Title: Transnationalism – An alternative Perspective on Heterogeneity, Complexity and Inequality?

Abstract

Due to the globalisation of economy, worldwide migration movements, the internationalisation of the media and the facilitation of communication processes across national borders, current societies are confronted with social spaces which are increasingly pluricultural, heterogeneous, inconsistent, fragmented and less regionally bounded. Even though globalisation can in no way be considered to be a new social phenomenon, it can be argued that the facilitation of means of crossing boundaries has led to the increasing frequency in transnational movements which have fundamentally transformed the structures of social interaction and communication. The national space as a reference system becomes more and more fragile; political, economic and social spheres of action are being reconfigured (Mau 2007: 19). The participation in transnational spaces requires particular capacities, competencies and resources. Relatedly the social resources of people are not equal distributed and the general conditions for participation in transnational networks and cross-border movements differ. Transnational spaces are unequally configured and are characterised by social conflict and tension. The highly competitive arena is structured by power relations and hegemonic forces. The confrontation with transnational spaces with overlapping social references initiates learning processes in everyday life but can also lead into excessive demands on participants. A nonuniform and temporal facet of transnationalisation can be seen as well on the basis of current developments of cities which are increasingly confronted with fundamental transformation processes due to global opening processes and cross-border movements to a greater extent than rural areas. Increasing complexity, diversity and inconsistency have become a normal reality of everyday life for urban residents. Not only migrants are involved in transnational spaces; also a broader range of people appear as global actors. Yildiz and Ottersbach emphasise that on the one hand states lose their force of social inclusion and their central relevance as a frame of reference for the orientation of city dweller. On the other hand re-nationalisation processes and the appearance of new forms of nationalism and fundamentalism show that the national space as an imaginary force is regaining its social and political relevance in the perception of people (cf. Yildiz/Ottersbach 2004: 11f.). Transnationalisation from the bottom up as a research approach offers a perspective which makes social actors, their transnational activities and strategies for coping visible. Subjects interact while having differing biographical knowledge and references; the overlapping social areas which are biographically collected and reflected on bring new challenges which have to be mastered as part of the everyday organisation of life. The complexity, contradictoriness and inconsistency within transnational spaces need to be acquired by the social actors. Accordingly new “coordinates of orientation” are created and diverging systems of references are related or integrated. These processes increase the transformation of regionally embedded...
The presentation will focus on transnationalism as a theoretical and empirical approach which offers (from my point of view) a useful perspective on heterogeneity, complexity and inequality of current societies. Other than the discourse of multiculturalism which at least in Austria has been used more as a model of assimilation, differences are not overemphasised and power relations are not denied. Moreover transnationalisation appears as a social phenomenon in which not only migrants but a broader range of people are involved. Against this backdrop assets and drawbacks of this approach will be discussed.

Bibliography