

Call for papers
International conference organised by the research unit
ESPACES ET SOCIÉTÉS (UMR ESO)
Rennes, France
April 9th - 11th, 2014

SHARING SPACE : AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH TO THE SPATIAL DIMENSION
OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

ESPACES ET SOCIÉTÉS, a research unit based in Western France (UMR 6590 ESO, gathering researchers from the Universities of Angers, Caen, Le Mans, Nantes and Rennes), is organising an international and interdisciplinary conference around the spatial dimension of social relations, April 9 – 11 2014. It is open to all researchers working in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The conference will focus on three principal areas:

1. Shared social worlds
2. (Inter)disciplinary positions and narrative accounts
3. Approaches, methods, tools

Proposals (in French or English) for interventions should be sent to the following address (see instructions at the end of the *Call for papers*) : colloque.espace-en-partage.2014@uhb.fr.

Beside classical interventions (communications and posters), all sorts of original formats are welcome: workshops based on research in progress, symposium-type workshops, videos and films, sound bites, displays, etc.

Deadline for submission : October 15 2013.

PRESENTATION

This conference arises out of the research interests of the team Espaces et Sociétés (UMR 6590 ESO), stepping on a tradition of social geography recognised both nationally and internationally and which has developed, over the years, in an interdisciplinary direction. The objective of the conference is to generate an interdisciplinary dialogue around epistemological, theoretical and methodological issues linked with the study of the spatial dimension of social relations.

Indeed, even if one has to be highly careful with the rhetoric of the new and of change, which nowadays constitutes an almost unavoidable *topos* in order to stimulate interest and to be different from others, the idea according to which the Humanities and Social Sciences have been engaged for several decades in a “spatial turn” seems broadly justified. This refers first of all to a change in awareness and perspective from the point of view of the models of analysis and interpretation, accounting for a growing interest in the spatial dimension of social relations. This change has been supported in particular by two major developments:

- The crisis affecting the mainstream historicist and universalist paradigms which considered the social world, its characteristics and its driving forces through essentially *aspatial* models, such as the theories of modernisation and development and a part of marxist currents;
- The relativisation of the national scale, which largely configured the problematics of social sciences, around the political figure of the Nation State, but also around implicitly organicist social imaginaries and models; this led to confining theoretic and empirical investigation to a space extremely limited both representationally and territorially.

The idea of a “spatial turn” can also be interpreted not so much as a change in awareness and perspective, but rather as a change of paradigm even within the disciplines in which space was historically considered a privileged focus of scientific study. Here again, the rhetoric of the turning point comes easily to the fore, in the form of the “constructivist turn”. This expression describes a radical critique of naturalist, essentialist and determinist approaches of space. To reason in terms of construction of the spatial dimension of social relations is both to refuse all forms of separation between the “spatial” and the “social” and to fully integrate the temporal and spatialized elaboration of the phenomena studied.

These evolutions are not simply the product of the endogenous dynamics of the Humanities and Social Sciences, they are inseparable from major socio-historical transformations :

- the dynamics of “modernisation” across the planet, which highlight phenomena of convergence and also of divergence, render obsolete the unequivocal figurations in terms of progress or revolution and force one *to take into account the contingency of socio-spatial configurations*;
- the dynamics of globalisation and of regionalisation (supra- as well as infra-national) *which render the multi-scale approaches increasingly essential*;
- the accelerated dynamics of interaction of human activities and land environments pointing to the urban-technological society and the productivist and consumerist mentality as major forces of change, which prompts one to *think about the coupling of societies, techniques and “nature”*;
- the revolution linked to the emergence of “cyberspace”, which is certainly only in its infancy and which calls for *in depth reflections about the space of “virtual reality”, at the individual as well as the community level*.

Taking what precedes as our basis, we intend to organise the conference around three principal entries, which obviously often overlap.

THREE LINES OF ENQUIRY

1. Shared social worlds

The interdisciplinary approach to shared space within the framework of the Humanities and Social Sciences can be described in broad terms as anthropological, in as far as its objective is to think in terms of “social worlds” and of “human worlds”, which in no way implies the adoption of an optimistic reading of these worlds and includes relationships of domination and inequalities, tensions and conflicts. If the shared spaces can generate community identities and solidarity, they are often contested spaces, monopolised and marked by deep-rooted inequalities: the notion of “sharing” (*partage*) designates here above all the idea of coexistence between actors, groups and communities in specific socio-spatial configurations. This must lead to the elaboration of descriptive modes and explanatory and interpretative models moving in a non-reductionist manner between singularity, particularity and generality, being aware of the plurality and overlap of the scales, taking into account the territorial as well as the network shape, the co-presence as well as interdependence and remote interaction.

The papers can refer to any spatial scale and to any politico-institutional level, from the micro-territories of daily activity to the planetary scale. Whatever the scales of observation and analysis used, it is expected that papers will contribute to the explanation and understanding of the modalities of sharing the world and their dynamics of reconstitution, approaching space other than as a simple background context for social relationships.

Some examples:

- How do social groupings form and restructure themselves, from the perspective of spatialization, as the consequence of multiple and often conflicting appropriations, whether their dynamic be infra-, supra- or transnational?
- How are neighbourly relations, taken as sharing space between different modes of living in city-centre, suburban and rural contexts, constructed and reconstructed?
- How does one analyse the changes in relationships between the different levels of territory networking or the vagaries of territorial constructions in politically unstable perimeters?
- How do new forms of spatialization through networks belonging to the space of virtual reality face inherited spatial discontinuities and what are the effects of these interrelations (e.g. “the Arab revolutions”)?
- What are the effects of the search for social and ecological authenticity by a number of social actors in the “North” on those in the “South” (local food systems, fair trade ...)?

Amongst the forms that world sharing takes, the interdependencies between human activities and the biophysical constituents of the planet, the resources and the forms of life which characterise it and the issues of socio-ecological transition present an important subject for study by researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences which questions our approach to natural resources, to the risks, to town and country planning, and in more general terms the understanding of nature by societies.

2. (Inter)disciplinary positions and narrative accounts

Arising from an awareness for some or from a change of paradigm for others, the “spatial turn” brings together many researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences around a “spatialized critical perspective”. Spatiality appears subsequently as a constitutive dimension of the social phenomena and relationships and not as the specific object for study of one discipline (geography, considered then in a restrictive way as the “science of space”).

In this context, the circulation and pooling of approaches, thematic areas and methods are instigated, leading to the reading of a world where the reconfigurations are not really understandable through the prism of disciplinary limitations. Such sharing gives immediate shape to dynamics for unification and differentiation. They contribute on the one hand to the construction of a unity of the Humanities and Social Sciences, sensitive to the analysis of discourse and meaning, to situations and actions. On the other, they lead to a re-examination of the architecture of disciplines and the methods of subdivision within them. New regroupings and identifications of researchers, based on thematic areas or on approaches, can thus appear.

This entry will therefore incorporate reflexive contributions on analyses of research experience or epistemological and theoretical developments directed towards questioning the relationship between disciplines and exploring cross-disciplinary themes (“mobility”, “gender”, “regional development”, “migrations and interethnic relationships”, etc.).

Current developments raise a whole set of questions. Are we heading towards a-disciplinary or post-disciplinary positions? Is thinking in terms of “dimensions” rather than of “domains” leading to a much more flexible conception of disciplinary specificities? How are disciplines, theories, currents of thought, etc., sharing at present the study of “space” or are they including it in their method of approach based on their centre of interest and how is such sharing developing? At what moment(s) in the research process is the spatiality of the research object questioned and in what way? How do specialised languages refer to space and what are the translation problems specific to the spatial categories?

These questions of an epistemological and theoretical nature are inextricably linked with others relating to the modes of articulation between society and the Social Sciences, and to the demands – especially those of a utilitarian nature – placed upon them. In fact, the researcher has to deal with the paradoxical

requirements of interdisciplinarity, in the sense that, at least in France, the appeal to develop it is in major contradiction with the importance of the disciplinary principles in the evaluation of research (e.g. journals, national agencies for evaluating research) or of the researchers themselves (e.g. university recruitment).

Furthermore, financing on a project basis can encourage conformist proposals or an increase in thematic fields linked to the issues of public policy (e. g. “marine science”, “territorial sciences”). How can researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences preserve their autonomy in the way they subdivide their research subject, they elaborate their problematics and analysis, they diffuse their results? How can they make themselves heard amongst the large numbers of actors interested in “space” and where do they stand in the various “hybrid” forums and arenas in which they are involved?

3. Approaches, methods, tools

The positioning of researchers, in their disciplines or at their interface, as well as the postures and positions that they adopt towards the subject(s) of study, can promote a discussion of the choices governing the elaboration of the theoretical approaches, the methods and the tools behind the whole research process. At the epistemological and theoretical level, the conference will endeavour to provide a critical review of the “constructivist turn” in our understanding of spatiality, focussing notably on contemporary Anglo-saxon discussions surrounding “non-representational geographies”; but also on other traditional lines of thought, such as phenomenology, French social geography and critical sociology.

The multiplicity of modes of conducting surveys, handling of data, of analysis and of feedback mirrors the diversity of intellectual currents, paradigms, approaches and theories applied. Researchers studying the spatial dimension of social relationships are today confronted by an increasing number of methodologies, means and ways of highlighting “the role of the place” in the social phenomena they observe, whether it be from seeking meaning in oral, written or visual or audio forms or in diverse material evidence objectivizing the processes and participating protagonists and their structural impact.

We invite the spoke-persons of this diversity to state their opinions at this conference so as to stimulate an exchange of views and transcend disciplinary methodologies and epistemologies so that we can identify what changes have occurred in ways of thinking, expressing and practising social sciences. At the intersection or in the middle between what is intelligible or perceptible, visible or concealed, what constitutes a firm “terrain” just as much as the ways of representing its outline and shape, of defining its (im)materiality or of considering individual and community positions, has different interpretations, as do the feelings, emotions and ways of implementing our objectives.

Papers should concentrate on the approaches by researchers towards the spatial dimension of the subject of study, whether it be in terms of speech register (learned, pedagogical, operational...), of theoretical frameworks, of concepts, of notions of “terrains”, of survey postures or of methodological tools. To think in terms of sharing is above all an invitation to scrutinise the nature of the relationship which constructs the research process and, particularly, the relationship with the other, he or she who is the source of information for the researchers. This also leads to the examination of the social experiments which researchers are conducting more and more, in league with civil and political authorities, so as to observe, analyse and, sometimes, give support to efforts of social development or alternative forms of citizenship.

THE “SHAPE” OF THE CONFERENCE: HOW CAN IT BE SHARED?

Sharing space also applies to the space of the conference itself. Our aim is to bypass the opposition between content and form and to promote a way of holding a conference which will take its title as an invitation to think with a little more originality about its inherent different elements of space-time. This is why we have devoted a separate section to a discussion of the “shape” the interventions might take. Our sincere wish is to take advantage of the organisation of this conference to make, with others, a modest contribution to changing the way things generally take place and we are open to all suggestions

The conference is itself intended as a shared time and space. In this perspective, all types of proposals breaking with traditional formats are welcome. What follows are but a few points to consider:

- several sessions of workshops on a given theme one after another, with discussants, leading to a lengthy sharing of perspectives;
- group proposals for symposium-type workshops, regrouping researchers wishing to take advantage of the conference to exchange views with one another, in an inter-disciplinary perspective, which they are not normally in a position to do;
- sending papers in advance and workshop seminars to discuss them without the need for them to be read out loud by their authors;
- a poster session followed by a second seminar-type session, to discuss questions which may have arisen and about which everyone will have had time to think;
- “hands-on” workshops on the “black box” of a research initiative and trying to share the questions related to the research in progress;
- presentation methods using supports other than written and oral papers (e.g. films, sound bites, displays, etc.).

Please let us have your ideas and your desiderata concerning the shape your intervention could assume. Obviously, “classic” proposals for workshop papers are welcome.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Each proposal should be submitted in two Word files :

- **File 1:** Contains the name and first name of the author, institutional affiliation and email address, the title of the proposal and a short acronym (a maximum of 8 characters) based on the title. File 1 will be named according to the following model: “ACRONYM_Name of the author” (e. g. “SPACE_Smith”).

- **File 2:** This file is entirely anonymous. It contains the acronym of the proposal, the principal thematic issue to be developed, key words (10 maximum), the discipline(s) of the author(s) and an abstract of no more than two pages and of no more than 5000 characters. The proposal can also indicate the form of presentation either intended or suggested. File 2 will be named according to the following model: “ACRONYM_Abstract_Date” (e. g. “SPACE_Abstract_28-03-2013”).

*The final submission date is: **October 15 2013.***

The complete and final versions of the papers are to be returned by **February 15th 2014**. They will be published on-line on the website of our Research Unit.