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Divided Cities, invisible youth and the "writing of coping maps" – Towards a social geography of adolescence[1]

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Abstract

The theoretical approach of "writing coping-maps" from the area of "Social Geography of adolescence" is based upon the hypothesis that present geographical approaches are losing sight of children's and young people's socio-spatial problems in divided cities. To face today's problems of growing up in cities – e.g. the "new poverty", increasing delinquency and youth crime or increased problems of integrating certain sections of the population – we have to uncover the invisible forms of coping with being useless (see e.g. "The End of Work", Rifkin 1995), to explain the reasons which are behind them and to do something against it.

"Invisible coping-maps" is developed on the basis that children and young people, growing up under the circumstances of digital capitalism, try to solve their problems of being useless with increasing frequency outside the institutions of socialization like family, school or the traditional social system. We assume that every human being (idea of "Making Geography" (Werlen 1995, 1997, Werlen/Reutlinger 2005)) writes its social (coping) map in order to keep his/her capacity of acting in spite of a rising number of so-called 'useless people'. In the empirical part of the present paper we have carried out a comparative study of the above subject in three Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona and La Coruña). This study is part of a higher research project combining the cities of Madrid (Spain), Perpignan (France) and Palermo (Italy). It serves the "Invisible Youth Integration"-project of the European Union's initiative "Leonardo da Vinci".

Flashlight – labor situation

"- You don't get a job in this quarter. To find a job you have to go outside the city, as there is no work here. There we can work, but for how long? ... Not for long.
- You have to be excellently prepared, trained...
- However, this young woman, who has all the necessary training, is out of work too.
- Well, by December I will have found something.
- But for how long?

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- For some time, and then the whole things starts again... that's the way it is. At least I will have a job.
- Yes, you will, like all the others, for a month, a year, and then....
- Unemployment is a major problem, not only here, or in Paris...., but everywhere.
- Employment is not the concern of the youngest and we don't want a place like school, but if you have to try so hard to get a job and if there is no job here and if you have to leave , ... this is what we are concerned about" (group of ten youths aged between 12 and 22 interviewed in Madrid, Spain).

The urban image is constantly changing. The increasing global economic integration also has an effect on the cities. Most people of the world work and/or live in cities. As a result, also for children and youths the city gains very much importance as a place where they grow up. In this lecture, I would like to depict the city as a place for living and the constant changes of the supposed chances and constraints for children and adolescents, which are affected by the urban development. To understand the spatial and social problems children and youths are faced with, it is necessary to take into account the relevant idea behind the term 'city' when different notions of it are being discussed.

In my paper I would like to give you an overview of the *Everyday Regionalization* approach which is lively being discussed by German-speaking social geographers; it is called the *Werlen* debate after Benno Werlen – a Swiss social geographer who initiated this discussion. My paper will focus on the contribution social geography researchers can make to the identification and solution of social and spatial problems which occur in urban spaces. It will primarily be about the problems of children.

The flashlight you have just read is based upon young people living in an underprivileged part of a Spanish city. They speak of the steadily growing pressure that they are forced to bear to keep up with the others. It is hard to find a job. If you find one, it is just for some time. Then you are going on job hunt again. The second part of this lecture is supposed to reveal the social changes that are behind the statements of these young people. The explanation of the actual spatial and social problems of children and youths in European cities calls for new approaches. The invisible coping maps' are instructive in illustrating one of these new approaches. All the theoretical considerations have been made from the viewpoint of an empirical research project carried out in three Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona and La Coruña). This investigation in its turn is part of an European research project of the EC initiative *Leonardo da Vinci* under the headline Invisible Youth Integration. It compares Madrid (Spain) with Perpignan (France) and Palermo (Italy).

The late modern city and the socio-geographic approach of the 'Everyday Regionalization'
The starting point is the idea to call the social conditions of the nineties *Late Modernity*, *Second Modernity* or *Reflexive Modernity* after the English social theorist Anthony Giddens instead of describing it as the post modern age or the risk society. Late modern cities thus denote contemporary European cities in which the results of the industrial capitalism or the First Modernity became radical and universal. Under the influence of Late Modernity, growing up in an urban habitat is characterized by a spatial and temporal disembedding process. Socialization during childhood and adolescence does no longer take place within a normal biography which is generally given, secured and guaranteed by institutions. Instead, it has lost its structure and has become individualized. As the children and youths are being detached from the traditional patterns of socialization, they face a multitude of options. These options involve risks, and the

young generation has to solve developmental tasks and social problems at the same time in a late modern city (cf. Böhnisch 1993, p. 74).

The capitalization of European cities, which massively started after World War II as a result of the booming economies, is progressing even further during Late Modernity and has undergone radicalization.

Therefore, all spheres of the spatial (and social) world are structured by means of (hidden) possessory interests and the distribution of power, rules and the principles of integration and exclusion. Children and youths perceive and experience the late modern city as fragile and contradictory. Various rationalities, which exist in a society at the same time, cause these contradictions. While some of the life conditions function in accordance with a goal-oriented logic of rationality, others are still ruled by the traditional, premodern logic or by the First Modernity (Giddens 1997). The inconsistent logic in these rationalities makes the spatial world, in which the children and youths grow up, fragile and contradictory.

Social geography approaches, in particular the so-called *action-centered social geography* with its subfield *social geography of children* largely contributed to the understanding of sociospatial problems which occur during childhood and adolescence in the late modern city. According to the action-centered theory of the *social geography of everyday regionalizations* (Werlen 1988, 1995a, 1997, 2000), the spatial world, the *material and immaterial artifacts*, i.e., objects and *spatial sections* made by human beings, are understood as the materialized, intended and/or incidental results of past actions. These results serve (or do not serve) as conditions for present actions. The relation between action conditions and action is dualistic in the *structuring* process (Giddens 1988): Social, physio-material and subjective action conditions make actions possible and, on the other hand, limit them at the same time. From this standpoint, the sociospatial problems of children and adolescents are no spatial problems, as e.g. sociopedagogical approaches in the field of sociospatial pedagogics see it, but problems of power and order in accordance with the thesis of highly ruled city. The *problem of acquisition* – the theme of industrial capitalist modernity – is no 'spatial problem' from this perspective, but a *problem of spatial action conditions* for actual action (Werlen 1997). Benno Werlen urges that social geography researchers should not investigate 'space' but "those actions with which the subjects produce and reproduce their 'geographies'". This is based on the hypothesis that *geography* is not just for "scientists. *Geography* is also made by all active subjects in their everyday lives" (Werlen 1997, p. 6).

Socio-geographic research is supposed to reveal the distribution of power which restricts the geographies of children and youths. From this point of view, it is necessary to take sociospatial and socio-geographic measures, i.e. to create situations in which the individuals are enabled to give a meaning to their own actions. Deregulation and authorization are introduced to alter action conditions, to get up-to-date with modernization and to create a society that is fully rationalized, in which children and adolescents can make their geographies without any high ruled context (or negative action conditions, respectively) and where they can follow their *policy of life conduct* and are thus integrated into the late modern society.

New aspects of the sociospatial research of youth spaces – The divided city, the thesis of superfluousness and particular items of the approach presented

At the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century, European cities and urban developments are marked by the increasing global economic integration. To stand up against other international urban competitors, to win the inter-urban competition with other communities, cities and regions, a city has to focus all its energy and resources onto the so-called 'entrepreneurial city', i.e. that part of a city that can be commercially exploited. The resulting site policy is supposed to provide an environment that encourages entrepreneurs to form new companies or to expand their businesses. When superior zones are developed for businesses of the third economic sector (e.g., banks, assurance companies, IT businesses), these zones expand massively, and a *drive-out architecture and regional planning* excludes social fringe groups from the city centers and attractive places of the European city. The thorough social and spatial exclusion of social problems or of people who are faced with social hardness, of 'those shaken off', the 'undesired' or the *losers of digital capitalism* (Böhnisch/Schröer 2000) is essential and facilitates the entrepreneurial goals as these problems disturb life within the 'entrepreneurial city', the economic centers.

The result of this urban policy, which is derived from the example of the Spanish city, is a struggle for social access; the further widening of the gap between poor and rich, and the increasing social and spatial exclusion of the 'undesired' leads towards the building and reinforcement of an *invisible wall* which *divides the city*: There is no place for the socially underprivileged in the 'entrepreneurial city'; it is accessible for the 'successful', for the 'global players' or the 'winners of the digital capitalism' who own the social and/or economic tools and resources to buy spatial access to these places. The socially underprivileged are drawn into the 'city of those shaken off' or the ‚superfluous or annoying city'. It is this spatial and social exclusion of these people which reduces their chances of getting access to the 'entrepreneurial city' someday and thus, of getting integrated into society.

The global economic integration results in a growing tendency towards the spatial and social polarization of the urban population, towards a new drifting apart of chances, as on the labor and housing markets, or concerning the accessibility of public institutions and the availability of education and training facilities, and finally it leads to the division or dichotomization of the city itself. The steadily growing tendency towards economic globalization, the so-called *digital capitalism*, does no longer lead to a discourse of *social emancipation and autonomy of all members of a society, but – in accordance with the postmodern principle of the segmented division of labor – to the socially extended redundancy of one part of the population and to the socially regressive redundancy of the other part (the 'non-productive' groups)* in Europe (Böhnisch/Schröer 2000, p. 64). Thus critical attention is being paid to the idea of a highly integrated society, in which everybody gains the same profit bit from the growing affluence, which the neoliberally exploitable ‚social optimists' call the *elevator effect* (Beck 1986, p. 122-125).

The urban habitat has undergone massive changes due to the tendency of urban division. Children and youths acquire their (spatial and social) environment also in divided cities. However, the actual problem that adolescents are faced with is no longer estrangement (although they become more and more alienated from the spatial world due to the radicalization of capitalism) but rather the release, and thus the superfluousness, of humans in the context of the digital capitalist world. There is no longer a guarantee for all children and youths to become integrated into society by means of education and work. Many of them find themselves in a situation of steadily increasing pressure, others are completely detached from the economic process and become superfluous. While trying to keep up with the present development (e.g., the struggle for social access, the competition of generations, the pressure of coping and being

successful etc.), the adolescents are subject to a steadily increasing pressure. Each individual has to cope with this pressure and the feeling of needlessness in his or her own biography.

Now I would like to come back to the flashlight from the beginning of this lecture, which showed young people living in a 'superfluous' part of the Spanish metropolis: These young 'shaken off' people are conscious of their needlessness and have to cope with their situation in their biographies. They say they have a job "for some time, afterwards the whole thing starts over again." Others cannot even believe that they will ever be integrated into society by getting a job.

If young people try to acquire the spatial world nowadays to maintain their ability to act (possibly applying the acquisition tools of the 70s and the 90s), either nobody shows an interest in it (in the 'shaken-off' city) or they are kept or pushed away from the object they want to acquire (in the 'entrepreneurial city') by the spaceguards (private and state security staff); they are reported to the police, are being made criminals and they are stigmatized as 'juvenile rule breakers and delinquents'. As today nobody is interested in the underlying reason of such forms of coping applied by children and youths, acquisition actions do not result in social integration but intensify (spatial and social) exclusion. The tendency now is to react to "adverse behavior" using law enforcement rather than socio-pedagogical means.

The fact that parts of the population have been released or have become superfluous and that the pressure to keep up with others has generally increased, altered the action logic of many people. The socio-geographic concept of 'everyday regionalizations' was still dominated by an action concept that was marked by purpose and rationality and was thus related to the first or industrial capitalist modernity. Just unequally distributed action resources and varying might of the competitors are causing differences in the 'making of the geographies' and are controlling the patterns of integration and exclusion into and from spatial sectors. Young people both in the 'entrepreneurial city' and in the 'shaken-off city' may make geographies that are characterized by their age and situation, but the action logic varies due to the release mechanisms. Approaches which apply this rational purpose-oriented model of actions to explain the sociospatial phenomena in childhood and adolescence, may be useful to describe the 'policy of life' of integrated adolescents, i.e. those who write so-called 'life conduct maps'. The latter are indeed offered more and more chances to plan their lives independently. However, these approaches lose sight of the *superfluous* children and youths, who suffer from the pressure to keep up with others, and they do not take into account their action logic either. The reasons why the latter make geographies should not be understood first of all as a problem of rationalization or systemization which is supposed to be identified and solved. With digital capitalism as background, the individuals have to cope with the problems and the anxiety caused by the 'threat of being shaken off' or the superfluousness, respectively at an individual level in their biographies. These geographies are not so much about a *policy of life conduct* and thus about the writing of 'life conduct maps' but about a *coping policy* (Böhnisch/Schröer 2000, p. 65.), which enables them to remain active in spite of their superfluousness and the increasing pressure of keeping up. As the making of the geographies is answered by a law-and-order reaction, the shaken-off young generation will not be integrated. Superfluous children and adolescents are shaken off from the very beginning and cope with their lives on territories of the institutional invisibility: they write *invisible (coping) maps*.

The approaches applied so far (such as the approach presented earlier in this lecture coming from the action-centered social geography) do not cover the sociospatial problems children and youths are faced with in a divided city. If researchers want to provide approaches to explain the present

and future problems of adolescents in big cities, they have to start from the superfluousness thesis. Today's challenge is no longer to provide 'spaces' and to alter 'action conditions' to meet the present problems of growing up in the urban habitat (the 'New Poverty' and the impoverishment of more and more people, the growing general and juvenile delinquency, or the increasing problems of the integration of whole ethnic groups etc.), but to uncover the meanwhile invisible forms of coping with superfluousness and to explain the reasons behind. The socio-geographic approach of the *invisible coping maps* that have been developed in the fields of 'social geography of the childhood' and 'social geography of the adolescence' can be very helpful in this respect.

The approach of the *invisible coping maps* starts from the fact that children and youths growing up in a digital capitalist world tend to solve their problems outside the traditional socialization institutions (family, schools, social system). They write invisible coping maps when following their *policy of coping* and searching for orientation, for the meaning of life, for acknowledgement and self-esteem. The basic idea is that the individuals (following the idea of making geographies) write their social (coping) maps daily in order to maintain their ability to act even in a world in which more and more people become superfluous.

The reception activities of children and youths in the divided city are deprived of their integrative component. Nobody is interested any longer in the reasons behind. And the (social) reaction is further exclusion. As the common approaches are so much focused, the work children and adolescents do behind this *policy of coping* is not perceived. This is the point where future research in the field of children and youth welfare should step in: it is necessary to see coping maps as a whole, and to acknowledge the forms of coping in the invisible territories as an achievement. By rendering the invisible coping maps visible, it will be possible to investigate the significance of invisibility, visibility and the writing of coping maps for children and adolescents living in the divided city.

The concept of visibility and invisibility can replace the traditional clear division of private and public spaces. On one side of the dividing line, we will find those actions that will be made visible by the dynamics of the economized city and its institutions on the social, spatial and subjective background. On the other side, there will be those actions that are kept in or pushed into invisibility. As the coping maps are rendered visible within future research projects in the sector of juvenile socio-geography, attention should not only be paid to the visible reference of these maps (e.g., when youths are offered coping aids in institutions), or to the moment when these maps become visible (e.g., in case of conflicts with social norms and values), but above all to the significance of invisibility. From this new perspective, dead-end kids, e.g., would be regarded as children and youths who are forced to write all their maps in the invisibility to cope with their problems. And as an allusion to this invisibility, they should be called the *invisible youth*.

Future research in the field of 'social geography of adolescents' should orientate itself to the following three maxims: (1) Children and youths have the right of visibility; no effort should be spared to offer all young persons the chance to cope with their problems in visibility. (2) Children and youths have the right of invisibility; and making things visible (by adults) should not interfere with this right. (3) Children and youths have to have the possibility to 'make themselves visible'. They have the right to find and test the borderline between visibility and invisibility (in a playful manner).

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