Dwelling in border regions – discourse matters[1]

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Abstract

Effects of cross-border mobility resulting from uneven development in border regions can be perceived very differently by city councils or planners and the local population. This paper focuses on the consequences of the cross-border mobility in relation to housing markets in four cities in a transnational cross-border polycentric metropolitan region in Western Europe. It applies Clarke's situational analysis and Keller's sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, in order to represent the complexity and contradictions going along with this development. Until now, the study of cross-border mobility focused mainly on the motives of citizens that left their country of origin to dwell in the close by border regions, while the related impacts on neighbouring communities remain mostly unexplored. A quick review of recent media coverage could easily lead one to describe the situation as a sort of love-hate relationship. Analytic cartographies are employed to show that similar effects can be perceived quite differently.

Keywords discourse theory and analysis, situational analysis, grounded theory, transnational housing market, cross-border region

Introduction

As a result of the opening of the borders (Schengen Agreement) and accompanying progressive Europeanization, transnational linkages within the European Union internal borders have expanded significantly in recent years. This has resulted in far-reaching consequences for the economic development and settlement structure in border regions. The effects of cross-border mobility resulting from uneven development due to differing regulations in border regions can be perceived very differently by city councils or planners and the local population. Demographic change and the mobility of the consumers are key factors to housing market developments. In parallel with the increasing heterogeneity of the demand side came the internationalization of housing market activities and the change of housing market actors. Real estate has historically been viewed as a local phenomenon (Bardhan & Kroll 2007) but the context of housing has altered significantly (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2004) and global, national, regional (national & transnational) and local interests are involved. Nevertheless housing market analysis is described as being rather reductionist (Maclennan 2012: 16). To account for *the multiplicity of stories* (Massey 1999) and potential contradictions, a constructivist perspective is adopted.

In Western Europe, the so-called Greater Region (which extends over the small nation state Luxembourg and parts of Belgium, Germany and France) can be characterized as a transnational cross-border polycentric metropolitan region. The small state Luxembourg (total area: 2,586 km^2/ 998 sq mi) has undergone quite an extraordinary economic and demographic development in recent decades (Hesse 2014: 1). In 2013 the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg hosts about 550,000 inhabitants (STATEC 2013). As a global financial centre and a centre for European Institutions, Luxembourg City is a far-reaching international labour market (Hesse 2014: 1). With about 385,000 workplaces as of 2013 (STATEC 2014), the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is attracting migrants from other - mostly European - countries (in 2013 about 44% of Luxembourg's inhabitants were foreigners) and about 159,000 cross-border commuters from the neighbouring countries (IBA/OIE 2014). House prices in

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Luxembourg are nearly twice those in the neighbouring border regions (Diop 2011), this prevents many commuters from moving to Luxembourg and even makes Luxembourgish citizens and expats move to the neighbouring countries. My Ph.D. research is focusing on the consequences of this development in regard to housing situations in four rather small cities in the border region (Arlon, Metz, Thionville and Trier), assuming that abstract societal processes become concrete and experienced at the local level, this paper interrogates the discursive framing of the consequences of the transnational linkages in regard to housing situations in the Greater Region, also referred to as a transnational cross-border polycentric metropolitan region. Because I would like to focus on discourse theory and methodology in this paper, I will present only some work in progress later on.

Discourse theory and methodology

Real estate has historically been viewed as a local phenomenon (Bardhan & Kroll 2007) but the context of housing has altered significantly (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2004) and global, national, regional (national & transnational) and local interests are involved. Nevertheless housing market analysis is described as being rather reductionist (Maclennan 2012: 16). To account for *the multiplicity of stories* (Massey 1999) and potential contradictions (Clarke 2005; Bauriedl 2007), a constructivist perspective is adopted. Since a variety of theoretical roots and methodological strands of discourse exist (Lees 2004; Clarke 2005; Keller 2005) and it was criticized that the elaboration of this approach by urban geographers and housing researchers is often unclear (Lees 2004: 101), discourse theory and methodology are elaborated in-depth in the following section.

Foucault (1972: 49, 1980) defines discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak". "Discourses are ways of knowing, acting, organising and representing things in particular ways. They are repeatable systems of communication, devices of understanding and instruments of power: linguistic articulations, socio-spatial material practices and power-rationality configurations" (Jensen & Richardson, 2004: 56). Discourses can thus be illustrated as "flows of knowledge through time" (Jäger 1993: 156; Schmitt 2007), which "guide the individual and collective creation of reality" (Jäger & Maier 2014: n. pag.). According to Flyvbjerg and Richardson (2002: 56) "Spaces, then, may be constructed in different ways by different people, through power struggles and conflicts of interest. This idea that spaces are socially constructed, and that many spaces may co-exist within the same physical space is an important one. It suggests the need to analyse how discourses and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are connected with particular spaces". If we consider spaces as socially constructed, "local, regional, national and global are not automatic, taken-for-granted social arenas but categories to be investigated as constructed and often-contested social facts" (Khagram & Levitt 2008, p. 8-9). "Social space" is thus both a "field of action" and a "basis for action" (Lefebvre 1991: 191). It is thus also important to see from where a person speaks (geographical location) and from which social world/arena a discourse arises.

The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, developed by the German sociologist Reiner Keller and the situational analysis developed by Adele Clarke who is an American Sociologist can be deployed for discourse analysis. The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse is highly influenced by Berger and Luckmann's (1967) "The Social Construction of Reality", while Clarke's situational analysis strongly builds/elaborates on ideas of the Chicago School of Sociology and scholars such as George Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969). Both approaches are combining symbolic interactionism and Foucauldian concepts and ideas. The authors basically intend to supplement basic grounded theory approaches (mainly based on Strauss) by including discourse theory/analysis inspired by Foucault. They both insist that one rather has to speak of theorizing than of forming big theories. Building on Foucault's notion of power/knowledge, which means accepting "power as unavoidable, recognizing its all pervasive nature, and emphasising its productive as well as destructive potential" (Flyvbjerg & Richardson 2002: 49) is considered as a means to analyse planning processes. Jacobs et al. (2004) promote the use of a grounded theory approach and thus *in situ* contextualized data collection and analysis to account for local particularities and context-related knowledge (Kemeny 2004: 63).

Clarke and Keller are referring to each other's work and have some joint projects; therefore a

combination seems to be promising. Clarke's intention is to push grounded theory through the postmodern turn and her look on situations is a main idea of the Chicago School of Sociology. Her situational analysis is inspired by a number of metaphoric and often overlapping and/or hybrid approaches to the social sciences and intends to represent complexities/relationalities with a special emphasis on social worlds/arenas (Clarke 2005). Strauss started theorizing social worlds/arenas in the late 1970s, proposing the idea that social life is organized through our commitments to various collectivities (Clarke 2005). Clarke (2005) describes it as a way of introducing the meso-level, recognizing that in practice no boundaries between micro-, meso- and macro-level exit, just complex fluidities.

> "It is where the macro-level long duree forces of urbanization, industrialization, gender/racial/ethnic formation, neoliberalism and globalization/transnationalization are temporally, geopolitically and temporarily instantiated-grounded in local/regional practices that become routinized, normalized, mundane." (Clarke & Keller 2014: n. pag.).

Situational analysis is thus employed to show that similar effects can be perceived quite differently and that positions might vary in different situations (Clarke 2005: 38). Nevertheless social worlds/arenas might intersect/overlap (Clarke 2005, Clarke & Keller 2014).

Observations/Work in Progress

Research questions – actors/stakeholders & agenda setting

- Which ongoing discourses about the housing market situation in relation to the proximity to Luxembourg can be detected?
- Who are the actors involved (scales: local/urban, regional, transnational, national and global)? What can be said about their interests, strategies and existing power relations?
- Which argumentation patterns are (re-)produced by actors involved (marketing strategies, development concepts, internationalization strategies etc.)? Who are the target audiences (clients, investors)? How do global/regional/national/cross-EU policies get adopted at the local level (dynamics of policy)? Which developments do city councils and planners consider (and which developments are thereby constructed as forerunners for future urban planning)? Do the neighbouring cities refer to developments in Luxembourg in their planning strategies? Which discourses implied processes of change? Which place-making instruments (symbolic and material) are created/used/referred to? Who is considered in urban planning strategies (and who is not)?

Empirical basis & methods

Clarke (2005) and Keller (2005) are in favour of multisite research, which is in line with grounded theory, building on the Chicago tradition of analysing different genres of data. But time and capacity constraints call for a preliminary determination of the corpus. In addition, consistency of the data is necessary for de-/re-constructing discourse structures (Keller 2013: 95). Table 1 includes major categories and approaches to the research project.

Table 1: Discourse analysis of local housing policies within the Greater Region

Level of analysis	Empirical focus	Empirical material	Empirical approach
Preparation	Academic literature	Literature on transnationalism, housing, discourse and space	Close reading
Accompanying analytic exercises	Situations, social worlds/arenas, positions	Entire data corpus	Situational analysis
Investigation of discourses	Discursive practice of the spatial structuring, materialization, urban discourses	Mission statement of project development, future development plans	Qualitative content analysis
	Local discourse context, discursive events	Local press	Qualitative content analysis
	Stakeholder opinions	Urban planners, policy makers, urban developers, landlords, tenants, real estate agents, …	Semi-structured interviews

The starting point was a close reading of the transnationalism (including migration & mobility), housing and discourse literature. While different variations of grounded theory methodology exist, Clarke and Keller recommend the use of pre-existing theoretical concepts and ideas. Because Keller (2013: 14) states that discourse analysis "moves from macro to micro levels of talk, text, context or society, and vice versa", I argue that the awareness of *existing* knowledge is essential to discourse analysis. Furthermore I contend that this preparation is essential for the conduction of expert interviews.

The three main cartographic approaches of situational analysis: (1) situational maps (see figure 1 for an example), (2) social worlds/arenas maps, (3) positional maps (Clarke 2005) are used as analytic exercises. Their focus lies "on elucidating the key elements, materialities, discourses, structures, and conditions that characterize the situation of inquiry" (Clarke 2005: xxii). They will be adapted during the research process and can help break up the data (Clarke 2005).

Figure 1. Messy situational map after Clarke

Source: own representation

The sample for qualitative content analysis is composed of newspaper articles from the local press to grasp public discourses (Gamson & Modigliani 1989; Keller 2013) and documents related to the cities trajectories of housing and urban development. Expert interviews will be conducted to widen the corpus of empirical material. The experts shall represent the variety of perspectives (politics, business, administration, landlords, tenants etc.), they are identified during document analysis and are chosen after a maximal contrast principle in order to gather a broad set of views. A semi-structured interview was constructed based on material gathered thus far.

The data analysis is oriented to the open research logic of qualitative social research (Flick 2009). Qualitative content analysis will follow major steps of grounded theory using categories generated inductively from the research material (e.g. Strauss & Corbin 1996). The ideas of coding, commentaries and memos from grounded theory are used during the research process (Strauss & Corbin 1996; Clarke 2005; Keller 2005). This allows a traceable documentation of the research process. Because several forms of discourse analysis exist and authors often make use of the same terms while supposing different meanings, a toolbox allowing the clarification of the vocabulary in use is set up.

Example: Coding of some discourse fragments

A quick review of recent media coverage could easily lead one to describe the situation as a sort of love-hate relationship. On the one hand, the 'economic engine' Luxembourg offers workplaces for many commuters, positively affecting the development of this European cross-border polycentric metropolitan region. On the other hand, negative consequences such as the overcrowded real estate market in Luxembourg continue beyond the national border and affect neighbouring housing markets. German media and policy documents refer to the ‚Luxembourg-effect', summing up several developments such as cross-border commuting and related traffic collapses, the increase of housing costs, etc. This term can be regarded as a regionalized metaphor for the border paradox representing the complexities of the development. The '2020 Concept for the Region Trier' for instance shows that city councils perceive the proximity to Luxembourg as an opportunity for the development of the city and a means to combat *demographic change/shrinkage*. The term 'city region TriLux' (City of Trier 2012) was coined to illustrate the connections and opportunities for regional development. At the same time, city officials also associate displacement in relation to the Luxembourg-effect (City of Trier 2014). Depending on the context, similar effects can thus be perceived very differently by city councils or planners and the local population and even within the same social world/arena as this example shows.

Reflection

Social constructionism "provides a means by which the subject matter of housing research can be extended beyond the confines of a ´state' versus 'market' narrative" (Jacobs et al. 2004: 4). The presented theory and methodology are considered as means to combat reductionism and to account for the "complex relations between discourses, power and knowledge" (Richardson 2002: 353) by asking: "what is going on?" (Richardson 2002: 359). As it is interpretative work, results of the interpretation may turn out differently depending on the attitude of the reader (Keller 2013: 112) or as Leick (2014: 5) puts it: "Every summary of research results is a reading among many possible […]" (see also Clapham 2012). A total explanation cannot be the target (is impossible); one rather has to speak of an exploration of (alternative) perspectives (Richardson 2002: 359). Discourse analysis thus allows "unfolding concurring opinions on the urban development of past and present" (Hesse 2010: n. pag.) and tackling representations (of space).

The heuristic distinction of micro-, meso- and macro-levels and discourse planes allows a documented analysis. Relations and overlapping have to be elaborated. Keeping in mind that discourses do not stay still, temporality has to be taken into account. Nevertheless by creating/using categories and through labelling, the researcher reconstructs and thereby reinforces these (leads for instance to methodological nationalism).

Last but not least, discourses in three nation states (respectively four), with specific planning cultures and different media cultures are analysed. "Different cultures have different discursive objects, which can make it difficult to translate texts from one language into another, or to understand texts and other symbolic practices from other cultures and historical periods"[2] (Jäger & Maier 2014: n. pag.). Additionally the cities vary in size and may have different ways/means of handling certain developments. Nevertheless the context is similar: the housing market is (more and more becoming) a global market and the research sites are located in proximity to the 'economic engine' Luxembourg.

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[2] Not to forget, that *nation states* and *culture* are also constructs.

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