



My cosmos, my opportunities, our spaces: Methodological reflections on photographic perspectives of young adopted children on their (new) environments

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ABSTRACT

Despite much discourse on growing-up environment as a central dimension of “child-well-being”, little is still known about why, how, and where meanings are created in it for children. For despite ongoing efforts in childhood research, children’s perspectives remain methodologically poorly embedded. Therefore, the author of this paper asks about relevance settings in children’s lifeworld - derived exemplarily from adopted preschool children’s environments. For this purpose, the author sets the demanding methodological balancing act between trivialising and exaggerating childhood in the research process as a central challenge. He makes it possible by a visual immersion in photographs taken by young children. In doing so, the arguments sometimes push into the hybrid and transformative.

As a result, not only possibilities to always switch between dimensions of ‘My Cosmos’, ‘My Possibilities’ and ‘Our Places’ become apparent as relevant to environment of growing up. The findings can also be read as an encouragement to research and argue more consistently and creatively. They show step by step why and how new paths can be taken and socio-scientific fears of the non-linguistic overcome to take research and thinking decisively further.

1. Introduction

The environment of growing up (named here as the term ‘Environment’) represents a central dimension of the child-well-being (Crampton & Freisthler, 2008). Nevertheless, we hardly know anything about when, why, how and where meanings arise for children. This gap is particularly evident in the research discourse on adoption, which still tends to be structural functionalist. Further, adoption can be regarded as a burning glass of educational questions and challenges because the welfare state only grants parental permission to couples here (Anonymized & Anonymized, 2020). My goal in the presented research project study and specifically in this article is therefore to methodologically substantiate a visually based approach to the perspective of young adopted children. On this basis we could empirically learn more about the dimensions of meaning in ‘Environment’.

However, the requirement to close the gap mentioned must be seen as high: An appropriate consideration of the perspective of children in research should neither trivialize childhood nor overemphasize the subject. Above all, the ‘newer childhood research’ (Eßer 2017) refers to the methodologically presuppositional project to approach places and things empirically that can be grasped in relational terms. Children of pre-school age face further challenges in terms of communication. Too often, directive, language-based or deficit-oriented methods fail to

capture the power and self-will of this age group (Kelle & Tervooren, 2008). There are increasingly creative methods that use drawing or completing stories to create conversation stimuli (Blaisdell et al. 2019; Desmond et al., 2015; Rose, 2016; Shaw 2021). However, alternative methods often focus on verbal communications, deductive interpretations or they are (still) not methodologically sound (Facca et al., 2020; Lange & Mierendorff, 2009; Rogersaand & Boyd, 2020). Further, they too often satisfy themselves in a sentimentalising or psychologising way. They therefore require an explorative and at the same time well-founded approach.

In order to break up the conditions described above, four scientific paradigm turns (Kuhn, 1962) are gradually included in the “turns”. They derive individual premises from their epistemological comparisons - albeit in different discourses and decades (cf. Fig. 1). And they deal with the critical reflection of the research of childhood or research with children (‘newer childhood research’, condensed in the well-being conception), with the phenomenological (‘turn of sociology towards everyday life’) and - in addition - with the praxeological (‘practice turn’) understanding of the world and subject, as well as with the pictorial as empirical data basis of sociological findings (‘iconic turn’).

Building on this theoretical background, this research project examines the possibilities and limitations of visual methodology in the specific field of visual data and data analysis. As a valid qualitative

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database (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019), 17 adopted pre-school children recorded their 'Environments' photographically on a total of 210 images. The iconological-iconic approach is intended to make previously unknown experiential qualities recognizable for children in their 'Environments', or to make already known qualities visible and perceptible.

2. Problem, research interests and questions

In the scientific discourse on the adoption procedure, in which couples apply as future adoptive parents, it becomes particularly clear: implicit normative family images as well as explicit indicators of good parenting and conducive environments for growing up can have a high impact on professional topics, and on self-perception as parents and family (Barbosa-Ducharne et al., 2012; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Anonymized, 2010; Michaelsen, 2017). In addition, children are completely absent at the time of the first home visits by the social workers within the framework of the adoption procedure. This leads to the a priori question of good parenthood without existing parenthood, which seems contradictory from an educational science point of view. In adoption practice, these conditions can lead to technically incomprehensible judgments on the part of social workers about the environment in which children grow up: such as criticism of too small or too large a window, a lack of zebra crossings in front of the house or a living environment unfriendly to children (Anonymized & Anonymized, 2020).

However, the absence of the child does not only apply in the practical sense for the first clarifications and analysis. It is characterized by a lack of inclusion of a perspective in empirical research and theory, which is why they have little orientation to offer. Behind the focus on structures, on parenthood, family or on adoption-related pathologies, there is a risk of overlooking how and what children experience as relevant. And the clarity of this problem does not only reflect a current challenge of adoption research, but of social sciences and educational sciences in general (Albert & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015). But in a needed methodological and methodical search for a relational view on structure and subject, it is important to remain scientifically sound. At the same time, the awareness of perceptions and the generation of meaning in the child's lifeworld themselves must not be lost (Schütz, 2004 [1959]).

Therefore, this study not only will generate hypotheses on relevance (s) of young adopted children's environment of growing up by using visual and photographic methodologies (Rose, 2016; Edwards et al., 2012). It also asks about epistemological possibilities and limits of the consequent implementation of visual methodology. For this purpose, 'Environment' is understood as one of several recognized well-being

dimensions that are in an interactive relationship to each other. The theoretical framing of these dimensions is taken on the one hand from the multi-perspectival concept of well-being, which emerged from discourses in childhood research (Anonymized, 2010; 2019). On the other hand, they are taken from the phenomenological concept of 'lifeworld' according to Schütz (2004 [1959]). This leads us to the following three main questions, theses, and scientific relevance. These will also frame the structure and argumentation of this article:

- What relevance do 'Environments' (family environment of growing up) of children - in the specific case of adopted children - at pre-school age have for child-well-being?

Thesis I: Family environments of growing up represent a central, non-isolatable dimension of successful growing up. This is especially true for adopted pre-school children (smaller radius of effect) as well as for experts in the adoption procedure. Meanings of these dimensions are empirically and methodically only inadequately differentiated (DJI, 2017; Hurrelmann & Andresen, 2013).

Relevance for educational sciences: Professional ideas of families, upbringing and growing up as well as of an understanding child welfare concept.

- How can young children (3–6 years) not only be (passively) researched, but also be considered as actors in the research process?

Thesis II: Conventional social science methods are limited with regard to explorative approaches to children's perspectives. This is why a creative methodological turn in research with children is necessary (Clark & Moss, 2011; Desmond et al. 2015; Kok & Yang, 2021; Lange & Mierendorff, 2009).

Methodological relevance: Appropriate approach to young children's perspectives, including critical reflection on the relationship between generational order and autonomy.

- What are the benefits and challenges of using visual data for research questions with young children?

Thesis III: As a consequence of the 'iconic turn', visual methodology enables creative approaches to broadening, supplementing or new perspectives on children's lifeworld (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Chaplin, 1994; Bohnsack, 2020; Rose, 2016). But it must build up a solid epistemological basis of legitimacy, especially in the social sciences.

Methodological and theoretical relevance: Empirically based reflection on

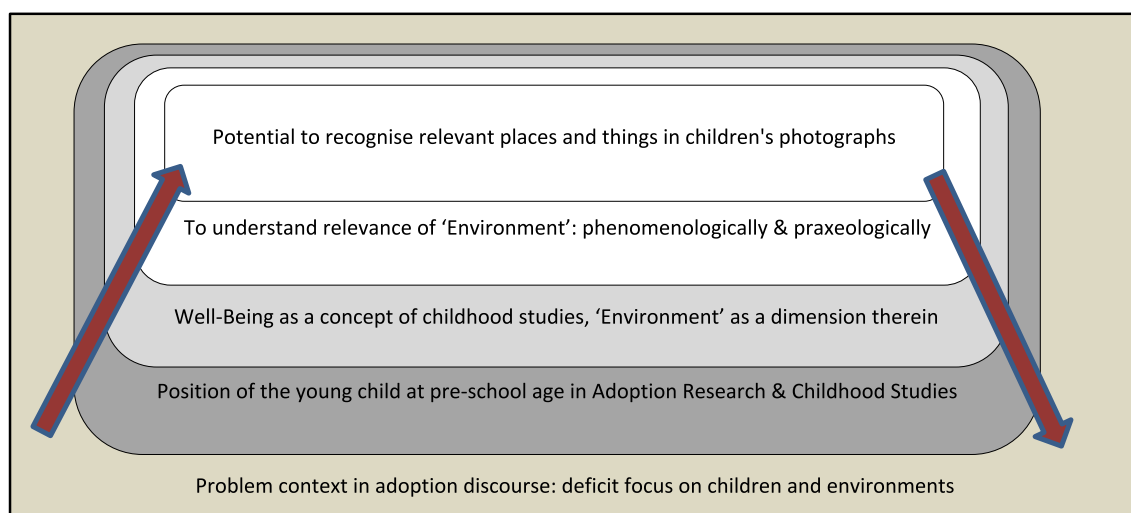


Fig. 1. The thematic steps of cognition from the problem context to the method and back again.

the advantages and disadvantages of visual methodology and recommendation of criteria for further research.

3. Methodological rationale along four paradigm turns

A goal-oriented discussion of the listed challenges and questions becomes possible thanks to past and current theoretical paradigm shifts, changes of world view (Kuhn, 1962) or so-called 'turns'. Even though some of the discourses on paradigm shifts within their respective disciplines, and consequently the citations date back somewhat, a combination of these turns seems to fit recent methodological needs. They allow us to take up all the central themes of the presented problem in an explorative way. Therefore, I will start by discussing these paradigm turns along this line of argument below:

The concept of well-being, embedded in the paradigm of 'newer childhood research' (3.1), decisively defines the present object of research ('Environment'), as well as the research attitude and claim. Phenomenology and its 'turn of sociology towards everyday life' points to the importance of perception, the sensual and intuitional dimensions. Without taking these into account, children's lifeworld could be understood neither theoretically nor empirically (3.2). In addition, the praxeological understanding ('practice turn' (3.3)) allows us to draw conclusions about social practices from artefacts of the lifeworld. Otherwise, it would be epistemologically difficult to infer meanings from photographs. In addition, we can better describe and consider relational characteristics theoretically as well as empirically. Finally, the pictorial as an empirical data basis for gaining knowledge from visual data ('iconic turn' (3.4)) enables us to empirically implement the phenomenological and praxeological premises of the 'Environment'.

3.1. Letting children see their lifeworld instead of seeing children in lifeworld

Grasping the relational interaction between children's perspectives and perspectives on children is a central methodological challenge in childhood research and childhood studies. According to childhood research, the methodological challenge in approaching the environments of growing up is not *that* we can consider children as actors and experts of their lifeworld by empirical and theoretical innovations, but *how*. Or as Lange and Mierendorff write¹: "New questions, new research questions, new research objects require us to question the existing repertoire of methods. Is the previous one sufficient to gain knowledge about them?" (2009, S.189). Even if this quote primarily indicates a direction and not yet a path, there is agreement in the discourse on the necessary attitude: we need to developed corresponding dimensions relationally and sensitively regarding topics between empowerment and subjugation. This also applies to the development of 'Environment' as a central dimension of child-well-being (Andresen et al., 2016; Crampton & Freisthler, 2008). However, researchers and disciplines disagree about suitable theories, subject concepts, data and methods. This area of tension becomes clear in the discourse on the - also relational - interaction between 'agency' and 'vulnerability' in the concept of childhood (Eber et al., 2016). Since in this study, I search for this relationship in photographs of 'Environments', I needed a theory on the meaning of sensory perceptions in lifeworld:

3.2. Sensual understanding instead of intellectual explanation

In this research study, I assume that we can only comprehend relevant dimensions in the 'Environment' once we have understood how relevance accrue in children's lifeworld. For this process of understanding, which turns away from scientific explanation, the phenomenological approach to the everyday as well as to the sensual dimensions

offers a theoretical support: "The phenomena of performing subjectivity, which alone constitute the lifeworld, remained and remain closed to mathematical-scientific observation for reasons of their very nature, and the natural scientist forgets that he himself, with his science of performing subjectivity, cannot find understanding of himself and his actions in any objective science"² (Schütz, 1971, p. 136f). If we devote ourselves also in an empirical way to the lowest, to the intuitive level of cognitivity (Husserl, 1913) we also will find and represent alternatives; alternatives to heuristics, which seeks to discover determined meanings, and alternatives to ontology, which discusses and defines existential conditions of being. In this way, phenomenology also allows us to make a first turn from the moment of taking a photograph to the contemplation of photography. What phenomenologists brought to mind as well as to theories in the 20th century but were unable to implement either methodologically or empirically: both a critique of intellectualisation and a critique of the concept of the subject.

3.3. Hybrid relativisation of the subject instead of dispute over the subject

The cultural-theoretical 'structure-and-agency-link' finally connects the phenomenological premises with the epistemological interest in recognising dimensions of meaning of 'Environment' in photographs - not only descriptively but also analytically. This link makes cultural reproductions and cultural innovation equally comprehensible. And most importantly, it enables us to leave behind the dualism between cultural structures and interpretive actors (Reckwitz, 2008; 2015). By his conception of social practices as an imagined notion of action, Reckwitz skips different dichotomies: the dichotomy between structure and subject, and the dichotomy between objective-sensible pre-structures and purely subjectively founded acts of action (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 132). Thanks to this concept of artefacts and social practices, which conceives of and brings together subjects and objects in a hybrid way (Latour, 1993), photographs can speak (epistemologically) from 'Environments' without having to speak about them verbally anymore (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Shaw, 2021). Not only practice theories, but also the art-scientific discussions about the cultural paradigm turn from text to images points to this different possibility of cognition.

3.4. Images instead of text: Iconic, photography and the social sciences

The epistemological turn towards the visual and visibility, the so-called 'Iconic Turn' (Burda, 2010), in social sciences takes place only with a delay - in contrast to art and cultural studies for example. In the meantime, iconic turn has long since assumed a dominant role in culture, in social practices and artefacts, as well as in the relevance of places and things (Bohnsack, 2020; Rose, 2016). As early as 1931, Walter Benjamin pointed out: "It is not the person ignorant of writing but the one ignorant of photography who will be the illiterate of the future" (1977 [1931], p. 64). In the 'iconic turn' as a demanded paradigm turn in social sciences' research and theory, which are sometimes also accused of a fear of the image, the primary concern is to understand a massively intensified presence of images and pictures in the social and everyday life (Edwards et al., 2012; Friebertshäuser et al., 2007): "Today, pictures and pictorial experiences are a central component of children's and young people's perception, experience of reality and communicative exchange. (...) The associated self-production enables new approaches to experiencing the world"³ (Marotzki & Niesyto, 2006, p. 7).

These four methodological premises form the basis of the visual methodology and approach in this study with young pre-school children. Further, they also serve as a methodological foundation for comparable visual research methods, for example with traumatized children and

¹ Translated from German to English by the author.

² Translated from German to English by the author.

³ Translated from German to English by the author.

adolescents or with children and adolescents in transcultural contexts (Desmond et al., 2015; Facca et al., 2020; Shaw, 2021). The methodological basis for collecting and interpreting the photographs is thus derived.

4. Sample, disposable cameras and photographs: Visual data and analysing methods

The data base of the study are 210 photographs taken by 17 adopted children between the ages of 3 and 6. This corresponds to a sufficiently large sample for a valid hypothesis-generating procedure of qualitative social research and qualitative childhood research (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). They were asked to photograph places and things that they like. The adopted children were born in 8 different countries on four continents of the world and were on average 4.5 years old at the time of the data collection. At this time, they had been living for an average of two years in mostly three- to four-member families who, socio-economically speaking, can mostly be counted as belonging to the upper middle class or upper class, with bisexual parents (occasionally with siblings who had also been adopted or with biological children of the adoptive parents). All photographs can be seen as – implicit or explicit – pictorial answers to the question that the researcher had personally handed over: “Can you photograph for me a few things or places in and around your home that are beautiful and important to you? Take as much time as you like for this. You can send me the camera in the box afterwards. Thank you very much!” The children could decide for themselves when they had taken enough photos of what, which led to a spread of between 7 and 28 photos within 2 days and 6 weeks; the average of taken photos was 13.

This data collection with single-use cameras (Holzwarth, 2006) is therefore a non-directive, non-linguistic, self-determined method (Blaisdell et al., 2019). It is open in terms of time, space, and content, empowering and - apart from the pre-defined task and method - creative. Also, thanks to the absence of the researcher during data collection and thanks to the image as a visual medium, the risk of reproducing power difference or marginalisation is low: “On the whole: analysing visual data overlaps also with a verbal critique, with postmodernism, with feminism, with post-colonialism (...)” (Chaplin, 1994, p. 197). Moreover, if photographs are collected specifically for a project – as it was the case for this study – we cannot compare it to the interpretation of already existing images as sources, such as from photo albums, installations or diaries: “They do not emerge from specific theoretical contexts, and so they can be used to answer a very wide range of research questions. (...) research question that has nothing to do with visibility or the visible” (Rose, 2016, p. 308). The study also explicitly does not aim to reconstruct and interpret individual cases through the photographs. The aim is to make visible – rather than to show in a descriptive way – intersubjective dimensions of children’s lifeworld that can be interpreted as relevant for their well-being. With these principles of visual methodology, not only relevant dimensions in “environments” of young adopted children can be examined. They also serve a differentiated justification of visual methods with children and adolescents who, for various reasons, can only communicate linguistically to a limited extent (Desmond et al., 2015; Facca et al., 2020; Shaw, 2021). However, the method theoretically derived and implemented here is characterized by the fact that the children took the photos without the presence of researchers. After that the researcher analysed all the photos exclusively with the visual methodology without involving language-based data.

In the inductive course of the data analysing process, I have selected 17 contrasting photos out of the 210 photographs. The qualitative analysis of visual data was based on the iconological-iconic image analysis in social and educational sciences (Bohnsack, 2020; Friebertshäuser et al., 2007; Fuhs, 2013; Marotzki & Niesyto, 2006; Rose, 2016; Shaw, 2021). The same applies to the deductive-inductive allocation or expansion based on the remaining 193 photographs. After all,

these were the key steps of this iconological-iconic data analysis:

Steps	Goals
I & II Pre-iconography	researchers' critical (self-)reflection
III Iconographic analysis	description and generation of questions
IV Iconic/iconic analysis	sensual, intuitive pictorial experiences
V Iconology	overarching synthesis

This analytic chronology (I-V) also defines the systematic of the following presentation of central results and findings.

5. Key results and findings

Admittedly, the method with single-use cameras as well as the iconological-iconic analysis method I used in the study are quite innovative and creative. Taken individually, they might be not new discoveries in research (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Shaw, 2021). On the other hand, the combination of photo assignment, photo survey, and purely image-based (without text or interviews) analysis as well as the methodologically differentiated derivation can be called a unique selling point of the method used here in the field of ‘newer childhood research’ (Eber 2017). The potential of this different approach to young children’s perspectives on their ‘Environment’ achieved in this way is evident in the now following results in response to the three main research questions (see chapter 2).

5.1. What the children photographed and where (and what and where not)

Even if it mainly stems from (pre-)iconographic descriptions, i.e. initial associations during the first photographic viewing of all the data: The allocation of the photographs based on this first analytical step already opens up a first access to possible dimensions of meaning in the photographed ‘Environments’ of the adopted preschool children (See Table 1). At the same time, it is also able to elicit critical questions from the research subjects about possible assumptions behind the codes and subcodes as well as about systematisation per se. They will also be part of the further steps of interpretation:

In the further (iconographic) analysis, it is above all the sensual, mental, pictorial, or acting capture of things and places (towards the outside) as well as a corresponding immersion (towards the inside) that prove to be relevant within ‘Environments’ for child-well-being. Thus, from an iconographical point of view, unchangeable places and things are visible to the child, in which he or she can appear to varying degrees. Or, alternatively, changeable places and things become visible that can be actively used. Furthermore, sections of specific (play) landscapes of the children could be discerned iconographically; or places and things whose attraction is their own logic, the inconspicuous or the location of the person taking the photo. What appears to be unifying here are the opportunities for the children, becoming apparent in the visible, through which or in which places and things can be (co-)shaped or expanded.

Regarding possible stereotypes that are familiar from the discourse of adoption and childhood (Michaelsen, 2017), it is surprising on this visual interpretative level that only very few images are able to serve these. In concrete terms, this means that the photographs hardly serve existing visual stereotypes of gender, age, race or socio-economical context. The most that can be identified are visual stereotypes of socio-economical context, for example in the high-quality furnishings or location of photographed places and things. Perhaps the quasi absence of the first three stereotypes is even one more indication of an educated middle-class environment, where many adoptive families live and adopted children grow up.

5.2. The iconic experience of images

The iconic analysis step according to Imdahl (1980) represents the

Table 1
Relevant dimensions in the 'Environment' - derived from the inductive-in-depth (n = 17) and deductive-across (n = 210) photography analysis.

(Pre-)iconographic codes	(Pre-)iconographic subcodes
1) Outside: Around the house, the flat (and further) (n = 62)	- vehicles and construction sites (including possible outings) (n = 15) - around the house (garden, sitting area, neighbourhood) (n = 12) - plants and nature (n = 12) - explicit outdoor places to play (n = 10) - wide-ranging exercise (sport, bicycle, football) (n = 8) - other (open, unspecific) (n = 5) - no subcodes
2) Outside, seen through the window (n = 8)	- no subcodes
3) Inside the house (n = 71)	- explicit places of play (n = 24) - bed and similar places/things of retreat (n = 18) - other (open, unspecific) (n = 29)
4) Entertainment (n = 25)	- watching: book, comic (n = 6) - multimedia watching and playing (TV, computer, tablet) (n = 6) - music: music system or instrument (n = 6) - decoration, idol, memory: pictures/posters/photos (n = 7)
5) Single play items (n = 49)	- small creatures: doll, soft toy (n = 21) - small worlds playmobil, lego etc. (n = 10) - in motion: vehicles (bicycle, like-a-bike, play tractor) (n = 5) - (upcoming) school: new school satchel (n = 2) - other (open, unspecific) (n = 11)
6) Togetherness (n = 70)	- shared family places (n = 26 - of which 16 with people in photo) - with other people (total n = 31) - with pets (cat, dog, pet's food bowl) (n = 8) - other animals (donkey, sheep) (n = 5) - no subcodes
7) Nothing recognisable (n = 22)	- no subcodes

central specifics of the applied image analysis. In the interplay of the praxeological view of artefacts and social practices according to Reckwitz (2008; 2017), only this step significantly enables the inductive breaking up of the image data, the analytical start from the visual level. In this way, we can enter the sensual and the relational space between subjects and objects. Through this access, we further can deepen child-related dimensions of 'Environment' and make them visible analytically. These iconic analytical steps lead away from descriptions that are mainly based on existing discourses and theories and attempt to make a text out of the image. From the planimetric to the sensual, Imdahl's (1980) and Reckwitz's (2017) premises can break down the data in such a way that we can guess phenomenological lifeworld as well as praxeological artefacts.

If we allow ourselves - as academics and researchers - to engage with it, the photographs now also start to seem, smell and sound unagitated and clean, calm and playful or harmonious and slow. And at the same time, they put the viewer/ the researcher in a tension in which it becomes perceptible that the relevance is also due to a certain unpredictability. This unpredictability could change at any time into the excited, loud, conflictive, and fast. These intuitive messages refer to the relevance initiated by the children. They want to negotiate 'Environment' ...:

- ... between overview and restlessness,
- ... between immersion and discovery and
- ... between security and intimacy.

Regarding the young children taking the photographs themselves, the analyses also allow us to derive initial theses on the relational interaction between the subject and the places and things that surround them. The photographed artefacts refer to social practices in which the child can perceive himself or herself...:

- ... as involved,
- ... as staging,
- ... as proudly contemplating or
- ... as enjoying without purpose.

These iconically defined characteristics of social practices thus define the first dimensions of meaning of 'Environment'.

5.3. In what dimensions and how places and things become relevant in 'Environments': The iconological-iconic synthesis

Finally, the overarching analyses of the photographs reveal three dimensions that are central to child-well-being in their environment of growing up. Along these, we can differentiate, theoretically discuss, and locate 'Environments' between 'My Cosmos', 'My Possibilities' and 'Our Places' (cf. Fig. 2). These dimensions each define themselves between the same five expressions, which are mutually dependent and together allow for a relational - rather than determinate, absolute and static - relationship between pre-school children, their places, and things:

- I. Occurrence in things and places (as a person):
- II. Characterisation of the physically and/or psychologically possible (co)determination of relevance within artefacts and social practices in important sections of the lifeworld.
- III. Place (in)boundedness of things and places:
- IV. The degree of dualism (place-bound) or duality (less place-bound) between action and structure, between subject and object.
- V. Degree of effect and determination over things and places:
- VI. Degree of self-determination and self-will in things and places; dualism or duality between degree of effect and space.
- VII. Possibility for withdrawal, rest, intimacy, immersion:
- VIII. Expression of possibilities to withdraw in or thanks to places and things - individually or collectively, physically, or psychologically.
- IX. Degree of assumption and development of responsibility:
- X. Characterisation of the assumption of (self-)responsibility related to the perception of oneself in relation to things and places

(cf. Fig. 2).

However, the three dimensions ('My Cosmos', 'My Possibilities' and 'Our Places') with their five characteristics (I - V) do not represent the most important prerequisites for enabling (adopted) children's well-being in the environment in which they grow up. What seems to be significant is the interplay between the three dimensions. This interplay enables the child to become and to be increasingly self-determined or self-willed and to switch between these dimensions at any time they like (cf. Fig. 2). This means that an imagined, bodily, hoped-for, or vicarious experience of 'Our Places' only contributes to child-well-being when children do not experience it as separate or detached from 'My Possibilities' and 'My Cosmos':

In the following, we will look in particular at the connection between the three central dimensions that have become apparent in the 'Environment' and child well-being. In addition, hypotheses are derived on the specific influence on well-being of young adopted children. After that, a conclusion and outlook to the knowledge gained from the methodological and empirical papers will follow⁴.

⁴ All photographs were taken by the young adopted children as part of the study. The children and their guardians have authorised the authors to reproduce these images for this publication.

„My Cosmos“



Based on the iconic-iconological analysis I named the first overarching dimension of relevance in young children's lifeworld 'My Cosmos'. This dimension can be characterised as exclusively accessible to the child or children – or at least they can determine who may enter these material or mental sections of their lifeworld and how. From their point of view, they are physically or psychologically present in these excerpts in such a way that they remain present even without being present. Strikingly often, this presence also includes the different height of the perspective or the proximity to the ground, which co-defines one's own 'cosmos' and makes access difficult for other, larger people.

In relation to young, adopted children, 'My Cosmos' could therefore be of additional significance because it can represent a counter-design to their entering the 'other place' or the 'other family' through adoption. For here they determine concretely or mentally who may enter this section of their lifeworld, which would not exist at all without the child.

„My Possibilities“



The second overarching dimension of the figuratively analysed relevancies in lifeworld is called 'My Possibilities'. It is so called because it ensures that children are (or would like to be) safe, based on safe things and places, that they can always satisfy their needs on the one hand and increasingly repurpose areas outside their 'cosmos' on the other. 'My Possibilities' thus stands for wishes and needs that are concretely met in the environment of growing up, as well as for stubborn fantasies and ideas of beauty in it. Creativity and spontaneity, but also routines and recurrences seem to connect these two characteristics and make them mutually enriching.

In relation to young, adopted children, 'My Possibilities' can also be interpreted as relevant because the safeguarding of the satisfaction of needs represents a biographical, existential theme. The same may apply to the (necessary) repurposing of existing things also.

‘Our Places’



The third and – for now – last overarching dimension of visually mediated relevance in lifeworld is called 'Our Places'. It is less about 'mine', its definition, limitation, or extension, but clearly more about 'ours', about the well-being of commonly used or negotiated places and things. In this context, the corresponding artefacts (which can also be understood as hybrid) or situations and places of photography refer to social practices that focus on participation; on one's own actions that take place outside one's 'own cosmos'. They thus contain more than just the possibility itself. In this dimension, places and things are mostly location-bound and only have a limited (explicit) relation to the child. And it is precisely thanks to this limitedness that they appear attractive to children. They enable to perceive an important dimension of well-being:

It is not so much the place and things, but the possibilities therein, and thus the possibilities for thought and action, that are child related. The autonomous and the communal merge here. Common places determine these photographs and either small details (e.g. a child's glass) or intimate, physical experiences of self and others (e.g. in the bathroom) refer to the competencies within.

In relation to young, adopted children, 'Our Places' therefore represents a particularly central dimension of well-being. That is where the common - as an actual or desired state - can be experienced, questioned and negotiated most directly. This can happen harmoniously or in crisis. It depends on how unilaterally or reciprocally 'ours' is appropriated, how much common physical as well as psychological experiences and areas of responsibility are merely sought or also experienced and found.

‘Oscillating in between’

If the three dimensions are not in close exchange with each other, we can assess their relevance for a relational construction of child-well-being as significantly lower. With other words: if they exist more or less isolated from each other, the children cannot flexibly shift or oscillate between them in terms of time, place and thought/imagination. Therefore, the dimensions of 'Environment' must be grasped holistically.

If children experience themselves oscillating as shaping and visibly participating not only in a few extracts, but holistically, this means that other places of growing up (such as adoptive families) show willingness and flexibility to withdraw their own images and ideals. They can exist in the mind but also in practices in a visual sense, in favour of the ideas of children and young people. Against this background, it would be easier not to rate the children's attempts at appropriation as deficits or conflicts, but to understand them for what they are: individual possibilities for (also) appropriating the 'Environment' in a creative way. And these are not primarily perceived by an isolable, childlike subject who is, however, in relation to adult subjects and the places and things that surround them. Enabling takes place in a hybrid and processual sense in social practices and in artefacts as their carriers. Thus, it takes place in the sensual, pictorial, imagined, objectified or spatial dimension, too.

6. Reflection and discussion of the findings

The methodologically and empirically explorative breakdown of one important child-well-being-dimension ('Environment') is still little interpreted in terms of research theory and is normatively susceptible. But if doing so, it does not only contribute in terms of content to the

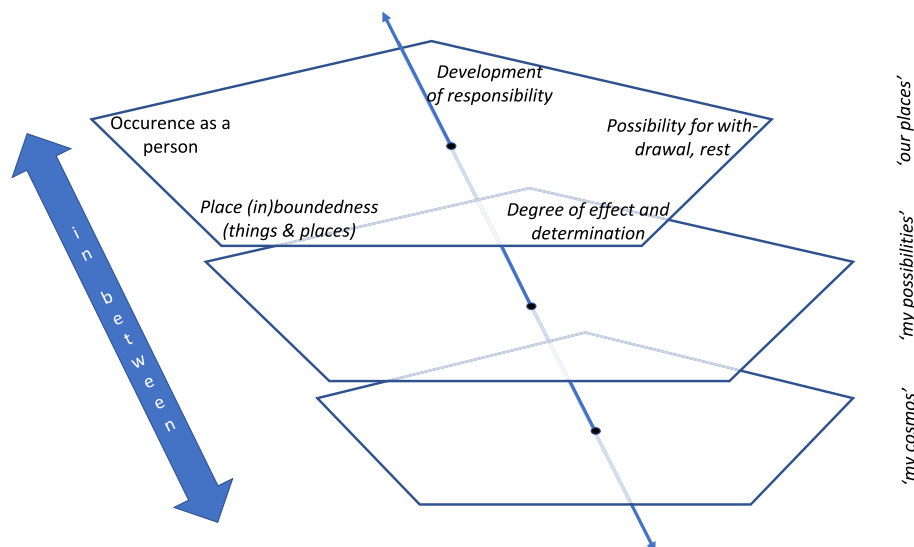


Fig. 2. Three-dimensional network on the needs of child-well-being in environment of growing-up: three dimensions, 5 manifestations and the in-between.

ongoing dimensionalisation within the well-being-concept by analytically breaking down the environment of growing up and making professionally relevant dimensions apparent. Methodologically and methodically, it also reflects a basic concern of social science and specifically of educational science: a consistent examination of growing up as a process of balancing between (self-)empowerment and subjugation (Andresen et al., 2016). A subject-theoretically unusual implementation of “eye level” and “appropriate communication” contributes to this, which specifically questions previous assumptions and premises in childhood research. This is done primarily through an intensive engagement with the figurative - in data collection and data analysing alike.

6.1. From photography as an uncertain data basis to photography as a benefit

Precisely because photography still has a hard time in empirical studies in social sciences, despite some (mainly hermeneutically based) approaches (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Bohnsack, 2020; Rose, 2016), a differentiated and critical derivation of its implementation and use is necessary. For example, photography or the pictorial represent a socially widespread, even inflationary practice. But their actual content is still underestimated in most (childhood) studies that work with photographs and consequently mostly approached in a truncated sense (Facca et al., 2020). From a methodological point of view, the non-directive, non-linguistic, self-determined data collection with single-use cameras, which was open in terms of time, space, and content, proved to be a decisive basis for knowledge. However, the photographic survey proved to be a levelling form of communication: in growing up, showing comes before speaking and the pictorial in preschool age often allows for even more moments of expression than the linguistic (Bohnsack, 2020; Desmond et al., 2015; Kok & Yang, 2022). In the required turn from the “readability of the world” to a “world-view”⁵ (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 169), researchers must, however, be prepared to leave their own textualized and intellectualised sources of power again and again. Only in this way, this “indirect access to the lifeworld” (Holzwarth, 2006, p. 202) via photographs allows an alternative interpretation of social situations. It also questions the predominance of language and its reproduction of power relations in social science empiricism critically (Chaplin, 1994; Edwards et al., 2012). In the spirit of social phenomenology (Schütz, 2004 [1959]), but also of the iconic (Burda, 2010) and praxeological (Reckwitz 2008) turn, the sensual, perception, is thus given more weight again – at all levels of empirical as well as theoretical debate. Finally, the differentiated explanations of the study should encourage further empirical projects to independently engage methodologically with pictorial approaches, even without talking about them with subjects. This also addresses existing methods or combinations of methods (Clark & Moss, 2011; Rogersaand & Boyd 2020) based on drawings, digital photographs or films (Blaisdell et al. 2019; Rogersaand & Boyd, 2020; Shaw, 2021).

6.2. Relativisation of subject status as empowerment of all those involved in research

A possible key for the relativisation of the subject status, which several paradigm turns had already theoretically contemplated (Lange & Mierendorff, 2009; Schütz, 2004 [1959], Reckwitz, 2008; 2015; Imdahl, 1980) but only rarely implemented empirically, does not seem to be the visual methodology alone. Above all the Imdahl's iconic approach (Imdahl, 1980) was a game-changer. For in this key moment, the pictorial, the sensual as well as artefacts as carriers of social practices take on an attention-guiding role that is partly contrary to textualized approaches. Now, in this iconically shaped epistemological step, some

important levels come together analytically. This leads to synergies between the lifeworld and power-critical premises of phenomenology, the ‘Practice Turn’, the ‘Iconic Turn’ as well as the well-being conception. They have been methodologically captured up to this point. By temporarily leaving the linguistic, we can enter a relational and lifeworld level between emerging and existing meanings with great benefits for other fields of research with people sometimes marginalized or overlooked by research (Desmond et al., 2015; Facca et al., 2020; Shaw, 2021).

Nevertheless, even with this decisive difference, findings from visual analysis remain connectable to discussions from text-based and hermeneutic, qualitative approaches. For this reason, the results of the study can also be fed back into a further discussion of Nussbaum's capabilities (2011) or – more methodologically – Bohnsack's documentary method (2020). However, they can enrich the increasingly intensive discourse on research ethics in qualitative childhood research (Anonymized et al., 2016; Barriage & Hicks, 2020; Facca et al. 2020).

6.3. Ethical research thoughts on the visual transformation of researchers

The situationally and communicatively open method, the seemingly pictorial distance as an approach to the sensually and intuitively experienced, as well as the relativisation of the subject status consistently implement mindfulness in a unique way. This is where the method used here differs explicitly from other approaches that analyse photographs more descriptively or then combined with other (including text-based) data (Blaisdell et al., 2019; Kok & Yang 2022; Shaw, 2021). In such methods, researchers have to expose themselves less to the uncertainties of hybrid space and sensory perceptions, and also less to the claims of own transformation during data analyses. What is participatory and dignified here is precisely not the concrete (sometimes predominantly language-based) negotiation between adult researchers and adolescent children as co-researchers. For in this way, the questions about the relationality of the concepts of subject and structure do not dissolve but tend to double. Rather, the participatory and dignified aspect methodologically consists in the fact that the pictorial created by children - comparable to the icons in the Orthodox Church - involves the viewer in a sensual dialogue that goes beyond the visible and re-constructible (Imdahl, 1980). And it is precisely in this pendulum movement that the relational becomes tangible, which can certainly lead to the transformation of the inquiring subject. In this iconic oscillation between the pictorial and itself, Latour's ‘structure-and-agency-link’ (1993) suggests that the researching subject, the photographing subject, and the photograph as artefact may well merge into converging actors. However, the question arises as to whether these abstract methodological insights into the relational interaction between the actors involved could also be transferred into practice.

6.4. Transfer possibilities into practice

The methodological gain for insights and further development of childhood research and qualitative research in general become clear. But the gain for practice and for children adopted and further groups of young children with specific needs or situations of growing up in the future is rather in the background so far, despite the explanations of the discovery and problem context at the beginning. Even if this applied question did not correspond to a direct aim of the study, it was at least an indirect one. And the results contain ground-breaking topics from this perspective as well, which would be ready for a dialogical transfer (cf. Anonymized et al., 2017) into various fields of practice such as research with traumatized children, children on the run and others (Desmond et al., 2015; Facca et al., 2020; Shaw, 2021).

Thus, the overview of what and where the children have photographed without talking to them offers a basis for consciously directing professional attention or for critically and reflectively defining indicators for social clarification. Furthermore, the presentation of the

⁵ Translated from German to English by the author.

iconic and sensually experienced lifeworld can help us to critically question our own perceptions and intuitions about attitude and action in the field. And finally, the dimensionalisation of the relevance of places and things in the environments of growing up offers us a fundamental orientation for innovative processes; processes of sensitisation, (re)orientation or further thinking and rethinking. With reference to the results, an ethical relevant rethinking would impose itself, for example, on the idea of an *ex-ante* review or on inadequate consideration of the child's perspective in child welfare assessments in general (Anonymized et al., 2016).

Finally, the apparent oscillation between 'My Cosmos', 'My Possibilities' and 'Our Places' illustrates the importance of the relational far beyond the spatial. This can be useful for professional attention in observing, accompanying, and enabling conditions of growing up for preschool children. The results thus also support a professional and methodological claim of wanting to work outside or in addition to normative, descriptive, systemic, or diagnostic approaches to child's experiences in everyday life (Andresen et al., 2016). In this way, research, science, and practice should become more compatible with the perceptions and experiences of children's lifeworld.

But also, in the concrete reference to the field of adoption, the analytical dimensionalisation points to possible key themes. Thus, 'My Cosmos' can be understood here even more clearly as an identity-forming counter-design to entering the 'other place' or the 'other family'. 'My Possibilities' refer to the existential safeguarding of the satisfaction of needs and the openness to the fact that existing places, things, ideas and dreams can also be re-designed or re-used. And finally, the dimension 'Our Places' makes it clear that the common – as an actual or desired state – must serve for harmonious as well as crisis-like negotiations. They may succeed above all by allowing the always available oscillation. Recognising and enabling this dynamic, in turn, corresponds to the social pedagogical objective of making this relationship the object.

6.5. Limits of the findings and further questions

Finally, I want to identify with a brief outlook possible limitations and, together with further questions, to ensure that the results and findings are also to be read as hypotheses. This visual, qualitative study did not aim at quantitative evidence for understanding children's needs and effects on other outcomes. As is usual in qualitative research, data were "used to decide which way interpretation should move forward, using data to generate hypotheses and new research questions" (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019, p. 229). They should be able to stimulate new research questions and studies in this important field of childhood research. Thus, although the methodologically derived parallels between the paradigm turns are comprehensible, they could also prove to be less significant than presented. One could also focus the fundamental differences between the chosen theoretical reference points. These methodologically interesting references must therefore be further differentiated and questioned. Despite its advantages, the method of surveying with single-use cameras (Holzwarth, 2006) also has certain disadvantages: Not only is this technique of taking photos – e.g. in comparison to taking photos with mobile phones (Barriage & Hicks, 2020) – simply no longer known to children of pre-school age. Regarding the only brief technical introduction and the subsequent absence of a researcher during the survey phase, randomness, and influence by third parties or by social desirability still cannot be ruled out. And even if the iconological-iconic character of the evaluation method is emphasised, many of the questions that arose in it would bring other insights through a hermeneutic-linguistic answer by the children. Also for this reason, transfers to methods with new media like digital photographs and films (Barriage & Hicks, 2020; Shaw, 2021) seem to be possible.

The fact that a dualistic view of speaking about it also has advantages is not denied in the study but is seen as a complement. For in all cases

there is always a risk of giving too much or too little weight to certain geneses of attention and relevance in the (relational) concept of subject and object defined therein. It is therefore important to understand the seemingly impossible epistemological path of empirically operationalising the relational. Thus, in addition to the substantive findings on child-well-being and 'Environment', the study also formulates an urgent recommendation: to have more confidence in the pictorial and, thanks to this, also in the perspective of young children in educational research, despite or precisely because of the uncertainties. In return, the text-based premises of widespread research methods and the intellectuality of the research subjects can be trusted less. To achieve this, however, a comprehensible methodological elaboration that can be discussed and criticised with reference to the respective interest in knowledge will always remain necessary.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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