

## ***Rethinking the scale of spatial comparison: does neighborhood comparison make sense? (working title)***

Challenges of Doing Comparisons: Theory and Evidence from the Global South (#6)

### **1. Synthesis**

The comparative gesture has become an integral part and critical influence to the discourse within urban research. Many scholars have contributed to that dialogue [e.g. Robinson 2006, McFarlane 2010, Sharkey 2013], highlighting the importance to change modes of comparison in order to increase our understanding about the urban sphere, in particular when trying to compare the situation on the ground between cities of the global south and north. When breaking down that discourse to concrete urban issues, such as for example gentrification related displacement, we see the importance of deconstructing former ways of comparison towards a pluralistic sense. In order to deal with such a pluralistic dimension, cities or districts within cities appear not necessarily as an adequate unit for comparison.

### **2. Hypothesis**

The discourse about comparative urbanism has shown, next to others that the frequently used conceptual categories of comparison need to be re-evaluated according to their universal applicability, e.g. the concept of middle class. But not only the categories of social structure need revision, also the spatial scale of comparison must change, in particular understanding the city not as a stable entity, but always in the process of becoming [Blokland et al, 2015]. As the comparison of Sao Paulo and Istanbul shows, cities have developed individual "neighborhood scales" which are in an ongoing flux, but for example the forms of auto-acquired living space appear to be stable within those spatial units. In other words, when doing comparisons the question comes up whether a spatial focus of comparison does make sense or if we not should focus on other scales of urban comparison.

### **3. The empirical basis**

The empirical basis for the paper is a comparative exercise, focusing on strategies of the urban poor for coping with displacement pressure. During a three months lasting field research in each of the cities of Sao Paulo and Istanbul, the research inquiry has been conducted using a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

### **4. Structure of the paper**

The paper will briefly reflect on the current discussion about 'comparative urbanism' and the 'comparative gesture'. In the next step it will elaborate on that discussion by presenting methodological as well as conceptual issues when applying ideas from the comparative gesture in a field research focusing on gentrification-related displacement. In the final step a conclusion will be drawn.

### Literature

Blokland, Talja; Giustozzi, Carlotta; Krüger, Daniela, Schilling, Hanna (Eds.) (2015): Creating the unequal city. The exclusionary consequences of everyday routines in Berlin. Burlington VT: Ashgate.

McFarlane, Colin (2010): The Comparative City: Knowledge, Learning, Urbanism. In *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34 (4), pp. 725–742.

Robinson, Jennifer (2006): Ordinary cities. Between modernity and development / Jennifer Robinson. London: Routledge (Questioning cities).

Sharkey, Patrick (2013): Stuck in place. Urban neighborhoods and the end of progress toward racial equality / Patrick Sharkey. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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