

# Mixed Methods in Research of Spatial Inequalities

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Researching spatial inequalities or neighborhood effects poses a number of methodological problems (Friedrichs 2014, Galster 2008). A central problem is to identify the causal mechanisms that relate the neighborhood (or a different spatial entity) to a specific outcome such as poverty. Mechanisms can on a very general level be defined as the specification of a causal process that shows how exactly X leads to Y. There are a number of mechanisms present in the literature on urban inequalities – however despite long standing research it is often underspecified how exactly a neighborhood contributes to a specific dimension of social inequality. One reason might lie in the separation of methods in the field: While a weakness in qualitative studies is that it is hard to tell how much the examined mechanisms are apt to generalization and how much they matter in relation to other factors (Galster 2008), quantitative studies are hardly able to validate which mechanism exactly produces the correlation in the data (Stolz 2016). The second problem is e.g. relevant if theoretical assumptions are transferred between contexts such as from the U.S. to Western Europe, from the Global South to the Global North or the other way around. The correlation between two data points might still be the same even when the underlying mechanism is not. This connects also to problems regarding data availability in different countries and regions when different available variables are used to measure the same concept.

Some authors argue that by accounting for the respective weaknesses of each method combining and mixing methods offers the possibility to open the „black box“ and research mechanisms in a more direct way (Small 2011, Stolz 2016). In this presentation I want to discuss this suggestion on the basis of a mixed methods study of neighborhood effects on political participation of immigrants in Berlin. The study combines a multilevel survey design with qualitative interviews and integrates deductive as well as inductive elements in field research and analysis.

In a first section I will discuss the methodological and theoretical issue at hand on a more general level. I will then, in a second step, show how the principles of mixed methods research were applied in the study. I will use this example to critically discuss benefits and pitfalls in mixing methods to study mechanisms of spatial inequalities in the last section.

## References:

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Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The transgressive city: Comparative perspectives on governance and the possibilities of everyday life in the emerging global city” Mexico City, 21-23 July 2016. <http://rc21-mexico16.colmex.mx/index.php>