



Globalization, competitiveness and changing state spaces:

Exploring the current spaces of politics

Geography Graduate School Intensive Course, 25.–26.3.2008
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The neoliberal idea that a strong economy is necessarily based on differentiation and specialisation of regions and cities has been closely connected to the future of the EU and to the question of scale and re-territorialization of socio-spatial relations and practices. During the past ten to fifteen years, competition has not only remained one of the catchwords among global business elites but has also penetrated the vocabulary of politicians, administrators and regional planners all over the world. Competition is therefore an integral part of place-specific discourses and practices of regional planning and development. Not surprisingly, the concept of competition has also surfaced in the political debates dealing with the future of the European Union, for example, concerning the Lisbon Strategy, the European Spatial Development Perspective and the reform of the structural and cohesion policies. In other words, in the process which aims to develop a new competitive EU, the concept of competitive region has emerged as a discursive tool which structures and in fact constitutes and reorganizes the practices of regional planning

in Europe. This is the case increasingly also in Finland, in which the economic competitiveness and competitive regional structure have been connected to the fundamental notion of “national survival”. It seems clear that the increasing tension between the “old” and “new” forms of state spatiality is one of the key issues of the current transformation of the Finnish welfare state.

In general, European political spaces are undergoing a rapid transformation. This intensive course studies “the age of globalization/competition” during which spatial relations are undergoing a rather rapid transformation. Indeed, the functions, meanings and practices of European states have been significantly remolded by “globalization” which is often understood as a subject in its own right. Rather than treating globalization as an autonomous subject, force or scale this intensive course aims to study contemporary politico-economic condition by carefully touching upon the spatial transformation of the state and society from various theoretical and empirical perspectives including ontological basis of territory itself.

The course aims to problematise the continuity and change in contemporary spatial structures from various theoretical angles following the vivid scholarly debate, for instance, on territory, territoriality, re-scaling, restructuring etc. This is done in guest lectures and other presentation which will examine some recent conceptual debates dealing with, for example, globalization, scalar restructuring, the urbanization of neoliberalism, state space relations and competitiveness.

The course brings together students and experts on globalization, regional transformation and scalar relations and in so doing it seeks to disseminate recent international findings concerning the changing spaces of politics to the post-graduate students who deal with issues on urban studies, new urban policies, socio-spatial transformation, regional development and regional policy.

The course also includes a roundtable discussion on the “scale” versus “site” debate that flourished in the early 2000 and has continued up to the recent times.

Students interested in participating in the intensive course are asked to send an abstract of no more than 500 words to Sami Moisio (samimo@utu.fi) by March 11th 2008. Please notice that the Graduate School will support the travel and accommodation costs of the participants (with presentation) in the limits of the budget available.