in urban lifeworlds in three countries, Benin, Bolivia and in Germany. We identify similarities and differences in our case studies, while acknowledging that the same global processes of mainstreaming literacy influence the three countries. In our research, we focus on urban lifeworlds, as we aim to contribute to fill a gap in research on illiteracy and learning within these contexts.

The three case studies will use the same methods of intensive ethnographic fieldwork, thereby profiting from a transdisciplinary dialogue between social anthropology and cultural psychology. We aim to understand the multiple ways of non-school learning that help these actors interact with the expectations of a world of literacy. By detecting differences, similarities and perhaps travelling ways of learning outside the classroom, we address the Cluster's overarching questions around relationality, multiplicity and especially temporalities of learning. In concrete, we will work on the following questions:

Which alternative forms of knowledge are at the disposal of illiterates in Benin, Bolivia and Germany? How are these forms created, transmitted and modified? How do illiterates economically, socially and politically participate in their respective environments? What are the challenges they face and how do they overcome them? In which ways is illiteracy experienced subjectively, how does illiteracy affect personal and social identity, emotions and volitions? In times of Covid 19 we also aim to be sensitive to the consequences of this global health crisis for the low/ not literates.

To identify the different ways and strategies to deal with a literate lifeworld and to identify learning processes we will accompany in every country a group of 25 adults during their daily activities. In order to approximate to the multiplicities of dealing with illiteracies we also aim to research the different social spaces where literacy is part of daily practices of communication and information. We want to look specifically on areas as public services, learning centres, social service institutions, professional workshops, health institutions, financial institutions, markets, and social organizations. By participant observation and (informal) interviews, we aim to approximate to an understanding of the dynamics of literacy practices in these areas. This is supposed to lead us to identify further strategies and learning ways as dynamics of interactions.

In order to analyse thoroughly the empirical material we will apply a Grounded Theory approach. As there will be sequenced periods of field research and periods of data analysis, we will be able as well to deepen observations and follow up continuative questions as to verify first findings. For a comprehensive work, we will realize two intensive participative research workshops in Bolivia and Benin, in cooperation with the respective Partner Universities. To follow up a participative approach we aim to elaborate together with our research participants and partners and inform accessible and at the disposal for local processes.

**Further Information: <https://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/>**