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## **“COMMUNAL LANDSCAPES OF EDUCATION” A PROGRESSIVE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT UNDER CONDITIONS OF INTERURBAN COMPETITION**

The research analyzes how the local state’s grasp on children and youth, within the concept of “communal landscapes of education”, is shaped by the logic of interurban competition.

Since approximately five years ago, “Communal Landscapes of Education” (further: CLoE) has become a widespread concept in German local politics. Aiming for the systematic improvement of the communal education landscape, local states network with childhood-related stakeholders like schools, child and youth services, culture, sports, local economy, and civil society to develop a “coherent overall system of education, rearing and care”.

Based on a broadened understanding of education that isn’t restricted to schooling, but also recognizes the importance of informal education such as social work, the landscapes are said to embrace a wide range of different locations and arrangements. Furthermore, governing education through networks on local scales is said to allow a higher sensitivity to local contexts as all kinds of professionals, residents as well as the recipients, mainly children and youth, can promote their specific needs and demands from bottom-up. Due to these progressive claims in public and academic discourses, CLoEs are seen as a win-win-concept that all stake-holders benefit from.

However, under current conditions of economic pressure, local states feel forced to act entrepreneurial, which raises the necessity of implementing new public management (NPM) instruments as well as to compete with each other for top-performers, e.g. investors and privileged families. As education attracts both of these target groups (and is further said to be crucial for regional economic sustainability as well as local social system), it is considered as a fertile ‘standort-factor’. Thus, the local state’s implementation of the concept is basically shaped by the economical logic of NPM and interurban competition.

From a critical-geographical perspective that focuses on how local politics are shaped by political economy, the research will analyze empirically to what extent in practice the concept can fulfill its progressive promises or if it is rather constrained by standort-political logics that try to lead to economic enrichment. Making use of the Capabilities Approach allows distinguishing between the former and the latter.

The empirical study contains a method mix: A standardized survey questionnaire will ask for the factors – i.e. locations and offers of opportunities - which in sum constitute the “landscapes of education”. This is to find out if they are to maximize flexible opportunities for the recipients in order to enable them to realize their notion of a “good life” they have reason to value, or if it is rather about increasing the regional skilled worker level, or to bring children and youth “at risk” into institutions to prevent problems of image and order.

Furthermore, in terms of power-relations, a network-analysis will clarify the different network partners’ influence on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the concept. This is to find out the different professions’ capacities to enforce their concerns and perspectives, and especially crucial from a capability-perspective, it is to analyze if the recipient’s are taken into account as central stakeholders according to these issues, or if it’s rather a matter of external experts or local policy makers.

Finally, an analysis of documents is to scrutinize the sensitivity to local contexts because in practice, this is often undermined by instruments from NPM that constrain the local state’s scopes by cost-

effectiveness considerations. Hence, it is significant to analyze the making, the importance, and the contents of central instruments such as mission statements, cooperation contracts and especially criteria of evaluation and to relate them to the different stakeholder's goals.

This project is a work-in-progress and the current stage is in the development of the instruments which will be used.