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### How to carry out socio-spatial analyses – Research design and methods

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#### Abstract

In the German tradition of social work<sup>1</sup>, the idea of a socio-spatial orientation (Sozialraumorientierung) can be regarded as a significant conceptual reference since the early 1990s. Starting with the seminal work “Pädagogik des Jugendraums” by Böhnisch/Münchmeier (1990), a variety of approaches around the concept of socio-spatial approaches were developed in theory and practice of social work.

The socio-spatial “key idea” is, that social work always “happens” within a spatial environment. The individual situation of a client can only be fully understood in the context of his/her everyday life within the surrounding local, national and international structures. Bearing a lot of resources and possibilities, as well as potential risks, problems or uncertainties, the nearer environment of the local neighbourhoods or regions can be regarded to be of central point of reference for social workers in all the different working fields (Spatscheck 2012)<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of such an orientation, the analyses of socio-spatial settings are becoming important and helpful tools for getting an enlarged understanding of encompassing and user-related social diagnoses as well as of problem and resource analyses that are searching for a broader knowledge than individualising approaches (Spatscheck 2009). Therefore, socio-spatial analyses can be regarded as a helpful tool for everyday social workers that are looking for a broader understanding of the life situation of their target groups and their environment and want to integrate this perspective in their practical work.

#### Keywords

Social work, social space, methods

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<sup>1</sup> In the German debate the term “Soziale Arbeit” (social work) is used as an umbrella term for “Sozialarbeit” (social work with adults) and “Sozialpädagogik” (social pedagogy with children and youth). The task of social work can be regarded as the “prevention and coping of social problems” (Engelke/Spatscheck/Borrmann 2009) or, more generally, to support citizens in their “leading of life” (Lebensführung) (Otto/Scherr/Ziegler 2010). In both senses, social work refers to the relationship between individuals and society and the possible conflicts and professional solutions within this relationship (Hamburger 2007, 14).

<sup>2</sup> Here, the territorialisation of social problems should be avoided. Not all social problems can be solved on a local neighbourhood level alone. Therefore, socio-spatial approaches need always to be guided by supporting national and international social and welfare policies.