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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Knoblauch, H., & Löw, M. (2021). Comparison, Refiguration, and Multiple Spatialities. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3791>

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## Comparison, Refiguration, and Multiple Spatialities

*Hubert Knoblauch & Martina Löw*

**Key words:**

communicative  
constructivism;  
mediatization;  
multiple  
modernities; poly-  
contextualization;  
refiguration of  
space; sociology  
of knowledge;  
sociology of  
space;  
translocalization

**Abstract:** Drawing on the empirical contributions of the *FQS* thematic issues on "The Refiguration of Spaces and Cross-Cultural Comparison," we specify what is meant by "refiguration of space" and how comparisons can serve to study the refiguration of space. We address the question of how current social change can be understood and explained in spatial terms. Moreover, these spatial dynamics are driven by tensions and conflict between different *Raumfiguren* [spatial figures] that result in refiguration. By capturing the conflictual nature of the social change in space, "refiguration" complements the rather linear idea of "globalization." The necessity to empirically substantiate its constitutive sub-processes of mediatization, translocalization, and polycontextualization raises the question of how refiguration can be studied on a global scale particularly on the basis of case studies and systematic comparisons. With reference to the articles in this thematic issue, we suggest to focus on "knowledge" instead of "culture" as a major reference for comparison. We introduce the notion of "multiple spatialities" by which such a comparison can be achieved, which accounts for the plurality of perspectives of observers comparing spatial phenomena and for the multiplicity of spatial arrangements within the varieties of refiguration to be found on the global scale.

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## 1. The Refiguration of Space

For the two *FQS* thematic issues on "The Refiguration of Spaces and Cross-Cultural Comparison" which have been edited by BAUR, MENNELL and MILLION (2021), the [Collaborative Research Center "Refiguration of Spaces"](#) (CRC 1265), which is funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG), serves as the background, purpose, and reference point behind the articles to be discussed here. As research in the CRC has already been documented in various publications (CHRISTMANN, KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2021; MILLION, HAID, CASTELLO ULLOA & BAUR, 2021; LÖW, SAYMAN, SCHWERER & WOLF, 2021), in this article, we aim to relate the CRC's work to the various contributions in these two *FQS* thematic issues by elaborating on the notion of "refiguration," discussing the problems and consequences of comparison, and proposing the notion of "Multiple Spatialities" as a means to address these problems. (In order to highlight the difference to current uses of the term, we use uppercase letters.) [1]

In contrast to very open terms such as "social change," "transformation," or "restructuring," many authors see "refiguration" as the *spatial interdependence between actors related to each other by social actions in a way that includes their embodied objectivations and the respective materialized (infra-)structures* (KNOBLAUCH, 2020). Along the lines of HOERNING (2021), for example, we can use this concept to go beyond a view on societies that assumes they are still neatly differentiated along distinct functional systems and across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels and distinct spatial scales. Instead, it is based on a relational understanding of space and produced in and constructed by knowledgeable actors (ELIAS, 2006 [1969]; KNOBLAUCH, 2020; LÖW, 2016). The word "refiguring" has been used in spatial research before in a rather passing way (GEERTZ, 1980; ROSE, 1996; THRIFT & OLDS, 1996) without being defined as a *terminus technicus*. We have adapted, refined, and defined the notion of *refiguration* as it allows us

1. to attempt a *diagnosis of the changes in contemporary societies* as "refigured modernity" (KNOBLAUCH, 2020, pp.268ff.), and
2. to relate this *diagnosis to socio-spatial processes*, such as globalization and their countertendencies, which are expressed in or mediated by space. [2]

In this sense, the refiguration of spaces is related to what we can observe empirically in the analysis of social space. As a consequence, both aspects can be distinguished methodologically in that the former—refiguration—is more abstract and guided by theoretical reflections on societal change—which, again, depend on empirical data—while the latter—refiguration of spaces—is a concept that is tested, substantiated, and corrected rather inductively by empirical researchers. This empirical research is based on three sensitizing concepts, which are explained below: namely, mediatization, translocalization, polycontexturalization. [3]

Based on the assumption that current social change is most clearly expressed in and mediated by space, we seek to hint at the changing role of and, possibly, the end of what had come to be seen as an unstoppable process toward "globalization" (ROBERTSON, 1989), "world system" (WALLERSTEIN, 1974), or "world society" (MEYER, 2005; STICHWEH, 1996). In fact, pushed by neoliberalism and the fall of the Iron Curtain, globalization as the transgression of spatial boundaries appeared to take on new dynamics, which seemed to be accelerated by the expansion of capitalism into formerly socialist regions of the world. However, historians and anthropologists raised doubts that the tendencies toward globalization had actually been new. The assumption that globalization was linked to the expansion of Western modernity had been challenged especially by post-colonial thinkers who hinted at the long-standing entanglement of the West with other regions in the world. Thus, MIDDELL (2021) alluded to the ethnocentric character of modernization theories and stressed that globalization went back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It is based on the background of these critiques in particular that we classify the recent global social change as "refiguration." In doing so, we cannot just account for the tendencies

of transgressing bounded space between nations, between systems, and between society and nature. In this sense, societies are turning into a world society (STICHWEH, 1996) and modernity has become a "global modernity" (SCHMIDT, 2014), governed by similar autonomous functional subsystems—economy, politics, religion, etc.—and sharing similar, albeit unequal, living conditions. [4]

As optimistic as this perspective on an ever-expanding world society may be, the concept of "refiguration" also allows us to acknowledge the concurrent countertendencies overlooked by such a perspective: The continuing role of the nation state has been reaffirmed by conservative and rightist movements, the transgression of boundaries is met by the rebuilding of walls, and even the assumedly ever-expanding capitalism seems to be confronted with the countertendencies of regionalization and renationalization. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the tension between an increasingly dense global network of circulating goods, people, and knowledge, as well as the transnationalization of politics. The differentiation of world society was confronted with the authentication of nation states and an increase in fortified borders, on the one hand, and an ever more tightly meshed, digitalized social control of individual spaces, on the other hand, resulting in what could be referred to as a "dichotopia" (LÖW & KNOBLAUCH, 2020, pp.221ff.). Dichotopia means the spatial split into, on the one hand, an immensely densified digital communication based on huge and complex networks of sociotechnological infrastructures and, on the other, the retreat of social life into bounded container spaces, such as private homes and severely controlled regional or national borders. Similarly, by "refiguration," we mean the dynamics resulting from the negotiations and conflicts between these spatial countertendencies. [5]

"Refiguration" thus offers an alternative to current notions of globalization, glocalization, or world society (LÖW et al., 2021), which primarily take place on a global scale and thus invariably provoke the backlash of a "retrotopia" (BAUMAN, 2017): that is to say, an emphasis on the local and new demarcations of boundaries (BERKING, 2006; ROUDEMETF, 2019). Although authors such as MASSEY (2005) have already noted an "a-spatial globalization" (p.81),<sup>1</sup> and especially advocates of postcolonial concepts since APPADURAI's (1996, pp.33ff.) "scapes of modernity" frame the idea of globalization in a spatially heterogeneous manner—on postcolonial theories of entanglement, see also ONG and COLLIER 2007 or RANDERIA (2002)—globalization is still often thought of in a non-spatial way, as shown by GENZ, POHL, DOBRUSSKIN and HELBRECHT (2021). The concept of "globalization" assumes the increasing importance of translocal, transregional, and transnational developments to the detriment of national-local ones (MATO, 1997). We therefore use the term "refiguration" to highlight the consequences of the tension arising from the simultaneity and equivalence of both tendencies: the delimitation of the global, network, or rhizome coexists with an equally decisive limitation, closure, and containerization across scales (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, 2020a, 2020b), which not only emphasizes

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1 All translations from non-English texts are ours.

the local but leads to new forms of—exclusive and exclusionary—localism (ROUDEMETF, 2019). SASSEN (2000) also noted the simultaneity of new fluid patterns and mobilities, on the one hand, and their enclosure and fixation, on the other. APPADURAI (1990) made a similar suggestion when he talked about "disjuncture." He assumed, however, that disjunctures are embedded in different scapes, which, he surmised, can be clearly distinguished from one another. Similarly, proponents of systems theory assume the distinction between functional spheres (STICHWEH, 1996). By drawing on the notion of figuration, we account for the fact that these distinctive spheres, systems, or fields are supplemented, blurred, and overlaid by crisscrossing networks of interdependencies, recently very much connected to digital mediatization. With "refiguration," we focus more on the reordering of spaces resulting from the tensions between various *Raumfiguren* [spatial figures] (LÖW, 2020a, 2020b). [6]

"Refiguration" builds on ELIAS's (2006 [1969]) idea of "figuration" as relationships of interdependencies ranging from the individual, the body, affects, and orientations to institutional actors (SCHIMANK, 2010 [2000]). As COULDRY and HEPP (2017) stressed, particularly sociotechnical infrastructures extend this concept to the "figurations of figurations," which allow for the spatial mediatization of action. By "mediatization," they stressed the fact that the use of and changes to technologies and media influence the spatial dimension of communicative action, the meaning, affects, and knowledge guiding it, and the institutions and circulations resulting from it. Therefore, one of the most decisive factors for the refiguration of space is the process of digitalization, or more specifically, digital mediatization. By affecting social action, digital mediatization refigures not only social collectivities, such as social movements and public spaces—which, as GUKELBERGER and MEYER (2021) demonstrated, are online and offline simultaneously—but also social identities. Based on a large qualitative study in 26 countries, FATTORE, FEGTER, and HUNNER-KREISEL (2021) showed that digitalization is now becoming a new decisive aspect for the wellbeing of children who develop a "digital self" of their own. Mediatization is therefore one of the main processes on which we focus in our empirical research on refiguration. [7]

As we have seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, digital mediatization is strongly related to the relevance of places: As a result of mediatization through digital communication technologies as well as the accelerated global circulation of people, goods, and technologies, we assume an increasing "translocalization," which is articulated at the institutional level in firmly coupled places and at the level of subjective knowledge as an increase in the meaning of the concrete place. Translocalization is not restricted to mediated communicative action, via Zoom, for example. As WITTE and SCHMITZ (2021, §21) showed, it also resonates at the level of what they analyze as the international "field of power." It includes the international field of nation states, yet also accounts for the dynamics of and interrelations with other social fields, such as religion, the economy, or the (digitalized) media. In this field, they discern the transformation of socially relevant dimensions of physical space, such as delocalization and re-particularization of nation states. This translocalization cannot be understood as "globalization" but rather exhibits, as WITTE and SCHMITZ stressed, features of

refiguration by means of their "double regionality" (§44). Phenomena in the global field of power and meaning can always be located both in local and in global social space. [8]

Finally, related to the new relational arrangements, spaces are increasingly "polycontextural." This means that knowledge, actions, and organizational decisions increasingly and simultaneously exhibit multiple references to space and are enacted in various spaces and on various spatial scales simultaneously. Thus, as SUWALA (2021) showed for economic geography, the rise of multiple or transnational corporations as well as intra- and inter-firm networks represent features of *polycontexturalization*. That is to say, companies' internationalization requires multi-spatial management based on the balancing of different spatialities with respect to management coordination and the multi-contextural embedding into different trade agreement settings. In another contribution to this thematic issue, PALLAGST, FLESCURZ and UEMURA (2021) demonstrated that the polycontexturality of urban planning—in their case, with respect to shrinking cities—is typically integrated on different scales (city quarters, cities, or at the regional, national, and transnational level), and links general contexts of national planning cultures with specific planning contexts in ways that are not framed by spatial entities, such as nations, regions, and cities. [9]

Mediatization, translocalization, and particularly polycontexturalization have proven to be immensely fruitful hypotheses, which have been substantiated and refined on the basis of a series of empirical projects and studies that have been published elsewhere (CHRISTMANN et al., 2021; LÖW et al., 2021; MILLION et al., 2021). As sensitizing concepts, they have also served as inspiration for the analyses of many contributions collected in the *FQS* thematic issues on "The Refiguration of Spaces and Cross-Cultural Comparison," to which we refer in this article. In line with this thematic issue, we seek to focus particularly on the question of comparison: How can we study the refiguration of space on a global scale? [10]

In order to answer these questions, we show in Section 2 that the two main problems of comparison that arise when addressing the concept of "refiguration of space" depend on how we understand the positionality of actors and observers and how we define and select spaces. We suggest resolving the latter problem by proposing (or rather refining) the notion of "Multiple Spatialities," a concept that we introduce and explain in Section 3. We conclude by discussing the methodological consequences of applying the concept of "Multiple Spatialities" when analyzing the refiguration of spaces in Section 4. [11]

## 2. Problems of Comparison

The question of how to study refiguration on a global scale has become relevant to our research in the CRC as many of the researchers undertake projects involving comparisons between different spatial units—locations, cities, regions, countries, etc.—in different parts of the world. Incidentally, this also holds true for the contributions that have been collected in this volume. The spatial units compared in these articles include cities—such as Berlin and Moscow (FÄRBER, 2021), Capetown, Barcelona, and Madrid (BURCHARDT, 2021), Bochum, Cleveland, and Nagasaki (PALLAGST et al., 2021), countries—such as Ireland (SUWALA, 2021), Mexico (ASCHAUER, 2021), South Africa (GUKELBERGER & MEYER, 2021), various bordering countries—like Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria (BECKER, 2021), 26 different countries (FATTORE et al., 2021), and systematic cross-cultural comparisons (HERGESELL, 2021; WITTE & SCHMITZ, 2021). Given that they refer to different spaces around the globe, the authors of these articles and our studies raise the question of what is being compared. Next to cities, which are systematically compared by BURCHARDT (2021) in his study on religious urban spaces, for example, nation states are an important unit of comparison. [12]

As mentioned above, the concept of "refiguration" includes the observation that states reestablish material boundaries in such a way as to reaffirm essentialist nationalist legitimations. One can hardly deny that nation states have become acting units of analysis in the case of COVID-19 policies, for instance, yet this observation itself demands a perspective that goes beyond the methodological nationalism of politics to also—as MANDERSCHEID (2021) demonstrated—govern official statistics collected during the pandemic. Moreover, as ASCHAUER (2021) added in the first volume of the thematic issue, even cross-cultural comparisons are often based on nationally collected data so as to reify the assumption that societies (e.g., within transnational political units such as the EU) are contained in nations, much as the institutions collecting data and analyzing them are bound by national borders. For this reason, WEISS (2020) stressed that we should not conceive of "society" as a bounded unit contained in nation states. CHRISTMANN and BAUR (2021) also suggested that researchers should avoid treating nations or ethnical groups like fragmented containers in comparisons and should instead examine them as bounded units. [13]

The same argument applies to the idea of cultural comparison for in many cases, nationalist legitimations are linked with cultural essentialism, which underlines historical narratives of a Christian European culture in Hungary or Poland, Islamic tradition in Turkey, or the Chinese culture. In contrast to such an essentialist understanding, cultures, rather than being separate units, are related to one another by a historical entanglement (RANDERIA, 2002). Particularly the process of globalization over the last several centuries has turned cultures into contact zones (APPADURAI, 1996). These contact zones do not exclude the possibility of differences, as claimed by essentialists, but rather stress that even the claims of such differences imply the possibility of translating and transcending the assumptions regarding the boundedness of cultures (BHABHA, 1994). The use of

"different" languages, for example, may be an "objective" indication for cultures and cultural areas (such as Anglo-Saxon, Western, Global South, occidental, or oriental), and even the borders of languages are rather legitimate constructs—supported also by linguistics AUER, 2002)—so that spatial researchers in particular cannot treat "culture" as an isolated unit. This calls into question the classic assumption that spatial comparisons should be based on the idea of cultural differences (AMELINA, BOATCA, BONGAERTS & WEISS, 2020, p.307). CHRISTMANN and BAUR (2021) summarized the *criticisms of considering culture as the basic unit of comparison*:

1. It typically leads to the fragmentation of larger cultural units.
2. It treats cultures as distinct and separate units.
3. It considers these units in restricted time horizons.
4. It fails to reflect the position of the observer. [14]

Based on this critique, CHRISTMANN and BAUR more generally argued that the idea of cultural comparison should be substituted by a focus on *knowledge* and the question of which actors share the same knowledge across whatever is considered the unit of comparison. Knowledge does indeed serve as a better starting point for comparisons than culture as it refers to the meaning of actors, including their spatial orientation, their imagination, and their affects. In the frame of theories on action and practice, knowledge is intrinsic to the processes in which spaces are constituted and socially constructed and objectified. On this basis, we can grasp not only the stabilization and institutionalization of social spaces in action—including institutions, power structures, and infrastructures—but also the contestation, change, and circulation of actors, their knowledge, and their objects (for more details on these three levels of observation, see KNOBLAUCH, 2021). Using these dimensions, comparisons can follow the similarity pattern—that is, the most similar cases design—on the ways in which locative media are used. Comparisons may also assess the pattern of differences and follow the most different cases design (BAUR & CHRISTMANN, 2021). In addition, FÄRBER (2021, §27) suggested applying the method of "comparative meandering" as well. Even after we have moved the object of comparison from cultures to knowledge, the question remains: *How can we compare knowledge in space and the spatiality of knowledge, including the observer and their social scientific knowledge?* To be more specific, there are two questions:

1. How can we *select and define the spaces* along with their corresponding levels, dimensions, and global position?
2. How can we account for the *positionality* of the comparison, those comparing, and those being compared? [15]

The latter problem is a basic concern for any social science of space. In our view, we can address this problem by using relational theory, in which social action establishes relations to others and things and in which social action is embedded in these relations (KNOBLAUCH, 2020; LÖW, 2016). As REICHERTZ (2021) nicely showed, relationality also applies to the relation between researchers and



their subjects, their knowledge ("culture"). This epistemological relationality also needs to be extended to their sociospatial "positionality." As we are working on the problem of positionality elsewhere in the context of an empirical theory of science (KNOBLAUCH, 2021; MARGUIN et al., 2021), in the remaining part of this article we would like to focus on the first problem: the selection and definition of spaces. We want to address this problem by proposing the concept of *Multiple Spatialities*. On the one hand, the selection of spaces for comparison always presumes some kind of similarity between these spaces. By using the concept of Multiple Spatialities, we can account for the multitude of spaces and the possibility of varieties of refiguration related to knowledge, action, and practices, as well as to material inequalities, asymmetries in circulation, and global power structures. In acknowledging the multiplicity of spatiality as something that is not only objectified in various forms, but that is also known and enacted in multiple ways, we propose it as a concept for a global comparison of the refiguration of space. As there has already been some prior research using the notion multiple spatialities, we will first outline the basic meanings of this concept. Then, we will add several additional aspects of meaning, which will be decisive in decentering the (Western) observers' perspective. In order to highlight the relevance of this additional meaning, we will use uppercase letters: "Multiple Spatialities" instead of "multiple spatialities." [16]

### 3. Multiple Spatialities<sup>2</sup>

The term multiple spatialities has been used in a series of studies on social space. However, it has been ascribed several meanings, which we need to explain briefly. First, at a very basic level, it refers to the interdependence of different spatial concepts in geography (LEITNER, SHEPPARD & SZIARTO, 2008). In their definition of the term, FLINT, DIEHL, SCHEFFRAN, VASQUEZ and CHI (2009) emphasized that empirical social phenomena can never be described by one spatial concept alone, such as a "network," "scale," "place," "positionality," or "mobility". In this sense, "multiple spatialities" means that empirical phenomena exhibit different spacial figures and can be described from multiple perspectives, such as the multiple spatial references in international environmental law (WALKER, 2009). In addition, the term is also used to understand the *complexity of certain spatial arrangements*, such as "spatialities of different forms, of different things and working at different scales" (p.615). These arrangements include the different spaces that are interconnected by the use of automobiles (MILLER & PONTO, 2016) or the air spaces constructed by military flight control centers (WILLIAMS, 2011). Multiple spatialities may be centered around bodies of actors such as the spatial aspects of the life world of cosmopolitan migrant women (BHIMJI, 2012). [17]

Multiple spatialities should not be mistaken for the refiguration of space, as the "multiplicity of spatialities" (BEAR & EDEN, 2008, pp.490ff.) does not account for role of tensions or conflicts at all. Although it had been introduced in the study of social movements (LEITNER et al., 2008), HALVORSEN (2017, p.446) conceded

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2 This Section is based on the initial drafts of a manuscript we prepared for the CRC 1265.

that the concept avoids conceiving of conflicts in a similar way as the—equally conflict-avoiding—concept of "assemblage." As a rather descriptive concept, multiple spatialities make it possible to grasp the *multitude of spatial arrangements* as well as the *plurality of perspectives describing space empirically*. In doing so, they help us get around the Western bias of refiguration. By drawing on ELIAS's (2006 [1969]) notion of "figuration," "refiguration" is strongly embedded in the narrative of Western civilization, which includes, for example, ELIAS's idea of *Disziplinierung* [disciplining] as part of the occidental modernization process (LOO & REIJEN, 1992). The descriptive notion of multiple spatialities helps to account for the ways in which different kinds of spaces or spheres transgress the boundaries of the "West," entanglement, and interconnection—for example, as "spheres" according to APPADURAI (1996, p.9). [18]

Moreover, by referring to "multiplicity," we would like to connect this term with a neighboring concept, "multiple modernities," because it adds a most promising meaning to the notion of "multiple spatialities." The notion of "multiple modernities" was coined by EISENSTADT (2000a, 2000b). Following and qualifying the rationalization thesis of WEBER, EISENSTADT (2000a) suggested that modernization must by no means take place only as a global extension of Western modernity. Rather, the various institutional complexes of modernity, economy and politics, education, and the family have developed in different societies and at different times in different ways, each with particular paths. He called these different paths "multiple modernities." By emphasizing the conflicting simultaneity of different modernities, their different regimes, the ambivalences, contradictions, and tensions inherent in their respective development, multiple modernities exhibit a very strong bias toward temporal processes. As with most theories of modernity, in the theory of multiple modernities a great deal of stress is laid on temporal paths and historical processes in time. The spatial dimension of this multiplicity, however, is rarely addressed—and often assumptions about the boundedness of cultural areas remain implicit, undervalued, or unquestioned. [19]

Against this backdrop, the concept of *Multiple Spatialities* parallels the idea of multiple modernities in that it addresses the *spatial dimension to the temporally conceived processes of multiple modernization*. Thus, it takes into account the criticism expressed in postcolonial theories underlining the entanglement between the various modernities. At the same time, it makes it possible to discern between both their relational interconnectedness and their differences and divergences, and what is distributed across spaces as the non-simultaneity of social and cultural developments. By focusing on Multiple Spatialities, we are not concerned, as in the discussion of multiple modernities, with the temporal-historical paths, which are certainly contested. Rather, we transfer this perspective to spaces and include among them, so to speak, the "varieties of refiguration," in line with the "varieties of capitalism" (HALL & SOSKICE, 2001). [20]

Because we start from the underlying interconnectedness and relationality of what is mostly regarded as different cultural spheres (OSTERHAMMEL, 1998), different economic systems, or geopolitical regions, we can observe similarities

and differences in various ways. For instance, on the basis of his comparison between Latin America, South Asia, and China, DOMINGUES (2011) observed that "there is much more variation in the way different regions and countries modernize, today and before, depending on their own civilizational background but also on how the answer to the Western institutions and imaginary, as well as colonial experiences" (p.519). With respect to South Korea, CHANG (2010, pp.320ff.) demonstrated that modernization took a very different route than Western modernization in that various processes occurred in such a condensed way, which he described as "compressed modernity." In an even more radical way, QI (2014) argued that basic categories of Chinese thinking differ so fundamentally from corresponding concepts in the West that the social theory in China is not only able to describe spatial processes—such as the "face" or "conflict"—differently, but also that the logic of these processes themselves are different. In her analysis of sociospatial processes (2014), QI therefore suggested that the refiguration in China takes on the form of what she called "paradoxical integration" (pp.191), which she identified as a figure of thought based on traditional Chinese thinking and elaborated within contemporary Chinese social theory. [21]

Similarly, the concept of Multiple Spatialities is an attempt to circumnavigate the Western bias of modernization theory discourses, which are implied in our concept of refiguration in a similar way as was proposed in WOHLRAB-SAHR and BURCHARDT's concept of "multiple secularities" (2012, 2017). This means that it is aimed at differences, variations, and divergences that arise from differently spatially situated social problems in which refiguration takes place. Both divergences and convergences can be studied as political "agonistics" (MOUFFE, 2013) or, in a more spatial understanding, as critical zones (LATOUR, 2014), where different spatial figures intersect, merge, or play out tensions. Analytically, we suggest studying Multiple Spatialities at the level of the knowledge of actors: that is to say, the subjective meanings of their actions—including imaginations, affects, and embodied knowledge—the actions they are guiding—including their objectifications and signification—and finally, the institutions, objectifications, and technologies that result from these actions and that are used to guide and frame them (KNOBLAUCH, 2021). They include legal, infrastructural, and economic regimes and governance structures that can be understood spatially (CHRISTMANN, 2016) and that can be considered an attempt to control circulations and arrangements with obligatory or informal rules, organizational procedures, and instruments of power. [22]

One example of the fruitfulness of this perspective on Multiple Spatialities is digitalized mediatization. Instead of a global network society or a digital divide, digitalization is multiplied spatially. In most Western societies, this followed a gradual change of media from the personal computer via coupled information and communication technologies to the smartphone within the framework of a liberal market regime, restricted by state-controlled data security. However, East Asian societies in particular have often undergone this process as "compressed modernity" supported by national states. This can be clearly seen in the self-evident use of apps for contact tracing in the context of the corona crisis in South

Korea and in the greater enforcement of network logic in everyday actions (BARTMANSKI, KIM, LÖW, PAPE & STOLLMANN, 2021). In many African societies, it was not possible to adopt relatively static personal computers on a broad scale, which is why digital mediatization occurred right away via highly mobile portable devices as "leapfrog technology." In Kenya, for example, we find a kind of "grassroots digitalization" that regulates private financial transactions via cell phones and fundraising via platforms (WEIDENHAUS & STOLLMANN, 2021), while at the same time futuristic train stations are built to replace the outdated English railroads as part of city planning. If the developments of smart cities, for example, are closely interconnected globally, centripetal tendencies are also apparent through the form in which they are used and how power is exercised over and through digital technologies—right up to the digitally monitored Chinese social credit system. [23]

In a similar vein, in his study on biographies of subjects living in the Bilad ash-Sham region, BECKER (2021) showed that refiguration can vary. As the region is shared by Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria, actors are confronted with relatively arbitrary borders and forced territorialization by the various states. As a result, they are embedded in a politically heterogeneous space and forced to continually transgress the borders physically and in terms of their affective "belonging." At the same time and more recently, they are subject to the enforcement of borders and citizenship. In fact, Becker's interviewees were embedded in a figuration of translocality, where social relationships in the family circulated and were transferred across different borders and regions. While middle- and lower-class families are diffused in different nation states, the effectiveness of state borders leads to increased legal confinement and forced emplacement. We are thus faced with a notion of refiguration that, on the one hand, embodies quite adequately the conflicting tendencies and, on the other hand, demonstrates how this word can be understood differently from its Western meaning. [24]

Similar divergences can be seen with respect to the nation state. The model of the modern state as a rational organization, delivering public services, and as a steering center that, stressed by modernization and world culture, has no plausibility in various non-Western societies. Some African and South American countries do not adhere to Western transnationalization and the isomorphism of "nation building," nor do they follow the Western "monopoly mechanism" as analyzed by ELIAS (2006 [1969], p.192) for Western states. Instead, many states are characterized by informal primordial power structures, such as kinship systems, and "irrational" authority. Because they have not been involved in interstate conflicts, they do not need to create a state through internal struggles of power; moreover, public service can be a source of money instead of power, so that bureaucratization can lead to a what the authors called the "refiguration of statehood." [25]

These examples indicate how the concept of Multiple Spatialities can address the question raised by AMIN (2002) of how "world-scale processes and transnational connectivity" (p.387) change spatial figures such as place and territory. In its

descriptive generality, it provides a framework for a wide variety of quite contradictory linkages across different scales. Under the heading of Multiple Spatialities, we highlight both the centripetal tendencies in the global interconnectedness of social spaces up to the scale of the global and the centrifugal and divergent tendencies of a reordering of spaces and the associated spatial regimes and governance structures that take place simultaneously in a conflictual way. [26]

#### **4. Conclusion: Methodological Consequences of Multiple Spatialities for Comparisons**

In this article, we have argued for an understanding of current social change in terms of spatial dynamics and for an explanation of these spatial dynamics based on the notion of refiguration. The empirical study of refiguration and its subprocesses demand that we undertake forms of spatial comparison that are sensitive to the multitude of social arrangements, knowledge of space, action in space, and circulations accounting for the perspectivity of observation connected to sociospatial positionality. [27]

In our opinion, the concept of Multiple Spatiality, allows us to focus on differences and similarities between spatial aspects of actors, actions, and institutions (analytical dimensions) at various locations, cities, regions, and other areas. In addition, it accounts for the positionality of the observer, the subject conducting the research, in relation to the observed, the subject being observed. By linking the perspectivity of the observer with the multiplicity of the space being observed, the concept of Multiple Spatialities is designed to address the question of how to observe and analyze similarities, differences, variations, and interconnections that exist between the observed processes of the refiguration of spaces. This includes questions related to:

1. similarities, differences, and variations of social tensions that accompany the refiguration;
2. similarities, differences, and variations of spatially related to forms of knowledge, action, and practice. [28]

Questions that could be addressed in empirical research include:

- Which power structures are involved and which conflicts arise?
- What spatial logic do they follow and how do they regulate circulations?
- Methodologically, what connects or distinguishes the different places of investigation?
- How can similarities and differences be observed and what overarching clusters can be identified? [29]

The concept of Multiple Spatialities is thus intended to capture not only the converging but also the diverging tendencies within the emerging spatial arrangements, as well as within the refiguration as a whole, in different societies,

social groups, and regions or cities of our individual studies from around the world. Thus, we are concerned here with the "varieties of refiguration." Refiguration takes place in different ways because it is confronted with different societal challenges, such as a classically industrialized, a compressively modernized, or a postmodern service society. With the concept of Multiple Spatialities, we not only start from their relational interconnectedness, we also take into account the conflictual diversity of spatial knowledge, spatial action, and spatial regimes in order to describe them adequately and, consequently, to better understand refiguration. [30]

## Acknowledgments

The CRC is supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under the number 290045248, SFB 1265. We are grateful to Elisabeth SCHMIDT for correcting the manuscript. Zachary MÜHLENWEG was in charge of language editing, and Vanessa ULOTH did the copyediting.

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## Citation

Knoblauch, Hubert & Löw, Martina (2021). Comparison, refiguration, and multiple spatialities [30 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 22(3), Art. 19, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3791>.