

Abstract

In the spatial planning literature, concepts of ‹space› have emerged as a progressively crucial framework for theoretical and empirical analyses. The concept of soft spaces, in particular, attempts to apprehend the significance of network related geographies within fuzzy bounded spaces for spatial planning and governance. This thesis shows that soft spaces became popular under the ‹post-political› condition and during periods dominated by neoliberalism by exploring their characteristics of flexible boundaries and networked governance. The thesis also illustrates why the Swiss action spaces of the recently introduced ‹Raumkonzept Schweiz› can be regarded as an example of soft spaces. In order to compile supra-regional goals and strategies, traditional statutory administrative boundaries no longer matched the reality of planning and Switzerland had to be divided into new spaces. The determination of these new action spaces has neither been made according to institutional nor to cultural concepts, but rather economic specialisation and social processes. Hence, the Swiss action spaces highlight the multiplicity of societal and institutional issues and integrate non-planning actors in spatial planning processes. Such changes demand for a higher amount of dialogue between the different government levels, for which hierarchical politics no longer suitable. All these points are in line with the concept of soft spaces. Apart from the comparison of soft and action spaces, the thesis examines the characteristics of the ‹Raumkonzept Schweiz› and the effects it has had since its introduction in 2012. Case studies of four action spaces of the ‹Raumkonzept Schweiz› show how the introduction of the action spaces has helped to increase the awareness of the importance of spatial planning. In addition to the positive consequences and aspects, such as the non-binding nature of the ‹Raumkonzept Schweiz›, points of criticism are also addressed. Statements about an insufficient degree of detail and missing aspects and links in the ‹Raumkonzept Schweiz› are used to show opportunities to further improve the concepts by taking future social problems and socio-demographic changes more into consideration in spatial planning and by integrating more issues of high regional importance.