

Walter Otto Ötsch

How images and metaphors affect the economy: examples from the 18th century to present day Neo-liberalism

Walter.oetsch@jku.at

As every kind of knowledge based on language, economic theories contain images and metaphors. In the history of economic reasoning, mechanistic metaphors played a major role: the crucial idea is that the economy can be modeled like a machine. Such concepts have important implications for economics (e.g. which methods should be applied or how "data" can be defined) and also for economic policy measures.

When economics is applied to problems in the real world, images and metaphors connect different and sometimes even incompatible theories to simple recommendations. In media discourses, images of "the" economy, which are supposed to truly resemble economic reality, influence economic decisions (performativity of economics). To understand current policy making (at the national as well as the European level), it is important to recognize the concept of "the market" as a distinct entity individuals have to adapt to. Often it is said that politics against the markets is impossible. Such ideas and images promote populism and disenchantment with politics.

Walter Otto Ötsch is an economist and cultural scientist at the Johannes Kepler University of Linz, since 2004 chairman of the "Zentrum für soziale und interkulturelle Kompetenz", since 2009 chairman of the Institute for Comprehensive Analysis of The Economy. He is researching in the history of economic reasoning, in political communication and in an institutional understanding of the economy.