FQS FORUM: QUALITATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH SOZIALFORSCHUNG

Volume 22, No. 3, Art. 1
September 2021

Comparing Actors and Scales. Methodological Perspectives From a Political Sociology of the Refiguration of Spaces

Johanna Hoerning

Key words: figurational sociology; comparison; sociology of space; spatial analysis; scale; refiguration of spaces; collective actors; Henri Lefebvre; Norbert Elias

Abstract: In this article, I translate the analysis of the production of space as a social process into a processual methodology sensitive to its political aspects. This requires taking actors as well as the different socio-spatial logics into account. One of the main transformations since the 1970s—the historical period under scrutiny in the analysis of the refiguration of spaces—is that of re-scaling. This means that the relationship between socially meaningful geographic arenas (global/worldwide, national, regional, metropolitan, urban, local, bodily), and thus the (hierarchical) order of spatial scales as a whole, has been changing. In order to investigate the diachronic process of refiguration, I have therefore developed a multi-actor and multi-scalar approach. My methodological contribution starts from the inquiry into the socio-theoretical dimension of scale. I do so by asking what sociological analysis can learn from the (mostly geographical) scale debate, and, conversely, what a sociological contribution to this debate might look like. The empirical context from which this intervention stems is research on non-profit and non-governmental organizations in housing and asylum politics. Methodologically, two distinct approaches of social theory are discussed here respectively: that of Norbert ELIAS's figurational sociology, and that of Henri LEFEBVRE's theory of space.

Table of Contents

1. Scales of Social Processes and Phenomena

2. Social Constructedness of Spatial Scales

   2.1 How? What? Who? Different angles on the sociality of spaces

   2.2 Scale-making and the refiguration of spaces

3. A Methodology for Analyzing Actor-Related Practices of Re-Scaling: Combining LEFEBVRE's Theory of Space and ELIAS's Figurational Sociology

4. Analyzing the Refiguration of Spaces by Comparing Actors and Scales

Acknowledgments

References

Author

Citation

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research (ISSN 1438-5627)

1. Scales of Social Processes and Phenomena

It is scarcely a coincidence that the debate regarding "scale" as one of the primary forms of spatial structuring and the relevance of a social construction of scale (MARSTON, 2000) has not been driven by sociological accounts. The question of scale in sociology has rather focused on the size of social groups, with the idea of differences between small- and large-scale social processes taking center stage. Analytically, sociologists have usually dealt with scales by differentiating between micro and macro phenomena and processes, taking into consideration an organizational rather than spatial structure. This can be traced back to Georg SIMMEL's (1992 [1908]) notions of the qualitative shift concerning the quantitative aspects of the group. "Scale" as a spatial concept has hardly been recognized as a relevant field of inquiry, exceptions most prominently stemming from rural and urban sociology (BRENNER, 2000; LOBAO, HOOKS & TICKAMYER, 2007; SASSEN, 2000; TICKAMYER, 2000). Yet I do not intend to postulate that geographical scale has played no role in sociological analysis. Quite the contrary, the debate on globalization and methodological nationalism (BECK, 2000; CHERNILO, 2002; WIMMER & GLICK SCHILLER, 2002) as more recent contexts of sociological inquiry, but also the classic question as to whether or not it has been possible to analyze (national) societies through research within urban contexts (FISCHER, 1975; HÄUßERMANN & SIEBEL, 2013 [1978]; WIRTH, 1940), revolves around a clear, albeit not explicitly outlined, question of spatial scale. [1]

The question of scale is not simply one as to the whereabouts of social action. Every social action takes place somewhere as it relates to social actors and their bodies, but neither the relevance of the spatial context nor that of its spatial structure is uniform. In this sense, *space* cannot merely be understood as a preconceived concept, but rather as a product of specific actors and their interactions. If people gather on an urban square to demonstrate for or against something, they constitute this place as a site of democratic action (GUKELBERGER & MEYER, 2021); at least for the duration of the demonstration, it ceases to be a simple, albeit specific (and specifically, powerfully planned) urban environment. The protesters relate their political enunciations to a *specific socio-spatial context*, be it urban (such as local housing policies), national (such as national asylum regulations), or global (such as global climate actions). In doing so, actors relate to different temporal logics (such as historical tradition, current politics, and/or possible futures). These spatial and temporal logics are entangled, they do not provide for neatly distinguishable sets of empirical analysis. That is to say, the social action at hand neither takes place simply within a given spatial context (be it a specific square, city, region or nation state) nor in a linear time frame, but rather it produces its own forms of spatiality and temporality. The relations between *spatial and temporal logics of social action*, therefore, must be more seriously accounted for within social theory (SORENSEN 2007; WEIDENHAUS, 2015). [2]

Scale—or rather: *scale-making*—can be understood as one of the central dimensions of social spatiality (BRENNER, 2001). Localization, place-making,

and territorialization are among the most salient other cases of social spatiality (ibid.). Scale relates to *hierarchically ordered, vertically differentiated socio-spatial structures* (JESSOP, BRENNER & JONES, 2008), but it cannot be understood "as a self-evident or pregiven platform," or "as a fixed, bounded, self-enclosed [...] container" (BRENNER, 2001, p.592). The theoretical debate around scale has argued instead for a processual understanding of the concept, subject not least to constant political contestation. Scales such as the body, the urban, the national, the regional, or the global cannot be stated as quasi-natural differentiations or social units, but—as such—must be analyzed based on the differing ways in which they are produced or constructed socially. Traditionally, the national has been favored in social theory as a more or less pre-given for the analysis of modern societies. It is not only with reference to postcolonial critique of this specific "unit of analysis" that we need to scrutinize this positing (BHAMBRA, 2017; BOATCĂ, 2015; GO, 2016; PATEL, 2013). Whereas, from a postcolonial perspective, scholars have been arguing for global and imperial as well as regional and urban differentiations, scholars from rural sociology have called for a variety of subnational arenas to be included within sociological analysis (LOBAO et al., 2007). [3]

In this article, I will make a methodological contribution to this debate, which has already been identified elsewhere as a missing element within social and spatial research (BAUR, HERING, RASCHKE & THIERBACH, 2014). I will begin with an inquiry into the socio-theoretical dimension of scale (Section 2). I do so by asking what sociological analysis can learn from the (mostly geographical) scale debate, and, conversely, what a sociological contribution to this debate might look like. To this end, I first establish what it means methodologically to analyze space (Section 2.1), and secondly how to engage with spatial refiguration in terms of scale-making (Section 2.2). [4]

The empirical context from which my reflection stems is a study on non-profit and non-governmental organizations in two fields: housing and asylum politics. In both cases, we analyze the ways in which these fields are not only multi-scalar, but in what ways the actors, as well as their networks and political interventions, contribute to a reordering of the politically institutionalized levels and their related spatial scales, which have been found to structure housing and asylum policies traditionally. These are not simply multi-level governance settings. Instead, our findings suggest that what is understood politically as "housing" and "asylum" not only differs in accordance to specific, seemingly hierarchically fixed scales or the specific organizations, but also relates scales, places, and actors (among others) in multiple ways. This points towards processes of spatial reordering, which we analyze as a refiguration of spaces. [5]

Methodologically, two approaches of social theory are discussed here (Section 3): that of Norbert ELIAS's figurational sociology, and that of Henri LEFEBVRE's theory of space. Both relied on spatial and temporal dimensions in similar, yet different manners. ELIAS (2006 [1969]) argued for a diachronic analysis of social structures and practices, relying mostly on historical reconstruction (sociogenesis), where spatio-material aspects such as the specific architectural

arrangement of buildings at certain points in time are expressions of the specific power relations during that time. LEFEBVRE (1991 [1974]) also analyzed spatial structures diachronically, examining their historical development, albeit in combination with a theoretical extrapolation of possible future developments in relation to specific societal formations. I will demonstrate that both perspectives can contribute to an actor- and scale-related analysis of social and spatial transformation and outline how these methodological premises can be translated into a research program (Section 4). [6]

2. Social Constructedness of Spatial Scales

2.1 How? What? Who? Different angles on the sociality of spaces

Whether or not we can see and observe spaces is hardly a banal question. On a phenomenological level (GUKELBERGER & MEYER, 2021), many varied examples come to mind when thinking about spaces, stretching from the entire universe to a mere bedroom. Do these have anything at all in common analytically? At first glance, the two examples could not be further removed from each another. The *(multi-)universe* seems to be a physical space that is ultimately unknown, perhaps unknowable, and simply "out there." A *bedroom*, in contrast, is utterly anthropogenic; one can see when, by whom, and for what purpose it has been built and arranged, and it is walkable, graspable, tangible, experienceable, and—even individually—changeable. [7]

It is certainly hardly coincidental that socio-spatial theory has largely developed through an engagement with a phenomenon that seems to offer some middle ground between these very distinct examples: *cities*. Cities are at the same time a *material*, built environment and an imagined context, a *symbolic* figure. Both as a material phenomenon and as a symbolic figure, cities seem at first to be more evident than other sociologically relevant phenomena such as professions and norms: Materially, cities are experienceable, tangible, even if not in the same all-encompassing way as a bedroom. [8]

At the same time, to speak of a "city" evokes clear images as diverse as a skyline, a buzzing street, many people, jobs or joblessness, or housing issues, to name but a few examples (HOERNING, 2016). This means that we are not only dealing with material and therefore physically perceptible structures that are integral parts of our everyday world, but also with powerful representations of the "urban." When we talk about "city," we all have certain images in our heads, images that are emotionally charged, borrowed from memories or simply derived from the multitude of (learned) media representations. On the other hand, cities are much less evident as concrete objects of investigation. [9]

What is assessed when examining a city? Is it a structural-physical or an administrative unit? Or do sociologists rather have to take into account the long-standing insight that a city cannot be limited to the (territorially determined) space it occupies (SIMMEL, 1993 [1900])? What is the boundary that determines our object of investigation? The demarcation of cities as an object of investigation

thus requires a theoretical conceptualization. For neither the dimensions nor what is examined as a "city" are actually observable, objectively given, "natural"[1] objects of investigation (HOERNING, 2016, pp.99-100). [10]

Yet it is exactly this seemingly natural, given status that characterizes spatial phenomena. This is no less the case for the bedroom, the city, or the universe, even though the relevance of these examples for social action differs. This status arises from their materiality, but it is constructed (and may be deconstructed) discursively and symbolically. Hence, this seemingly natural ontological status requires closer inspection because it is not simply "there," but rather has been produced socially (LEFEBVRE, 1991 [1974]). This is more apparent for spaces such as the nation state, which we can map but certainly cannot see directly. It is not as apparent for the natural and built environment. Here, it seems obvious that we can, indeed, *see* space. Whether it is the view from the top of a mountain or a skyscraper, or the grounded perspective walking through an alley, across a square, or even through a subway, we perceive, experience, and describe its materiality. "It" is there; we can move through it, touch it, and, of course, observe others in their modes of dealing with "it." Even though several people may move through the same spaces, they do not necessarily construe the same meaning for these, let alone the same use. The relevance of broader socio-structural aspects such as political or economic inclusion may also differ significantly when it comes to using and making sense of specific spaces. [11]

Considering *space as a product*, as something that "epitomizes activity," that links activities and objects intrinsically, "both concrete and abstract" (LEFEBVRE, 2009a [1940], p.107) means understanding space as something that people as people constantly create *and* perceive as natural at the same time. Social products are material objects, and as such "[...] intervene in human society: they are 'goods'. They are a stimulus to social activity, to human needs and relations, but they also impose certain determinations on this activity" (p.134). It is possible to derive three analytic approaches from these general theoretical assumptions:

1. *How* is space produced?
2. *What* kind of spaces are produced?
3. *Who* produces these spaces? [12]

In each of these cases, the analysis requires a *processual perspective*. As a matter of fact, a processual perspective on the production of space in terms of agency is not absent in social theories of space. Quite the contrary, the fundamental questions of a social theory of space have so far largely focused either on the "how" or on the "what" of spatial production. The *how* has most prominently been answered by authors such as Michel de CERTEAU (1984), Anthony GIDDENS (1984), or Martina LÖW (2016). LÖW (2016) introduced the two processes of "spacing" and "synthesis," stating that,

1 All translations from German texts are mine.

> "[s]pace is constituted as a synthesis of social goods, other people, and places in imagination through perception and memories, but also in spacing by means of the physical placement (building, surveying, deploying) of these goods and people at place in relation to other goods and people" (p.225). [13]

Others have sought to show *what kinds of spaces are produced* (CASTELLS, 1996; HARVEY, 2001; SOJA, 1989), although actors and agency certainly are not absent within these accounts, especially in those of HARVEY and CASTELLS. Prominent examples included the space of flows of capitalist network and information society (CASTELLS, 1996), the transnational spaces of migration (PRIES, 2001; SMITH, 2000), or the networked and glocalized (SWYNGEDOUW, 2004) space of global cities (SASSEN, 2001). The focus here is placed on the fact that current social conditions effectuate a change in spatial structures and reference variables, that social change also goes hand in hand with the change in social spaces, and that attempts are made to describe these. [14]

The angle of *who* produces space is the one that has been most underrepresented thus far in the debate on spatial theory, at least theoretically and conceptually. Those interested in *how* spaces are produced demonstrate that this is done by everyone. Even though the resources differ between individuals (LÖW, 2016), all individuals are engaged in the processes of constituting spaces (here, the term "constitution" is preferred to that of "production"). Within approaches focusing on what kind of spaces are produced, emphasis lies not on individuals and their different resources and statuses, but on structural power hierarchies favoring certain economic and political actors. [15]

It seems relevant to add that spaces, whether in the sense of *geopolitical scales* ranging from local to national or global, or in the sense of physically perceived contexts of action, are not simply produced in practical terms and, for example, structured economically. Space is also *politically negotiated, conceived, and contested*. Space is a "central object of political struggle in the contemporary world" (BRENNER, 2000, p.373; see also LEFEBVRE, 1991 [1974], p.410). If we understand space, following LEFEBVRE (1991 [1974], pp.38-39) as something that is produced socially, we can think of it as containing:

1. a *symbolic dimension* in terms of a lived social praxis—which means, essentially, that people attach meaning to specific places by the way in which they make use of them and that space symbolizes meaning (*representational spaces* or *lived space*);
2. a *conceptual dimension*, attached to more or less powerful (state and non-state) actors who plan, think, and organize societal conditions spatially (*representations of space* or *conceived space*);
3. a *material, tangible dimension,* which means that, despite being social, space is manifest in material forms and structures that make it easily objectified, but it is society that equally "propounds and presupposes" (p.38) it (*spatial practice* or *perceived space*). [16]

The three dimensions can be distinguished from each other analytically; indeed, there is no "pure" lived, conceived, or perceived space, but only socially produced space that is simultaneously lived, conceived, and perceived. It is this triple dialectic relationship that reflects a LEFEBVRIAN understanding of space. Now, for LEFEBVRE, *space* as a historical, social product *cannot be detached from the political*:

> "[...] space is political. Space is not a scientific object removed ['détourné'] from ideology or politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the essence of rational abstraction, it is precisely because this space has already been occupied and planned, already the focus of past strategies, of which we cannot always find traces. Space has been fashioned and molded [sic] from historical and natural elements, but in a political way. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally populated with ideologies" (2009b [1970], pp.170-171). [17]

Thus, space is not only powerfully conceptualized by the state or state-related actors (LEFEBVRE's core example being the work of urban planners). LEFEBVRE's central observation that there is a conflict between representations and practice leads us to the understanding that the historical, political production of space lies in the *conflicting uses, conceptualizations, and symbolizations of space*. From this, he also derived the claim for critical analysis to define "according to what strategy a given space has been produced" (p.171). It would be misleading to derive an understanding of space as a mere product, or object of this. It is, instead, always processual, or rather in the making, as it is constantly being produced through co-referenced symbolizations, representations, and materializations (or materializing practices). This also renders the equation of space and politics less surprising, as then this is not the equation of one processual and one objectified concept, but rather that of two interrelated processes. [18]

In this respect, a thorough investigation into specific modes within the production of space is required. It is not only individual practices and social routines and economic and political structures, such as globalization and nation states that need to be examined. There is a *multitude of different types of collectives,* ranging from political parties to more or less formal political organizations and initiatives and social movements, that are of importance to this, and that are all equally linked with individual and macro actors. In the following discussion, I will focus on *collective political agency*. This narrows down the "hopelessly broad" (McADAM, 2007, p.574) term, rendering it possible to observe "emergent and minimally coordinated action by two or more people that is motivated by a desire to change some aspect of social life or to resist changes proposed by others" (ibid). Conceptualizations of (collective) agency through which intentionality is emphasized are most relevant in this case. In their relational approach, EMIRBAYER and GOODWIN (1996) contended that there are

> "three structural or relational contexts of action: the cultural, social-structural, and social-psychological. Social action is shaped and guided at one and the same time by

> all three of these transpersonal environments, which intersect and overlap with one another and yet are mutually autonomous" (p.358). [19]

Bettina LELONG (2014) derived a methodological approach to investigate urban development from this. In her analysis, she examined the actor configurations (social-structural dimension), the normative commitments and understandings of the world and of actors' own possibilities within those configurations (cultural dimension), as well as the emotional features of collective action expressed through individual orientations, which might be considered responsible for ties between these or the decoupling of actors and strategical/tactical choices. These actor configurations or "constellations do not emerge in a vacuum, but in concrete spaces" (GETIMIS, 2012, p.32), just as they shape and transform those spaces. How is this relevant? What transformations can we observe in relation to scale in this regard? [20]

2.2 Scale-making and the refiguration of spaces

When we refer to changes in social spaces today, we often refer to tendencies towards globalization and the dissolution of boundaries. The question of the "where" of society can apparently no longer be answered as straightforwardly as the social sciences implied until the second half of the twentieth century with reference to the nation-state constitution of societies and thus their territorial delimitability (BHAMBRA, 2017; BRENNER, 1999; GO, 2016). In the meantime, the premature swan song to the nation state (ALBROW, 1996) has been analyzed in a more differentiated manner. A multitude of micro-processes at the local, regional, national, and international level have been observed; these are shaped by quite different actors or organizational units (ranging from nation states, enterprises, and financial centers all the way to activist networks and non-governmental organizations, NGOs) (SASSEN, 2008). Thus, not only classic actors such as states and transnational corporations are drawn into focus, but also the multitude of local, regional, national, supra- and transnational, and global civil-society actors. [21]

The spatial changes that accompany globalization processes are dealt with in detail in the debate regarding "scale" and thus *socially and politically constructed spatial scales* such as the local and the global, which shape our understanding of the world (COX, 1998). A thorough genealogy of these scales, be it the body as a scale, the neighborhood, the local, the urban, the regional, the national, the international, or the global is still missing. Nonetheless, what has certainly been outlined is the fact that the hierarchical order of these spatial levels is most relevant to both social action and interaction as it is thereby produced (BRENNER, 2001; COX, 1998; JESSOP et al., 2008; MARSTON, 2000). Within quantitative research, there is an adjacent problem referred to as *MAUP* (Modifiable Areal Unit Problem), which is currently understood to mean that "the choice of ecologically valid spatial units is [seen as] essential" (CHAN-TACK, 2014, p.318). Although it misinterprets scale as an ecological unit, this ultimately means that the spatial scale of analysis is highly significant for sociologically relevant relationships. [22]

Research has studied the radical changes of these scales since the 1970s, explaining that these did not simply consist in the dissolution of national borders; rather, the urban, the regional, the national, and the global level have simultaneously changed (COX, 1998; SMITH, 1992). As a result, the levels have tended to disintegrate and are less clearly distinguishable from each other today, instead standing in diversified relationships to each other:

> "The recognition that social relations are becoming increasingly interconnected on a global scale necessarily problematizes the spatial parameters of those relations, and therefore, the geographical context in which they occur. Under these circumstances, space no longer appears as a static platform of social relations, but rather as one of their constitutive dimensions, itself historically produced, reconfigured, and transformed" (BRENNER, 1999, p.40). [23]

Altogether this is interpreted as a *dialectical process*, consisting, on the one hand, of the *movement of goods, capital, people, images/conceptions, and knowledge* across geographical spaces and, on the other hand, of the *production and new differentiation of relatively stable and immobile (localized) infrastructures*, which make this movement possible (BRENNER, 1999). This understanding of *simultaneous de- and re-territorialization* is indeed very helpful to differentiate the state centrism of common ideas of globalization as well as current discussions on the re-bordering of nation states. The socio-spatial processes of scale-making, place-making, localization, territorialization, and networking, among others, are intrinsically related—the nation can simultaneously be a territory and a scale, the urban a local site/place, a network, as well as a scale, and so on. [24]

However, it remains unclear as to how and by means of which practices these processes are produced in new relations of circulation (movements of capital, people, goods, knowledge, ideas) and order. It is here that the thesis of a *refiguration of spaces* becomes imminently promising:

> "A continually growing albeit unequally distributed, hierarchically structured increase in interconnections and interdependencies between individual and collective actors and places, an increase in individual and collective systems of reference, and an ever-growing quantity of circulating objects, technologies and human beings all lead to spatial re-figuration of the social order and changing social actions" (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, p.16). [25]

The perspective of the refiguration of spaces encourages looking simultaneously at the *spatial dynamics* that have been described and the *actors involved in the shaping of these dynamics*. The notion of a *politics of scale* (BRENNER, 2001) refers to the fact that the structuring of socio-spatial organization is (re)negotiated, both through the concrete interventions of actors and in the sense of a new institutionalization of social practices. The European Union is a good example for ongoing politics of scale at both the micro- and macro-level. People make sense of place-related identities just as much as of a pan-European identity formation (albeit mostly not at the same time). The relationship between these and the relevance of the local, the regional, the national, and the European, and

their hierarchical order, is constantly in flux, varyingly within different fields of action. [26]

Re-scaling therefore means that the relationship of the geographic territorial arenas or units (from global/worldwide to national or regional, metropolitan, urban, local, all the way up to the unit of the body) to one another changes, and thus the (hierarchical) order of spatial scales as a whole. In sociology, this argument has been very central to the debate on global cities (SASSEN, 2001): At the same time that global financial and productive flows have intensified, making the location of economic activities less important, so-called global cities have developed as nodal points within this global economy, increasing the meaning of the local, but in specific, not general terms. The term "glocalization" (SWYNGEDOUW, 2004) essentially refers to this process of re-scaling. [27]

Physical boundaries as well as cognitive boundaries are constantly redefined in the practices of the actors involved (GILSON, 2011). Overall, *new political spaces* emerge that no longer correspond to fixed, territorial containers of nation-state politics, but rather that are "dynamic, performative, interactive, and fluid" (BOUDREAU, 2007, p.2608). In this sense, it is then relevant as to how and where networked action takes place, and as to which spatial imaginations play a role in this process (BOUDREAU, 2007). COX (1998) demonstrated in his differentiation between spaces of dependence and of engagement that different forms of political spaces emerge. While spaces of dependence are based on the local location of social relations and their dependence on those spaces for the realization of fundamental interests, spaces of engagement establish network spaces in order to weaken or circumvent the local/territorialized boundary of the realization of interests. If a local initiative for the establishment of a car-free road, for example, is based solely on its success in a local participation process to assert its interests, for which only the district level has decision-making powers, then we are dealing with a "space of dependence." If the initiative can exert pressure by involving European regulations on climate targets and (supra-) national organizations as partners, then the initiative establishes a "space of engagement" within which knowledge situated at different spatial scales is put in relation to each other, and deployed to enforce interests. This example also makes it clear that these different political spaces are strongly dependent on the actors: In the same case, the opponent—in other words, an initiative against the establishment of the same car-free road—will not succeed in activating the same networks as resources, thus experiencing a political "space of dependence." [28]

Within my own research, I focus on a very specific type of collective actor, which as of yet has not been in the spotlight of scale-making research given its focus on institutional political and economic actors: NGOs or non-profit organization (NPOs) and other interest organizations such as associations and pressure groups account for a broad scope of differently organized and professionalized actors. Although I will refer to NGOs in a generic manner, it is necessary to understand that there can be no homogeneity of actors referred to by this term. In the literature, it is often pointed out that NGOs have become relatively powerful actors and contribute to shaping what is known as political spaces (BONACKER

& SCHÜSSLER, 2008; CORNWALL, 2002; GAVENTA, 2006; YANACOPOLUS, 2015), a concept that is more often than not understood merely metaphorically. There is talk of closed, invited, and claimed/created spaces at a local, national, and global level (GAVENTA, 2006). Their material dimension is only identified in the negotiation spaces. It should be emphasized, however, that these studies focus on the concrete practices of the actors. It is pointed out in the literature that an understanding of the political practices of NGOs based on spatial theory would be necessary in order to understand the dimensions of the re-scaling of spatial scales and political-geographical spaces of power (YANACOPOLUS, 2015). Within the scale debate, NGOs have been understood as relevant actors of re-scaling. Scholars typically argue that NGOs are relevant for re-scaling because of their non-state, territorially detached status, and their strategies to turn local concerns into global ones, local interests into international negotiation tables, and through the establishment of glocalized networks so as to create new types of links (ARTS, 2004). [29]

A thorough focus on actors, engaging in an empirically founded analysis with a conceptualization of what collective agency is in the practices of re-scaling, seems to be the main contribution offered by a sociological perspective the otherwise conceptually and theoretically rich debate on scale. A systematic account of the socio-spatial dynamics that shape and are shaped by social action and interaction is what sociological analysis can derive from the (geographical) debate on scale. So, how can re-scaling in particular, and the social construction of space in general, be grasped methodologically? [30]

3. A Methodology for Analyzing Actor-Related Practices of Re-Scaling: Combining LEFEBVRE's Theory of Space and ELIAS's Figurational Sociology

Conceptualizing space from a social science perspective as a social product, we face the dilemma that there is *no starting point for analysis*. Space and social structures (of practice, of meaning, of political and economic dynamics, etc.) are intertwined in such way that it is difficult to set an initial point for any analysis. If we look at the actors, social settings, practices, and institutions, and aim at explaining the spatial settings thus created and produced, the fact that these actors etc. are not independent from the spatial settings they encountered in the first place is omitted. Tenants' associations dealing with housing policies at a local level, for example, do not simply engage in changing the stigma of large social housing projects. Advocating for more social housing, they find their political strategies bound to the specific materialities, symbolisms, and discourses related to the very same issue, not only on the ground in a specific city, but also in relation to the broader context of national housing policies. [31]

They do not act out of the blue, producing a material reflection of their relations and structures of meaning. Thus, space is not a simple reification of *social structures*. Likewise, it is impossible to use *spatial settings* as a starting point, trying to explain social dynamics from the engagement of actors with those settings. The very fact that social housing has been realized on large estates

does not causally relate to the perceptions and politics towards the same—even though there are correlations between these two aspects. [32]

Still, there are prominent examples for both approaches—giving priority to either the social structures or the spatial structures: Pierre BOURDIEU (2018 [1991]), for example, thought of segregation as a reification of the structures of inequality that he identified as a social space of positions based on the economic, social, and cultural capital of individuals and social groups. He thus extended his conceptualization of a homology between individuals' positions in the social space and their habitus (as well as their proximity in terms of social groups/classes) to include the homology between social space and physical space. "[S]ocial space is not a physical space, [but] it tends to realize itself in a more or less complete and accurate fashion in that space" (p.108). [33]

In contrast, within the field of urban research, the Chicago School approach explained social relations as a competitive engagement with (scarce) city space (PARK, BURGESS & McKENZIE, 1925). Moreover, characteristics of individuals and groups have been derived from the specificity of the spatial setting in an urban context, in particular its size and density (FISCHER, 1975; WIRTH, 1938). Bearing these most relevant examples in mind, one could say that

1. the *lack of a starting point* is common to sociological analysis, this going back to the dualism/duality of agency and structure (GIDDENS, 1979), and
2. *setting an initial point of analysis* and an explanatory direction is thus required. [34]

These problems, however, are classic methodological challenges for social research. If structures enable and limit the possibilities of agency, and if agency not only expresses, but also creates (produces and reproduces) these structures, then we cannot identify "where it all began" or even "where it all ends." Any process-oriented analysis, therefore, finds itself confronted with this question, requiring some kind of operationalizing for empirical research. However, space is not a social structure per se, but it is always a material structure. Hence, there is actually no dualism, but rather a *triangle of agency, social structures, and spatial structures*. [35]

From the point of view in social theory, this issue can be resolved by *understanding space and social structures in terms of a dialectical relationship*. Dialectical thinking is, in the first place, highly abstract. A positive statement is only ever valid in conjunction with its simultaneous negation. Hence, if space *is* (there), then at the same time it is *not*. What does this mean, though? It means at least two things:

1. We can look at space but we cannot *see it as it is* (HUFFSCHMID & WILDNER, 2008). Describing a waterfront residential development will only lead to notions of colors, shapes, light, atmospheres, spaciousness, and many more aspects related to sensorial perception. We may or may not see

remnants of the previous harbor installation; we certainly need a great deal of background information to understand the conflicts between a city authority, private developers, former inhabitants, current or future owners, and inhabitants. As a person who can afford to live in such surroundings, we may cheerfully see it as a possible residential site; as a person who is involved in a so-called Right-to-the-City-initiative, we might look at it in disgust. Therefore, seeing space "as it is" seems like an endless juxtaposition of different historical developments, social symbolizations, and meanings, among other things.

2. *Space seems to be natural, but it is not*. The materiality of spaces draws us to the conclusion that it is a given fact, something external to human agency. Yet the waterfront residential development is not just a product of human agency (which is, of course, obvious), but it is only meaningful in relation to human agency. [36]

LEFEBVRE (1991 [1974]) referred to aspects such as these as "the illusion of transparency" (p.27) and the “realistic illusion” (p.29), the "illusion of substantiality, naturalness, and spatial opacity" and contended that it "nurtures its own mythology" (p.30). Hence, in terms of dialectical thinking, it is more important for this definition (space is) and its negation (space is not there) to serve as the starting point for a creative movement, not only in thinking, but also in the process of becoming "whose first moments are Being and Nothingness, identity and contradiction" (LEFEBVRE, 2009a [1940], p.28). This means nothing less than the prime relevance of social practice as the "transcending [of contradiction] is located within the movement of action" (p.93). [37]

Consistent with this earlier work on "Dialectical Materialism," LEFEBVRE developed his spatial dialectics in "The Production of Space" (1991 [1974]). Understanding space as a social product means taking into account that space contains:

1. a symbolic dimension in terms of a lived social praxis—which means, essentially, that people attach meaning to specific places by the way they make use of them and that space symbolizes meaning (*representational spaces or lived space*);
2. a *conceptual dimension*, attached to more or less powerful (state and non-state) actors that plan, think, and organize societal conditions spatially (*representations of space or conceived space*);
3. a *material, perceivable dimension,* which means that, despite being social, space is manifest in material forms and structures that make it easily objectified, but it is society that equally "propounds and presupposes" (pp.38-39) it (*spatial practice or perceived space*). [38]

The three dimensions can be distinguished from each other analytically; there is, indeed, no "pure" lived, conceived, or perceived space, but only socially produced space that is simultaneously lived, conceived, and perceived. It is this triple dialectic relationship that reflects a LEFEBVRIAN understanding of space. *But*

how are we to analyze this process of becoming? LEFEBVRE's methodological answer to this question was (possibly) twofold:

1. analysis of the becoming in everyday life: *rhythmanalysis* (2013 [1992]);
2. analysis of the becoming in societal formations: *transduction* (1996 [1968]; 2003 [1970]). [39]

"Rhythmanalysis" revolves around the core concept of the body, "the measure of rhythms" (LEFEBVRE, 2013 [1992], p.20). Rhythm itself relates to time, both cyclical and linear, and to

> "[...] regulated time, governed by laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body. Rational, numerical, quantitative and qualitative rhythms superimpose themselves on the multiple natural rhythms of the body (respiration, the heart, hunger and thirst, etc.), though not without changing them" (p.9). [40]

Hence, LEFEBVRE conceived of rhythm not as something merely temporal, but as concerning the "interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy" (p.15). Whereas rhythmanalysis is relevant for the *spatio-temporal analysis of social practice*, transduction was used by LEFEBVRE himself in order to determine the *urban development of the social*. It consists of reflections on the possible in order to better understand the present dynamics. It represents

> "an intellectual operation which can be methodically carried out and which differs from classical induction, deduction, the construction of 'models', simulation as well as the simple statement of hypothesis. Transduction elaborates and constructs a theoretical object, a possible object from information related to reality and a problematic posed by this reality. Transduction assumes an incessant feed back between the conceptual framework used and empirical observations" (1996 [1968], p.151). [41]

In his account of "The Urban Revolution" (2003 [1970]), he discerned it from "fact-filled empiricism with its risky extrapolations and fragments of indigestible knowledge" (p.5). "[I]nvolving a virtual object, which attempts to define and realize that object as part of an ongoing project" (ibid.) in his engagement with urbanization processes, LEFEBVRE developed a heuristic concept, namely the idea of "complete urbanization" as "an abstract vanishing point of thinking" (HOERNING, 2019, p.212). This allows for reflections about the very same processes, understanding the urban condition not as an entity or state, but as a process (LEFEBVRE, 2003 [1970]). This methodology is highly revealing for the analysis of macro-structural processes, but it is insufficient in order to grasp as to how and in which ways these processes are shaped through agency. An explicit combination of both methodologies is sorely missing in LEFEBVRE's work. [42]

It is here that Norbert ELIAS's process sociology—or figurational sociology—enters as a helpful supplement. Perceiving the interwovenness of agency, and

spatial and social structures as *figurations*—that is to say "webs of interdependence which link and both constrain and enable the actions of individuals" (MAGUIRE, 1988, p.188)—shifts the focus not to the actors themselves, but toward the relations between the different actors and groups involved in the production of space. For ELIAS, "it is people, who act, occupy statuses, perform roles and form social structures" (DUNNING & HUGHES, 2013, p.50). ELIAS's analogy between figuration and dance is informative in this context, as it points towards the relational arrangement of actors (and, spatially relevant, their bodies), which is dependent on the actors but not on specific people, meaning that the figuration can be seen as an enduring spatially and socially structured means of agency and interaction. This way, "figuration" serves as an associative image for the coupling of social and spatial structures and their defining role for agency and simultaneous dependency on enactment. [43]

ELIAS's radically process-oriented and relational sociology aligns well with attempts within the sociology of space to de-ontologize the analysis of space. He did not, however, develop an explicit social theory of space. In turn, it is not a coincidence that he dealt with space analytically and theoretically in "An Essay on Time" (2007 [1992]). Both time and space are interpreted as positional relations "at a very high level of abstraction and synthesis" (p.81), and as essential components of human orientation (and meaning-making). For ELIAS (p.81), space relates to "non-moving and unchanging standards," time to the opposite, thus, movement and change. However, movement and (continuous) change are ELIAS's core concepts, turning space into a double abstraction based on distance and stability. According to LÖW (2016), he thereby "dissolves space in time, but it does allow him to address the idea of motion" (p.111). [44]

Yet, as Peter LINDNER (1996) demonstrated, ELIAS (2000 [1994]) had more to say about space when looking at the implicit role of spatial processes. LINDNER (1996) showed the entanglement of temporal and spatial dimensions on the one hand, and sociogenesis and psychogenesis on the other. He contended that ELIAS referred to spaces

1. of *everyday proximity* concerning emotional-affective processes of *differentiation* that are no longer influenced strongly by natural space;
2. in *terms of scopes of action*, which have been undergoing considerable expansion, losing their attachment/dependency on natural space;
3. as *integrative units*, which have been subject to *stabilization and integration* in terms of territorial states. [45]

I argue that LEFEBVRE's *spatial dialectics* and ELIAS's *figurational analysis* are not only compatible, albeit the former has a strong philosophic and theoretical side which the latter has sought to circumvent (MORROW, 2009), *but, indeed, are both necessary to understand the processes of the social production of space*. *Figuration analysis* has a strong historical component. ELIAS (1987) sharply criticized "the retreat of sociologists into the present" and instead argued for "explain[ing] the structure and direction of long-term social processes" (p.226).

In analyzing the relations between those functions, ELIAS depended heavily, though not entirely, on the past in order to determine present conditions. He expounded the intimate relationship between past, present, and possible futures. Yet, his methodical unconventionality in excavating the sociogenesis of the "sense of cultural superiority" (LINKLATER & MENNELL, 2010, p.385) in Europe was not matched by the methodological tools to investigate "possible futures" and, thereby, present processes pointing toward them. There are simply no drawings and writings from unseen and unheard-of times. [46]

On the other hand, LEFEBVRE's (1991 [1974]) analysis of the historical production of space relied heavily on architecture and planning history, which he related to general societal transformations in relation to capitalism. The diversity of sources LEFEBVRE used is therefore much narrower. In "The Production of Space," he relied only remotely on historical sources, while it is not as vivid from an empirical standpoint. ELIAS's strength was the combination and relation of very different "domains" (LINKLATER & MENNELL, 2010, p.387), stressing the "complex interactions among social-structural changes, and the everyday world of the 'habitus,' and personality structures" (p.410). The "false" dichotomy between micro and macro was thereby avoided and superseded, combining social theory with the middle-range and theories of society (BAUR & ERNST, 2011), as well as the analysis of state development with the development of bodily/emotional restraints/control (FEATHERSTONE, 1987). How can these methodological premises be translated into a research program? [47]

4. Analyzing the Refiguration of Spaces by Comparing Actors and Scales

I will start my reflections on how to engage with LEFEBVRE and ELIAS in empirical research by outlining the general research frame from which they emerge. As mentioned above, the general research question refers to the refiguration of spaces (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017):

> "Re-figuration is for us a preliminary general hypothesis which helps to understand what we perceive as a fundamental shift in our understanding of space. [...] Mediatization seems to us to be a dynamic driving force of the re-figuration of space by way of digitalization. It is one of the reasons for another new spatial development that could be called translocalization. By translocal we mean that social units such as families or religious communities have different locations that are connected by the circulation of knowledge, representations and things. Thirdly, we shall consider the changing relations of spaces as social contexts of different activities, forms of communication and societal functions; we call this 'polycontexturalization.' [...] Re-figuration not only addresses general societal changes; it also demands that we continue the reflection on what we mean by space and how we can conceive the sociality of space, which was so inspiring in the spatial turn towards a relational understanding of space" (p.3). [48]

How can one make these processes of refiguration visible and comprehensible? In my own research, I am looking at a limited variety of organizations in two

different policy fields, namely housing and asylum. The limited variety of organizations refers to the notion of NGOs. Whether it is slum development, child and youth work, violence prevention, climate policy or human rights, whether it is aid on the ground through infrastructures and educational programs or global campaigns and lobbying on the EU or UN parquet—NGOs have become an integral part of the political and social landscapes of the world. Although both the legitimacy and the trust placed in these organizations are problematic issues, NGOs are generally seen to play a mediating role between the concerns of local populations and the various state and supranational bodies (STEFFEK, NANZ & KISSLING, 2008). They are usually defined as relatively stable organizations in which individuals come together on a voluntary basis to act publicly in the sense of thematic or group-specific interests (YANACOPULOS, 2015). They are identified as a central form of civil society organization and, therefore, in more or less clear differentiation from state and private sector actors (FRANTZ & MARTENS, 2006). [49]

In my research, I ask how NGOs contribute to the re-organization of spatial relations within their political and social fields of activity. In some way, they (must) address the politically institutionalized spatial scales from local to global in order to make their concerns heard. On the other hand, they supposedly also establish independent spatial arrangements that are consolidated in concrete locations, resources, and infrastructures as well as in networks, political relations, and worldviews. Thus, I investigate the spatial praxis of NGOs with a special focus on their strategies in order to take into account the explicit influence on power asymmetries and their spatial order. [50]

Housing and refugee politics are two highly topical and dynamic thematic areas. In my project, I aim to assess the interaction between NGOs and other actors within the policy fields, as well as the spatial references and their relevance for the strategies and fields of action of the organizations. Both policy areas—housing and asylum—are characterized by a shifting interplay between different spatial scales (e.g., local, national, regional, global), shaped by both state and non-state political and economic actors. This explains why I chose to focus both on these policy fields and on the "intermediary" actor type of NGOs as a promising research object for the investigation of the refiguration of spaces. [51]

In order to analyze the spatial re-orderings in specific political fields and the relevance of a specific actor within them, my team and I have developed a processual, but at the same time multi-sited qualitative research design. While it is necessary to reconstruct the historical development of the policy fields, the actor constellations within them, and the relevance of specific scales and their relation to one another based on documents, current perceptions, practices and discourses are analyzed on the basis of semi-structured interviews. [52]

Engaging with the multiplicity of social action, from the most localized to the most globalized (TILLY, 1990) requires a *multi-sited approach*. Engaging with a specific policy field, on the other hand, requires a *multi-actor approach*. Both can be combined in following institutional links between specific organizations (in our

case: interest organizations or non-profit organizations) from local to national to international organization types. Organizations such as local tenants' associations and European associations for cooperative housing providers do form on specific scales, but they certainly do not act exclusively on the same. In order to span different politically institutionalized scales, they build networks and form professional partnerships as well as multi-scalar memberships. Following these networks provides insight into the differentiated notions and relevance of specific scales, locations, topics, and positions. [53]

Comparison here is not to be understood simply as an encompassing comparison (BRENNER, 2001; McFARLANE, 2010; ROBINSON, 2011; TILLY, 1990; WARD, 2010)—dealing with actors as cases within overarching, systemic processes, looking for differentiations. Rarely, organizations here appear as closed entities with defined boundaries (interests, values, motives, etc.) that simply require contextualization within their fields. Housing associations, for example, link local specifics with regional, national, and international contexts through and by their way of organizing and building networks; their positions vary with scales, topics, political counterparts, among many others. Here, ELIAS can be most instructive in searching for "complex interactions" between domains and different moments in time, as well as the broad literature on *multi-sited ethnography*. Within multi-sited ethnographies, "communities, locales, peoples" (NADAI & MAEDER, 2005, §20) are compared, but the object of study is fragmented and multiply situated; comparison therefore is an integral dimension, but in "the form of juxtapositions of phenomena that conventionally have appeared to be (or conceptually have been kept) 'worlds apart'" (MARCUS, 1995, p.102). The relevance of a multi-sited approach for analyzing scale-making is salient, too, as what can be grasped thereby are the interconnections and intersections between different scales and the ways in which they are constituted as units both of social experience and of political action (NAESS, 2016). [54]

Any analysis of *collective actors* as political actors requires, therefore, not only a *combination* of (at least) three different, but not neatly separable aspects:

1. their *contextualization in the specific policy fields* in which they intervene in order to grasp the general interrelations and power relations between different actors involved in a specific field;
2. an *organizational analysis* in order to understand the general structure of the actor in terms of decision-making structures, internal division of labor, degrees of institutionalization, etc.;
3. a *network analysis* to understand the organizational environment in terms of concrete relationship structures. [55]

Combining these aspects means to look out for multiple, different interrelations between the ways of organizing, contextualizing, and networking. Most organizations, though—whatever their degree of institutionalization and formalization—do not exhibit a spatial logic at first glance. Even though engaging with specific questions and phenomena such as climate change, migration, or

housing may entail different spatial notions such as global interdependencies, regional inequalities, or local conflicts, these are neither the only nor the necessary references for the political agency of organizations. Inquiring into the ways in which collective actors shape—intentionally or not—the material, conceptual, and practical spatiality in their respective fields requires an inductive analysis of relevant spatialities. [56]

We may use three questions to guide such an approach:

1. *What are the concrete localizations and positionalities that collective actors occupy?* This question raises the issue of places and contexts of activities, the importance of local specifics and local resources in terms of infrastructures such as buildings and equipment, but also the location of value structures, which are established by the actors for themselves, their target groups, and political opponents. Thus, this perspective is intended to develop *spatial constructions of difference*. To the extent that specific contexts of meaning are established with spatial localizations, constructions of identity can go hand in hand with these spatial delimitations, which require attention. Why is it, for example, relevant for an international organization for refugees and asylum to transfer its European hub from London to Berlin in the wake of Brexit, while a national German organization has historically been working from outside of the capital, despite addressing German federal politics so directly? Which resources do the organizations rely on, which of them are locally fixated? Do notions of the public, of lobbying practices, of democracy, of Europe, etc. relate to specific locations and, if so, how?
2. *Which spatial connections and movements emanate from the actors?* This question is aimed at the *relations and interdependencies between places and contexts* that are considered significant by the actors, but also at *relations between different actors* that are considered relevant for the creation or maintenance of these links. This question also requires an examination of the construction and maintenance of the infrastructure that these links are supposed to make possible. Thus, this perspective refers to the technical, material and personal dimensions of networks and mobility within these networks. If the analyzed organizations in housing and asylum politics mostly act across different places and scales, how do they accomplish this materially, using what resources? And not only materially: How do actors make sense of the connections between the different sites and scales in which they are involved? For example, in light of the "refugee crisis" and rising right-wing populism in Europe, an organization dedicated to German refugee politics may deem it important to work on Greek islands and with local partners there. The purpose of this intervention may be not only to make a specific value-based Europe visible at its borders, but also to establish knowledge, partnerships, and thereby legitimization to lobby for a humanitarian take on asylum by the German federal government.
3. *Which spatial references and ranges form the actors' basis of action?* On the one hand, this is about the *geographical scope of activities*, but also about the *relationship between geographical and social reach*. Central to this line of

questioning is the reference to spatial scales from local to global and the dynamics of de- and re-hierarchization within these, as well as to (other) actors that are considered relevant for the creation or dismantling of these hierarchies. Does having a consultative status at the UN mean that the outreach of an organization is global? What shifts between scalar/multi-scalar action and discourse can be observed? What constitutes globality? When is it even addressed as necessary, relevant, or simply extant? When are other scales deemed more or less important? How does, for example, a housing association at a European level make sense of the fact that housing is a local activity and also a locally shaped market, while at the same time being bound to national housing systems and global housing markets? [57]

These and similar questions form the basis of our multi-actor and multi-scalar approach. It is process-oriented not so much by virtue of a thorough historical analysis, but rather due to the fact that we follow current transformations along with their symbolical, practical, and discursive spatial aspects through the agency of different networks of organizations in dynamic policy fields. Understanding the actors as part of figurations, as constantly shifting relational fields, but also embedded in structurally (economically and politically) determining contexts of power hierarchies combines the methodological insights we can gain by engaging with LEFEBVRE and ELIAS when dealing with transformation processes and space. [58]

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Paul WELCH-GUERRA and Theresa ADENSTEDT for our methodological discussions within the project Nichtregierungsorganisationen: Strategien räumlicher Ordnungsbildung. The usual disclaimer applies. This publication is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation), project 290045248, SFB 1265.

References

Albrow, Martin (1996). *The global age: State and society beyond modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Arts, Bas (2004). The global-local nexus: NGOs and the articulation of scale. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geographie, 95(5,* 498–510.

Baur, Nina & Ernst, Stephanie (2011). Towards a process-oriented methodology: Modern social science research methods and Norbert Elias's figurational sociology. *The Sociological Review, 59*(19), 116-139.

Baur, Nina; Hering, Linda; Raschke, Anna Laura & Thierbach, Cornelia (2014). Theory and methods in spatial analysis. Towards integrating qualitative, quantitative and cartographic approaches in the social sciences and humanities. *Historical Social Research, 39*(2), 7-50, https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.39.2014.2.7-50 [Accessed: June 1, 2021].

Beck, Ulrich (2000). The cosmopolitan condition. Why methodological nationalism fails. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *24*(7-8), 286-290.

Bhambra, Gurminder K. (2017). The current crisis of Europe: Refugees, colonialism, and the limits of cosmopolitanism. *European Law Journal*, *23*(5), 395-405.

Boatcă, Manuela (2015). *Global inequalities beyond occidentalism.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bonacker, Thorsten & Schüssler, Sina (2008). Entgrenzungsfolgen: NGOs und die Quellen politischer Macht in der Weltgesellschaft am Beispiel internationaler Sanktionen. *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, *15*(1), 43-72.

Boudreau, Julie Ann (2007). Making new political spaces: Mobilizing spatial imaginaries, Instrumentalizing spatial practices, and strategically using spatial tools. *Environment and Planning A*, *39*(11), 2593-2611.

Bourdieu, Pierre (2018 [1991]). Social space and the genesis of appropriated physical space. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *42*(1), 106-114.

Brenner, Neil (1999). Beyond state-centrism? Space, territoriality, and geographical scale in globalization studies. *Theory and Society*, *28*, 39-78.

Brenner, Neil (2000). The urban question as a scale question: Reflections on Henri Lefebvre, urban theory and the politics of scale. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *24*(2), 361-378.

Brenner, Neil (2001). The limits to scale? Methodological reflections on scalar structuration. *Progress in Human Geography*, *25*(4), 591-614.

Castells, Manuel (1996). *The information age: Economy, society, and culture, Volume, 1: The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Chan-Tack, Anjanette M. (2014). The case for spatially-sensitive data: How data structures affect spatial measurement and substantive theory. *Historical Social Research*, *39*(2), 315-346, https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.39.2014.2.315-346 [Accessed: May 19, 2021].

Chernilo, Daniel (2002). Social theory's methodological nationalism. Myth and reality. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *9*(1), 5-22.

Certeau, Michel de (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cornwall, Andrea (2002). *Making spaces, changing places: Situating participation in development.* Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Cox, Kevin R. (1998). Spaces of dependence, spaces of engagement and the politics of scale, or: looking for local politics. *Political Geography, 17*(1), 1-23.

Dunning, Eric & Hughes, Jason (2013). *Norbert Elias and modern sociology. Knowledge, interdependence, power, process*. London: Bloomsbury.

Elias, Norbert (1987). The retreat of sociologists into the present. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *4*(1987), 223-247.

Elias, Norbert (2000 [1994]). *The civilizing process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Elias, Norbert (2006 [1969]). *The court society. The collected works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 2* (ed. by S. Mennell). Dublin: UCD Press.

Elias, Norbert (2007 [1992]). *An essay on time*. *The collected works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 9* (ed. by S. Mennell). Dublin: UCD Press.

Emirbayer, Mustafa & Goodwin, Jeff (1996). Symbols, positions, objects: Toward a new theory of revolutions and collective action. *History and Theory*, *35*(3), 358-374.

Featherstone, Mike (1987). Norbert Elias and figurational sociology. Some prefatory remarks. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *4*, 197-211.

Fischer, Claude S. (1975). Toward a subcultural theory of urbanism. *The American Journal of Sociology*, *80*(6), 1319-1341.

Frantz, Christiane & Martens, Kerstin (2006). *Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGOs)*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Gaventa, John (2006). Finding the spaces for change: A power analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, *37*(6), 23-33.

Getimis, Panagiotis (2012). Comparing spatial planning systems and planning cultures in Europe. The need for a multi-scalar approach. *Planning Practice and Research*, *27*(1), 25-40.

Giddens, Anthony (1979). *Central problems in social theory*. London: The Macmillan Press.

Giddens, Anthony (1984). *The constitution of society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilson, Julie (2011). Transnational advocacy: New spaces, new voices. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, *36*(4), 288-306.

Go, Julian (2016). *Postcolonial thought and social theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gukelberger, Sandrine & Meyer, Christian (2021). Creating space by spreading atmospheres: Protest movements from a phenomenological perspective. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *22*(3), Art. 16, http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3796.

Häußermann, Hartmut & Siebel, Walter (2013 [1978]). Thesen zur Soziologie der Stadt. sub\urban. *zeitschrift für kritische stadtforschung*, *1*(1), 101-118, https://doi.org/10.36900/suburban.v1i1.43 [Accessed: May 19,2021].

Harvey, David (2001). *Spaces of capital. Towards a critical geography*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hoerning, Johanna (2016). *Megastädte zwischen Begriff und Wirklichkeit. Raum, Planung und Alltag in großen Städten*. Bielefeld: transcript.

Hoerning, Johanna (2019). Reassessing urbanization theory. *Geographische Zeitschrift*, *107*(3), 209-229.

Huffschmid, Anne & Wildner, Kathrin (2008). Räume sprechen, Diskurse verorten? Überlegungen zu einer transdisziplinären Ethnografie. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *10*(3), Art. 25, https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-10.3.1224 [Accessed: March 31, 2021].

Jessop, Bob; Brenner, Neil & Jones, Martin (2008). Theorizing sociospatial relations. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *26*, 389-401.

Knoblauch, Hubert & Löw, Martina (2017). On the spatial re-figuration of the social world. *Sociologica, 11*(2), 1-27, https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.2383/88197 [Accessed: May 30, 2021].

Lefebvre, Henri (1991 [1974]). *The production of space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Lefebvre, Henri (1996 [1968]). The right to the city. In Eleonor Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas (Eds.), *Writings on cities* (pp.62-184). Oxford: Blackwell.

Lefebvre, Henri (2003 [1970]). *The urban revolution*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Lefebvre, Henri (2009a [1940]). *Dialectical materialism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Lefebvre, Henri (2009b [1970]). Reflections on the politics of space (1975). In Neil Brenner & Stuart Elden (Eds.), *State, space, world. Selected essays* (pp.167-184). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Lefebvre, Henri (2013 [1992]). *Rhythmanalysis. Space, time and everyday life*. London: Bloomsbury.

Lelong, Bettina (2014). Grasping micro-macro-interactions in urban development politics: a multidimensional network approach to collective action. *Historical Social Research*, *39*(2), 203-234, https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.39.2014.2.203-234 [Accessed: June 1, 2021].

Lindner, Peter (1996). Die Kategorie "Raum" im Zivilisationsprozeß von Norbert Elias. *Anthropos*, *91*(4/6), 513-524.

Linklater, Andrew & Mennell, Stephen (2010). Norbert Elias, the civilizing process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations—an overview and assessment. *History and Theory*, *49*, 384-411.

Lobao, Linda M.; Hooks, Gregory & Tickamyer, Anne R. (Eds.) (2007). *The sociology of spatial inequality*. New York, NY: Suny Press.

Löw, Martina (2016). *The sociology of space: Materiality, social structures, and action*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Maguire, Joe (1988). Doing figurational sociology: Some preliminary observations on methodological issues and sensitizing concepts. *Leisure Studies*, *7*(2), 187-193.

Marcus, George E. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *24*, 95-117.

Marston, Sallie (2000). The social construction of scale. *Progress in Human Geography*, *24*(2), 219-242.

McAdam, Doug (2007). Collective action. In George Ritzer (Ed.), *The Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology* (pp.574-581). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

McFarlane, Colin (2010). The comparative city: Knowledge, learning, urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *34*(3), 725-742.

Morrow, Raymond A. (2009). Norbert Elias and figurational sociology: The comeback of the century. *Contemporary Sociology*, *38*(3), 215-219.

Nadai, Eva & Maeder, Christoph (2005). Fuzzy fields. Multi-sited ethnography in sociological research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *6*(3), Art. 28, https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.3.22 [Accessed: May 19, 2021].

Naess, Hans Erik (2016). Creating "the field": Glocality, relationality and transformativity. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *17*(3), Art. 15, https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-17.3.2600 [Accessed: May 19, 2021].

Park, Robert E.; Burgess, Ernest W. & McKenzie, Roderick D. (Eds.) (1925). *The city. Suggestions for investigation of human behavior in the urban environment*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Patel, Sujata (2013). Towards internationalism: Beyond colonial and national sociologies. In Michael Kuhn & Shujiro Yazawa (Eds.), *Theories about and strategies against hegemonic social sciences* (pp.119-132). Tokyo: Center for Glocal Studies.

Pries, Ludger (2001). *New transnational social spaces. International migration and transnational companies in the early twenty-first century*. London: Routledge.

Robinson, Jennifer (2011). Cities in a world of cities: The comparative gesture. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *35*(1), 1-23.

Sassen, Saskia (2000). New frontiers facing urban sociology at the Millennium. *British Journal of Sociology*, *51*(1), 143-159.

Sassen, Saskia (2001). *The global city. New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sassen, Saskia (2008). Neither global nor national: novel assemblages of territory, authority and rights. *Ethics & Global Politics*, *1*(1-2), 61-79.

Simmel, Georg (1992 [1908]). *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Simmel, Georg (1993 [1900]). Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben. In Georg Simmel (Ed.), *Das Individuum und die Freiheit* (pp.192-204). Frankfurt/M.: Fischer.

Smith, Michael P. (2000). *Transnational urbanism: Locating globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Smith, Neil (1992). Geography, difference and the politics of scale. In Joe Doherty, Elspeth Graham & Mo Malek (Eds.), *Postmodernism and the social sciences* (pp.57-79). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Soja, Edward W. (1989). *Postmodern geographies. The reassertion of space in critical social theory*. London: Verso.

Sørensen, Estrid (2007). The time of materiality. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *8*(1), Art. 2, https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-8.1.207 [Accessed: May 19, 2021].

Steffek Jens; Nanz, Patrizia & Kissling, Claudia (2008). *Civil society participation in European and global governance: A cure for the democratic deficit?.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Swyngedouw, Erik (2004). Globalisation or "glocalisation"? Networks,territories and rescaling. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *17*(1), 25-48.

Tickamyer, Anne R. (2000). Space matters! Spatial inequality in future sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, *29*(6), 805-813.

Tilly, Charles (1990). *Big structures, large processes, huge comparisons.* New York, NY: Russell Sage.

Ward, Kevin (2010). Towards a relational comparative approach to the study of cities. *Progress in Human Geography*, *34*(4), 471-487.

Weidenhaus, Gunter (2015). *Soziale Raumzeit*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Wimmer, Andreas & Glick Schiller, Nina (2002). Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences. *Global Networks*, *2*(4), 301-334.

Wirth, Louis (1938). Urbanism as a way of life. *The American Journal of Sociology*, *44*(1), 1-24.

Wirth, Louis (1940). The urban society and civilization. *American Journal of Sociolog*y, *45*(5), 743-755.

Yanacopulos, Helen (2015). *NGO activism, engagement and advocacy: The faces and spaces of change.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Author

Johanna HOERNING is an acting professor for urban and regional sociology at HafenCity University Hamburg. In her academic work, she focuses on the relationship between general societal dynamics and the spatial and political premises, processes, and implications of the same, with a particular interest in cities and civil society actors.

Contact:

Dr. Johanna Hoerning

HafenCity Universität Hamburg
Henning-Voscherau-Platz 1
20457 Hamburg, Germany

E-mail: johanna.hoerning@hcu-hamburg.de

Citation

Hoerning, Johanna (2021). Comparing actors and scales. Methodological perspectives from a political sociology of the refiguration of spaces [58 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *22*(3), Art. 1, http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3763.