

Soziale Marktwirtschaft: All inclusive?



Öffentliche Räume

ABSTRACT

The German economy is doing well. Yet perceptions regarding the state of German society are more sobering, as public, policy and academic debates are increasingly concerned with rising inequality. The public is losing trust in Germany's social market economy and its capacity to ensure social benefits. Larger segments of society find the promise of economic advancement beyond their reach, increasingly more questions are raised about Germany's model of a social market economy.

Policymakers, business leaders and civil society must find answers to these questions. Does the social market economy still deliver on its promise? How robust and vulnerable to crises is our economic system? What do citizens expect the German economic and social order to deliver? What economic and societal challenges do we face?

In a series of roundtable discussions the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Progressive Zentrum debated these topics and how to best address them. The concept of inclusive growth for Germany has proven to be a crucial overarching theme in the discussion and developing measures to ensure the viability of a social market economy. The theme-oriented papers emerging from these discussions will be published for public access. The goal here is to provide constructive input to a broader public debate on the future of German society and economy.

The volume presented here explores the relevance of public spaces (i.e., open spaces, institutions and networks) for society, an issue that often underlies conflicts over cash transfer and tax rate policies. Public spaces, as

areas accessible to everyone and in which people from all segments of society – regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age or socioeconomic background – can interact with each other, are essential to social inclusion. Collective in character, public spaces serve to supplement formal equality in terms of providing genuinely equal access to participation in society.

Fear of social decline is often cited as the primary driver of xenophobic sentiments, divisive thinking and calls to protect “one’s own” in the face of the “other.” Addressing these fears responsibly involves taking first an unprejudiced view of the opportunities for advancement that are available in our society. A serious response to fears of social decline therefore means offering genuine opportunities for advancement while ensuring social mobility through our institutions. Broad-based access to high-quality public institutions, infrastructures and networks is therefore essential.

The three contributions featured in this volume discuss the importance of public spaces from various perspectives. In the first contribution, Peter Siller explores the relationship between justice and access to institutions, infrastructures and networks in terms of social inclusion. Sabine Meier then examines from an urban sociology perspective how urban, neighborhood and spatial planning shape the nature of human interaction and thus influence social inclusion and integration. In the third contribution, Benjamin Dierks and Katharina A. Zweig take a close look at the digital age, examining the relevance of virtual public spaces to society today.