

Multilevel politics of memory: the local dimension of South Korean politics of memory towards Japan

The role of regions and cities in international relations has gradually increased in recent decades. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, such as the influence of globalisation, decentralisation of power, and the blurring of boundaries between foreign and domestic policy issues. Although states are still the main actors in the international arena, local governments also play an increasingly important role. Paradiplomacy, which encompasses the involvement of local governments in global affairs, has gained significant attention in scientific research. City diplomacy, a subset of paradiplomacy, refers to all forms of international activity carried out by cities.

The politics of memory refers to the entirety of activities conducted by political entities to advocate for a particular interpretation of history. It is characterised by both external and internal dimensions that can become intertwined. As a component of foreign policy, it seeks to shape a certain vision of the past and gain recognition for it from the international community. It can be carried out not only by national authorities, but also by substate entities, including cities.

The project will constitute an original, comprehensive, and multi-faceted analysis combining the issues of city diplomacy and politics of memory. The research will focus on cities in South Korea, while the scope of their politics of memory will be narrowed down to their relations with Japan. The Republic of Korea and Japan have a long history of relations dating back to the beginning of our era. However, it is because of the annexation and occupation of Korea by Japan from 1910 to 1945, the current relations between the two countries are among the most complex in the East Asian region. Many unresolved issues from the past continue to hinder South Korea-Japan relations. Furthermore, both nations often maintain completely contradictory historical narratives in many cases.

The main objective of the project is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of a highly under-researched area that combines city diplomacy and politics of memory in South Korea, thereby filling a gap in the field of international relations and political and administrative sciences. The second goal is to conceptualise the multi-level politics of memory. The project will also provide answers to the following research questions: What are the determinants of international activity of cities in South Korea in the field of politics of memory? How do cities in South Korea pursue the politics of memory, and what tools do they use? To what extent is the politics of memory of cities consistent with the politics of memory implemented at the national level? What are the factors that cause the discrepancies?

It is necessary to adopt methodological pluralism. The research will be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Among the most important ones will be literature analysis, normative acts analysis, field research, and qualitative content analysis at memorial sites. A survey will be conducted among all South Korean cities. Based on it, a selection of cities will be made for in-depth case study analysis. A vital element will also be experts interviews, as well as interviews with politicians and officials from selected cities and representatives of memorial sites.

The outcomes of the project will include publications of articles in peer-reviewed international journals in accordance with open access policy, as well as presenting research results at national and international academic conferences. The data acquired during the research will also constitute a significant contribution to the preparation of a doctoral dissertation.