

Spatial Competition and Economic Policies: Discourses, Institutions and Everyday Practices

The proposed project investigates the impact of the concept of “competition”, and particularly “spatial competition”, on different ontological levels of social reality covering (1) international and national policies, (2) socio-economic institutions and (3) everyday life. Embedding our transdisciplinary analysis into a micro-meso-macro framework and triangulating theories and methods from the social sciences and the humanities, we will explore socio-economic transformations since the 1980ies.

To this end we analyze the transmission of economic knowledge on, economic reasoning about, and economic images of competition from academic debates into political and public discourses. Employing text mining techniques and discourse analysis we investigate how the economic concept of competition entered different discourses and how it impacted on politico-economic transformation processes.

(1) Macro: Competition among (national) economies

On the macro level the project will focus on “country competitiveness”, i.e. the success on international markets in order to study the policy conclusions implied by the logic of competitiveness. While economists mainly highlight the importance of cost competitiveness, our analysis will show that competitiveness comes in many dimensions, and that non-cost dimensions are often of decisive importance. Yet, an interdisciplinary perspective on the implied policies highlights the unintended consequences of increasing competitiveness, which manifest themselves on various ontological levels.

(2) Meso: Institutions of competition

On the meso level we will explore the transmission of competitive economic logic and discourses taking the example of the housing market interpreting it as spatial competition over a scarce good involving different (public, private) institutions and agents. Specifically, we will study transformations of the organizational landscape and spatial policies over the last decades through the lenses of both institutional economics and urban sociology in order to investigate consequences with regard to spatial inequalities and social cohesion.

(3) Micro: Competition in everyday life

The impact of competition on the micro level will be analyzed through a sociological as well as an ethnographic approach, which provide a discerning insight into everyday competition for the appropriation of scarce resources and reproduction of inequalities, legitimate perceptions of the world and dimensions of experience of different actors (class, gender, age). We investigate the fields of housing and dwelling using narrative interviews and participatory observation to explore (1) symbolic negotiations and subjectivities, (2) practices and enactments and (3) materialities of competition in everyday situations.

Summing up, the central aim of the project is to develop a transdisciplinary view on the multi-level impact of the concept of ‘competition’. Our micro-meso-macro framework and the triangulation of methods and theories from various disciplines allows for a deeper understanding of the resulting economic, social and political transformation processes since the 1980ies.