

Research frontiers in Economic Sociology and Labour Studies (ResFron ESLS)

Seminar

The contract city

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Room A, h. 13.00-14.30

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via Pace 10 - Milan



Current “planetary urbanization” is challenging the Weberian perspective seeing the Western city as a unique phenomenon joining market forces with political citizenship. There is a need for a new insight into the hybridization of political-economic forms in the globalized urbanity of the 21st Century.

The increasing mobility of capital, people and information has changed the space relations of urban societies. Contractual relations have increased in every field of social life, not only in the economic field, but also in the political, and in creative and scientific areas. Contracts involve both local and global actors: States, multinational organizations and international institutions, Unions of States (like the European Union), regions and cities. In many cases of urban strategic plans and city contracts, also the private sector and civil society are contractual partners. Contracts are normative and performative: by defining the agents’ relation with space, they may exclude or include various segments of society in different ways. The public-private partnership is an example: it operates by selecting business interests for approval at negotiating tables and deals. The selection, sometimes tacit sometimes explicit, calls to question the problems of democratic legitimacy. Contracts may be written or unwritten, incomplete and implicit. Contractual relations are a dialectical and negotiated concept in which economic, political, legal and cultural factors are interrelated. Contracts are not only legal frameworks or economic aggregates of individuals, but socially embedded forms.

The concept ‘contract city’, hitherto unused in literature, aims to combine the theoretical body of economic-juridical literature on the contract with historical-anthropological and socio-spatial literature on the city. The ‘contact city’ conceptual tool will be applied to 9 global cities of Europe, North America and Asia.

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