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Constructing Globality in the Development Discourse of the World Bank and UNDP

Our paper deals with the emergence of a global semantics of inequality within world society, in particular in the context of the development discourse produced in the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). How do these international organizations (IOs) refer to globalized spaces and how do they reproduce them in their organizational discourses? What contributions have these two major international organizations made to the construction of globality as a socio-spatial category? And in what way and to what extent are these constructions of globality dependent on the semantics of (global) inequality?

These questions concern the discourse of globally active international organizations that can be conceived of as major influences in the (re)production of globality itself. By putting certain issues on the agenda and offering solutions that can only be delivered by them and on a global scale they have regulated the discourse both of specific problems and the idea of a world community concerned by these problems. Among these IOs are the World Bank and UNDP, whose definitions of development have competed and shaped the global development discourse over time. One of the key issues within this development discourse has been inequality, traditionally related closely to the realm of nations states, but framed as a global issue here.

In a corpus linguistic and discourse analysis of official texts produced in the World Bank and UNDP we trace how references to a global imaginary correspond to political programs of overcoming inequality. These programs are concerned with poverty reduction, gender mainstreaming, environmental security and other aspects of heterogeneity. Overall, we aim to trace which specific discourses, e.g. on issues of global justice, the climate, environmental protection, poverty etc., serve as the main vehicles for the emergence of such a global semantics of inequality and, in turn, the construction of globality.