

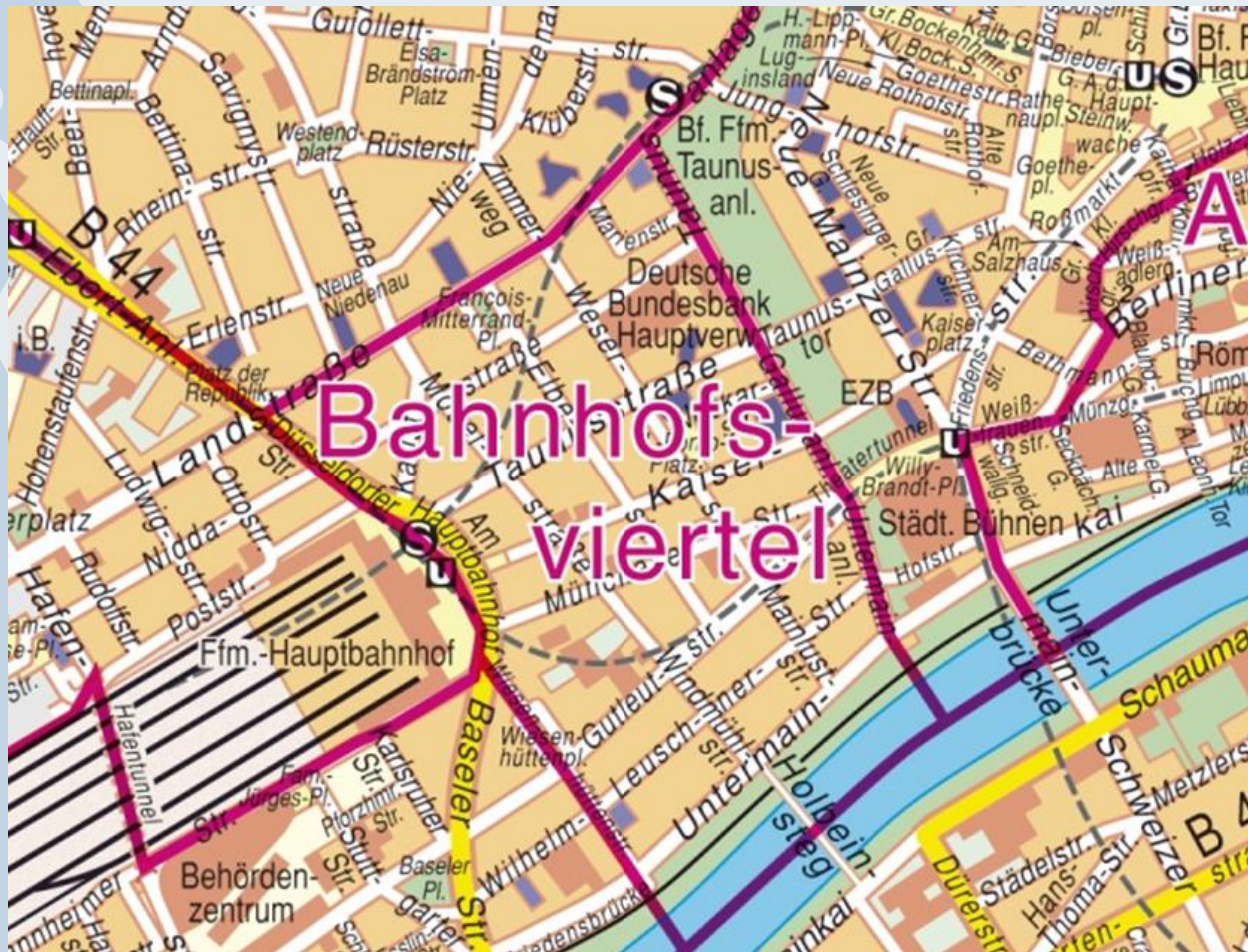
(Children's) Bodies in an Urban Space

Ethnography in the “Bahnhofsviertel”
a City District of Frankfurt

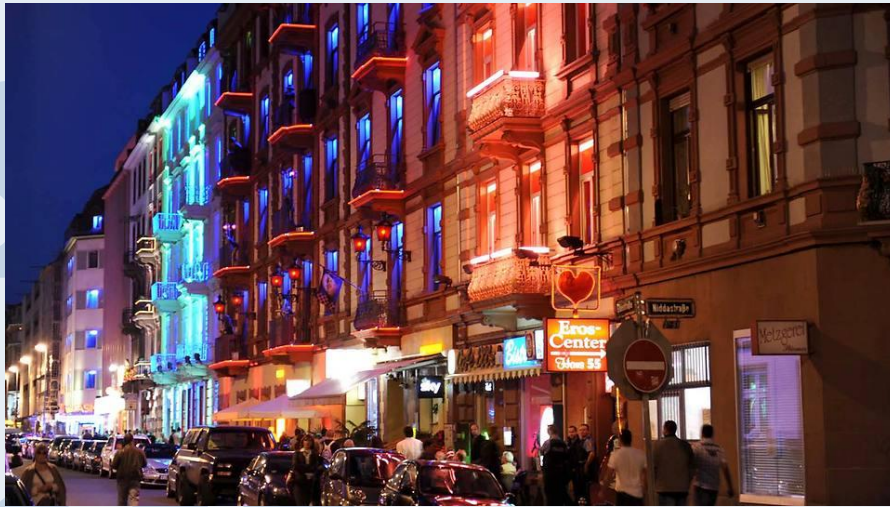
Elena Bütow

“Bahnhofsviertel”

A city district of Frankfurt am Main
(located in the vicinity of the central railway station)



“Bahnhofsviertel”



(Children's) Bodies in an Urban Space - Overview

1. Theoretical framework

1. Children in big cities
2. The body as research object
3. Theory of social practices
4. Children's bodies as research objects
5. Summary

2. Methodical design

1. District inspection
2. Ethnography – Participant observation

3. Preliminary work

4. **An empirical example** - 1€ Discounter as a space for body experiences?!

1. Theoretical framework

1. Children in big cities

- “The Living Space of a Big City Child”
Martha Muchow (1935)
- Muchow focused on
 - the space in which the child lived
 - the space the child is experiencing
 - the space the child is living

1. Theoretical framework

2. The body as research object

- The body as product of social processes.
- The body as producer of society.

(Gugutzer 2004)

1. Theoretical framework

3. Theory of social practices

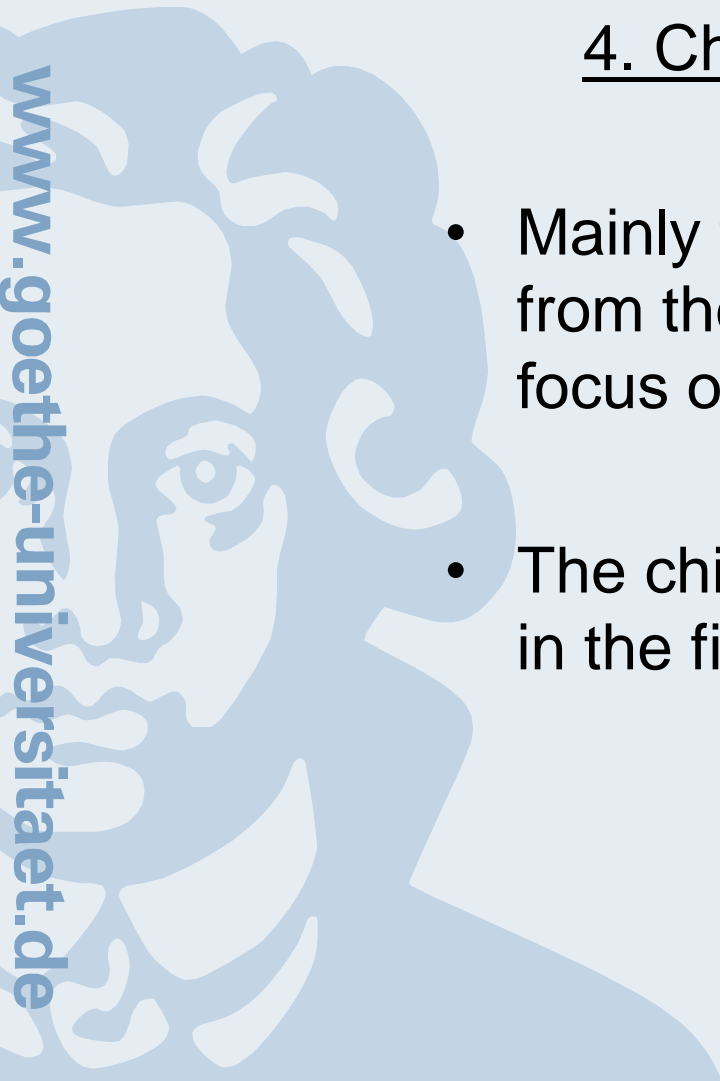
- Practices are body-movements and the way people interact with each other and objects.
- Practices are always embedded in a vast socially shared implicit knowledge and are experienced and comprehensible.
- Objects are important elements of social practices. They can enable certain processes as well as limit them.

(Reckwitz 2003)

1. Theoretical framework

4. Children's bodies as research objects

- Mainly the body of a child is strictly separated from the adult one and it is discussed with the focus on a “*normal and healthy*” development.
- The child's body has been especially neglected in the field of childhood research.



1. Theoretical framework

4. Children's bodies as research objects

- James Prout argues that the child's "body should at least be regarded as a limitation or restriction of possibilities" in connection to studies in which childhood is defined as a social construct.
- Moreover, he pleads for objects the child interacts with to be regarded as extensions of the body.

(Prout 2003)

1. Theoretical framework

“In order to understand children as social actors, it is of great importance to pay attention to the children’s bodies and how they act and how they are experienced and constructed”
(Prout 2003, S.48).

1. Theoretical framework - Summary

5. Urban Space as research field

- The term “**urban**” refers to the social structure within a big city.
- The term “**space**” refers to a theoretical concept in accordance to Martina Löw (2001).
- Space as a “relational arrangement of bodies. These bodies are in constant movement, which causes the arrangement to constantly undergo changes” (Löw 2001).

1. Theoretical framework - Summary

5. (Children's) Bodies in an Urban Space

- The body is placed between actions and structures.
- Children are conceptualised as social actors and their bodies are seen as a resource with which they understand and encounter the urban space.
- The aim of my thesis is the reconstruction of children's body practices in an urban space.

2. Methodical Design

- 1) **Contextual description** of the city district with the help of official documents (documentation of the city of Frankfurt, register of residents, city maps, brochures of the city districts, newspaper articles, etc.).
- 2) **Children's bodies as a product** of an urban living space to reconstruct the socio-spatial structures of the city district by visiting the district together with the children (**district inspection**).
- 3) **Child's body as a producer** of an urban living space to focus on situative body practices of the children (**participant observation**).

2. Methodical Design

Participatory district inspections with children

- Which spaces in the city district do the children frequent?
- How can these spaces be described from the children's perspective?
- How are these spaces marked for the children, which kind of structures and social orders do they have?
- Where are the (body-) limits and limitations for the children?
- Which ways of movement and which types of bodily practices are facilitated by local structures and which ones are prevented?

2. Methodical Design

Participant observation

- Which body practices can be observed?
- How does the child's body act in a usual and experienced situation?
- How do the children use their bodies in order to encounter the urban space?
- How do the children use, change or repurpose the spaces according to their possibilities and limitations?
- Which logics underlie these practices?
- How do these body practices produce social reality?

3. Preliminary work

- “Urban Learning Spaces”
at the Goethe-University in Frankfurt (2011-2014)
- Contact with the children, their parents and all pedagogical institutions in the city district
- Attendance and observation of 15 children in their everyday life in the city district
- Already done: first participant observations and all district inspections

4. An empirical example - 1€ Discounter as a space for body experiences?!

- The 1 € discounter is an important place for the children in the city district.
- Various body practices of the children can be observed: they touch the products, pick them up and show them to each other, they dance in the shop,...

4. An empirical example - 1€ Discounter as a space for body experiences?!

- How is the discounter structured? Which material, visual and sense-related form is given? How do the children make use of it in a physical way?
- How do they deal with the given structures and on the other side how do they repurpose the discounter with their body practices?
- Which possibilities or limitations can be regarded and how are given structures or objects (re)used creatively by the children for other purposes?

Thank you for your attention!

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