

Spatiality

Spatiality combines all conditions and practices of individual and social life that are linked to relative position of individuals and groups with regard to one another. One fundamental postulate of geography is that those relative positions (or geographical situations) determine, probably or partly, form and intensity of social interactions. These in turn build back, while distorting them in an incremental way, the main structures of geographical space. Spatiality is one of the two main explanatory paradigms constructed by geography in order to contribute to explaining differentiation of use of the globe surface by human societies, it forms an interpretation by means of " horizontal " relations, which complements explanations based on " vertical " relations of societies with the diverse conditions and resources offered by natural environments. The paradigm of spatiality has mainly asserted itself since the fifties.

The notion of space in geography relies on three main reference systems :1) location space is a set of terrestrial coordinates where each point position is identified by its latitude, longitude and elevation (according to a given projection system) ; 2) space as it is perceived, lived or represented at individual scale, includes, beyond pronounced subjective and cultural variations, a relatively systematic organisation, very often centred on the person and composed of proxemic bubbles (E.T. Hall) or concentric " shells " (A. Moles), whose level of familiarity decreases with [distance](#), and in which perception of distances, inflated in known areas, tends to contract along with decrease of information about places. Concrete shapes of those representations, often comparable to concentric circles in traditional sedentary societies, get diversified in function of the mobility practices of individuals and of their frequentation of places that form their living space ; 3) aggregation of those individual spaces and composition of their interactions repeated in the course of time produces an heterogeneous and anisotropic space, made of hierarchically organised nodes and axes that organise circulation flows inside territories presenting uneven meshes. In the course of history, this geographical space tends to become more and more heterogeneous (contrasted) in terms of weight distribution (mass, wealth) of nodes or meshes, and contracted in terms of travel time, whereas circulation conditions (speed, comfort) on long distances, as well as forms and conditions of habitat, tend to become more homogeneous.

Each society organises its territory in function of a spatiality of its own that depends on its values and norms as well as on its choices of activities and its technical mastery. It is analysed on basis of the main components of the working of territories, namely appropriation, habitat, circulation, exploitation (or production) and administration (or management). Dimensions, spacing, densities and forms (configurations) so vary according to societies, but landscapes and spatial structures may also reveal effects of anthropologic invariants (such as measure of cultivated land in terms of work days, of spacing of journey steps in walking days, or sprawling of cities in terms of transport hours), of geometrical constraints (circularity of market areas or frequenting areas around a centre, linearity of main transport axes) or interaction constraints (strong decrease of frequenting probabilities along with distance or " distance tyranny "), which explain similarity of elementary spatial structures, identified by various spatial analysis models (gradients of urban fields, rings of von Thünen, hierarchically organised hexagonal patterns of central places), and listed for example by R. Brunet in his table of " chorems " .

Bibliographie