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The Habitus and the City.  
Visualising spatial relations of class and culture in  
youth development

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## **Abstract**

The habitus, as a result of its environmental habitat, is known as a structured schema related to social and spatial dynamics in which a person and their mental and bodily actions are physically embedded. In order to contextualize the effects of urban inequality within the everyday lives of young people, the duality of habitus and habitat has to be taken into account. As social space tends to be translated into physical space, it will be shown how these social conditions affect adolescents' opportunities in the case of a medium sized town in Germany. In emphasizing class divisions and the diverse social and mobile practices of youth across space and place, a mix of visual methods has been used. Through photographs taken by these young people documenting their daily routines and the places in which they occupy, the acquisition of their personal dispositions can be culturally explored and, by mapping their local infrastructures and networks, put into the town's social and physical space. Whereas the photographs allow for visual insights into (and possibilities of) social life experiences within material and symbolic dimensions, the maps reveal the personal infrastructures of the young people and the relation between their capitals and the urban infrastructure.

## **1. Introduction**

Andrew Sayer claims that „spaceless matters are physical impossibilities“ (1985: 52). In order to contextualize the effects of urban inequality within the everyday lives of young people, the duality of habitus and habitat has to be taken into account. For various reasons the limitations of a bourdieusian approach will be supplemented with a more elaborated concept of critical realism. On the one hand, this is grounded in methodological problems regarding the interplay of structure, culture and agency. As Margaret Archer (1996:679) put's it, analytical dualism „enables o explore the interplay between these (...) irreducible constituents of social reality in order to account for why things are so and not otherwise.“ Berth Danermark (2007: 56) argues that it's not possible to integrate knowledge without being very clear about the question of how the reality is constituted. Therefore, the „ontological perspective should determine the methodologies used in the research, which in turn guide us to explonatory theories about the phenomenon under study.“ Due to this problem Bourdieu's methodology is far too reductionistic. Critical realism pays more attention to the nature of relations. Also Bourdieu's characterization of space lacks concreteness. On the other hand, as Dirksmeier (2009:123) points out very clearly, Bourdieu's (2003: 284 ) emphasis of space as a „set of co-existing points“ is quite challenging, but not well defined. Bourdieu (1991) is differentiating between the social space, the physical space and the occupied space. The social space as an ensemble of relational positions is the most elaborated construct until now. Space is less seen as an environ-

ment, where human and social life takes place, or as synthesised and constituted by people itself, but as a medium through which social relations are reproduced (Löw 2001: 183). Adopting a pragmatic view, Bourdieus reductionism of processes in time and space and the real causal relations become clear by the simple, but complex research questions on contextualisation of human socialization and development. The interlinkages between the positioning and placement of the parents and territorial infrastructures for their children are complex. In relation to that, the potentials to experience and to define themselves within their daily beings and doings and the ability to create their own way of utilizing places and spaces differs a lot (Horton/Kraftl 2006, Seggern 2009 and others). Thus, the anchoring of these complex processes in use of a multidimensional design makes a difference, because from different perspectives the real causal powers and interdependences can be analytically synthesized. The concept of class from the German research group of Michael Vester and others (2003), and their special use of hermeneutics on the habitus, provides a highly effective tool to order the constitutive elements of spatial structuring and other social forces in individual cases. Distinct to Bourdieus deductive empirical method, within these approach the inductive syndrom of the habitus is analysed. Culture is not seen merely as a consequence of social class background, but as a causal factor for social practices and the collective development of the habitus, which has to be taken into account. What kind of evidence is given of the city by the culturally informed synthesis of space relating to young people of different social class backgrounds? And which places, which resources and functions, are open to whom?

## **2. Methodology**

As mentioned already, Bourdieu is more interested in the social construction of classification in general, than to grasp the different entities ontologically. This is deeply founded as a conceptual bias of his epistemology on class struggle. But for visual analysis of space it makes more sense to argue ontologically, as Roy Bhaskar does, and to ask about the social structuring of material entities first. Whilst critical realism accompanies Karl Marx's historical materialism, in which reality exists independently from human being, for Bourdieu the pure exististence of physical space is not as relevant. However, this turn is methodologically relevant, as mentioned above, because it links the question of constitution of reality with the possibility of knowledge about it. Especially for the analysis of the embedding of persons and their actions it is obligatory to ascribe a material and temporal pre-existence to space. Also for puting the habitus to work for questions of visual sociology, the aesthetical disposition, which manifests in the visual practice of photography, has to be taken into acctont as an expression of the meaningful structuration of the inner and outer world. Within photographs, social reality and personal relevance is represented visually. John Grady strongly argue about the

universal character of visual data. Grady (2008: 9) concludes that, visual data encourage the analysis at different levels, which potentially „include the micro-level of society – often including face-to-face interaction (...) and the macro-level-which encompass (particular groups, the author) of the population. He claims for an ontological status for the visual, because „looking at“ means consequently „being framed by“ (Grady: 19). In consequence, the application of visual methods processes for perception of the apparent world can be reconstructed through placing and agency. In order to analyse the pictures, questions are raised about the generative intentions and conditions of social practices which can be related to personal or collective meanings (e.g. visual mediated emotions and social interactions). On the other hand, questions are also raised about the topological and sociographic configuration and utilization of human settlements as spaces of symbols. Following Dieter Läßle (1991), Herbert Schubert (2002: 162) concludes that the material-physical substratum is represented by means of spatial figures and systems of symbols on the basis of which the utilization and patterns of occupation can be identified. Social spaces can be interpreted through architecture and the build environment, their more detailed codes (e.g. blocks of building, family homes, school, neighborhood) and their configuration (urban layout, relation of inner and outer spaces), in which sociosemiotics of everyday life (e.g. youth- and leisure time culture, family life) are embedded and their meanings (e.g. cloth, marker) enlisted (Schubert 2000: 170). These kind of analyses of object-person-environment relations has already been applied to home environments (Wuggening 1988). On the basis of triangulation the case can be applied to the objective structure and to spatial relations and resources of the city (see data below). The habitus-syndrome is constituted as a special type of interplay, which refers to a position in social space. To convert these patterns of mentality, elemental categories are applied as a heuristic tool (e.g. aesthetical vs. functional, individual vs. social, et cetera) to find the proper schemata (Bremer & Teiwes-Kügler: 259).

### **3. Data**

The investigation has followed a participatory research approach conducted with pupils aged 13-14. Due to the goal to attain a sample with diverse social class backgrounds, a form of comprehensive school was chosen for this study. In total 22 semi-structured qualitative interviews with teenagers were conducted. Parts of the study have been done with the elicitation method of reflexive photography (Dirksmeier 2009: 166). Youth were instructed to take pictures of their daily routines, leisure time activities and places which they occupy and to explain their meanings afterwards. In addition, they were asked to draw these places and their personal social networks on a city-map. To reconstruct their personal intentions, settings and daily routines the whole set of photographs is taken into account, as a complex sequence in total. Personal statistical data about parental education, em-

ployment, income, status and home address were taken into a questionnaire, on the one hand. In addition, the city council provides very detailed statistics and information about wealth or poverty in different districts, youth and family development programs, public spaces, playgrounds and institutions, churches, clubs and events, on the other hand.

#### **4. Examples**

Examples are intended to be given, to point out which sort of results can be achieved in use of the developed methodology explained. In comparison of the sets of photographs the differences are becoming very clear. The pupils are living in the same middle-sized town and visit the same year of school. But their visual practices and pictured living environments are very distinct, related to their chosen motives and the social class background, stated. Whereas the photographs allow for visual insights into (and possibilities of) social life experiences within material and symbolic dimensions, the maps reveal the personal infrastructures of the young people and the relation between their capitals and the urban infrastructure. Two cases will be presented in contrast. It can be shown how the concept of habitus and their visual practices attain knowledge into the synthesis and of spacing, attitudes and interpretations of personal and social being. The same with taste and lifestyle, personal relationship to the body and to emotions, actions and social relationships. In such a way, these data and a relational methodology provide insights into the complex multifactorial and causal mechanisms regarding tendencies of inclusion and exclusion in interdependence to the social and built environment and the positional constitution of spatial structures.

Questions to be asked and answered are multiple and can actually be brought to a more abstract theoretical level (as seen above).

- At which place did the parents position themselves with their habitat in town? What sort of territory for growing up results nearby as a consequence? What kind of infrastructures are attainable?
- Which places and public spaces do the teenagers usually occupy? What kind of places are attractive for them?
- Which kind of leisure time activities do they prefer? What kind of supportive or educational aspects do teenagers experience in these settings?
- To what extent do teenagers experience the offered infrastructures as not satisfying their needs? Are they able to move around in town and to choose or are they constrained in their mobile practices?

## 5. Conclusion

In regard to the conference call on resourceful cities this kind of study gives answers to questions regarding the constitution and resources of a city's space. As Martina Löw (2001) claims, personal spaces are as, or even more real as assumed objective space pictured on city maps. Therefore, the class-related type of use and acquisition of space gains cultural insights into urban patterns of life and the potential (utilization of) resources, a city is able to offer and to produce for its citizens. A few studies have already been done in this kind of fashion (for Germany especially Seggern and others 2009, Heinzlmann 2009). What is special here is a) a strong emphasis on class and culture, b) the complexity gained with as relatively small and simple, but yet mixed data collection and c) the ordering of causal mechanism on different levels with their impact on spacing and youth development due to elaborated theoretical work. Especially via the photographs, it is able to present how unsettling and „thoroughly material-spatial-embodied-evental“ (Horton & Kraftl 2006) youth life really is.

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