

Epistemological bases

Spatial analysis refers to one of the main uses of the term « space », common to geographers, to specialists of spatial economy or of regional science. Space is here a relative space, produced, defined by relations between places that develop because of interactions between localised social actors. This concept is distinct from the more encompassing concepts environment and territory or region. Space as making part of the explanatory project of spatial analysis is not assimilated with the whole interface between earth / atmosphere / human societies, which is the study object of geographers.

Schematically, compared to the problematic of classical geography that was analysing « vertical » relationships between natural environments and societies, spatial analysis is mainly focusing on « horizontal » interactions between places. Hence spatiality would be a part, a subset of geographicity.

Development of specific theories and models in this framework relies on an epistemological position which implies on the one hand a relative autonomy of the spatial fact, a specificity of this component of social life organisation, and on the other hand, existence of laws or general rules of spatiality, which allow explaining what, in geographical distributions or systems, mainly comes from social dispositions, independently from variability of conditions provided by natural environments. Spatial analysis models may summarise structures of geographical systems, which describe their stable configurations - these are static models - or may simulate processes of genesis and evolution of systems - these are then dynamic models.

The project of spatial analysis would then be to study this « spatialisation » or transformation into space of the earth surface by human societies. Originally, in reaction against an idiographic tradition of geography, which was concerned with illustration and explanation of uniqueness of each place, spatial analysis asserted itself as a nomothetic approach, oriented by search for models and general laws.

Bibliographie