

## **Two blog entries based on empirical research at Bahnhof City West / Westbahnhof in Vienna on 27 March 2018**

### **I: On ethnographic research – emotional bribery at its best?**

“Oh, that’s kind, thanks, but no.”, “Yes, sure, thanks, and can I take one for my daughter as well?” – those are the sorts of answers I got when I set out to seek answers to my questions of ethnographic research. Not only was I going to need answers from people, I was going to need them to give them during their working hours. What to do? As an anthropologist it often seems that you depend on the voluntary collaboration of others, usually strangers, to talk about themselves.

When you’re at the very beginning of your ethnographic research project, you’re eager about the thoughts you have in mind, the questions you want to find answers to and about the exciting details your interviewees may tell you. As the time of your planned research draws nearer, you start considering whether at all it’s going to work out, whether people will be willing to give you answers and maybe you remember all the times it didn’t work out the way you planned it. But – you need your research to get done.

That was how I felt. So one Tuesday morning I headed out to the train station mall ‘Bahnhof City West’ in Vienna. Luckily, I wasn’t alone. It was shortly before Easter and I had chosen to take chocolate Easter eggs with me. I presented myself to my interviewees smiling happily and telling them in very beginning I’d like to thank them for their time with some Easter eggs. The most interesting aspect learned was that for some the mere offer of a token of appreciation was appreciated and worked as a catalyst. And the one comment about this being bribery? It was a joking remark made by someone who laughingly consented to my offer taking out a bunch of eggs...

### **II: Looking for the train station**

Only a few years ago, a train station was a train station. Trains arrived and departed, travellers bought tickets and provisions. In the air there was an air of excitement, of the extraordinary.

Nowadays when one enters a train station there’s a good chance one is greeted by shops unrelated to train travel: clothes, shoes, underwear, home décor, bijouterie, all is there.

Travelling has become a very usual thing nowadays and it seems as if this being usual brought other most usual things to the space – shops. Also, of course, travelling by train has become relatively less attractive compared to air or even bus travel and railway companies rent out space to generate income.

And so it is the odd shopping-mall-cum-train-station atmosphere that presents itself to a traveller. I couldn’t help but wonder how what seemed like a sad absurdity to me worked for other people, specifically those working there daily. It was like a slap in the face for my nostalgic feelings when five out of seven people I interviewed during my ethnographic research at ‘Bahnhof City West’ in Vienna told me they do notice they work at a train station but the only differences they see are related to revenue, theft and noise. Only one person immediately let me know that she loves the liveliness of that place, the different people that move around there, the air of it.

Have people forgotten about train stations? Have they gotten pragmatic? Or are people working there simply more attentive to other facts than space?

For me, there is one solution: I enter Westbahnhof through the very back entrance. Or I even buy my ticket through an app and walk to the platform immediately, without even entering the train station hall...