

Territory2

Here we propose a provisional definition of territory. It integrates what we have learnt from our first observations on the nature of geographical space, considered in its different aspects, from spaces that are produced to spaces that are experienced and lived in. It set out a few more general hypotheses, which we will subsequently endeavour to verify.

Concerning what can be drawn, two main components of the concept of territory will be retained, the "social space" component and the "lived-in space" component.

We have seen that the social space refers to «places» in the «biosphere» formed by interwoven social and spatial relationships. This focuses on a new "thread in this weave", combining the spatial component of what is social, and the social component of what is spatial, and approached by a method that consists in objectifying relationships that are identified and enumerated by the researcher, geographer or anthropologist.

In contrast, the "lived-in space" expresses the existential, and necessarily subjective relationship that the socialised individual (informed and influenced by the social sphere) establishes with the Earth. It is impregnated with cultural values that each reflect a belonging to a localised group. Becoming acquainted with it involves becoming acquainted with the people concerned, noting their practices, their representations and their imagined space.

On the base formed by the socio-cultural reality, territory is the manifestation of an economic, ideological and political (and hence social) appropriation of space by groups that form a particular «representation» of themselves, of their history and of their singularity. [...]

This being said, the concept of territory combining the two notions of social space and lived-in space also involves four more issues, which we will for the moment envisage as working hypotheses:

-1) this concept of territory, using the (spatial) data of geography, describes the way in which each subjects finds his/her place in a group, or in several social reference groups. The outcome of this personal itinerary is the construction of a belonging, and of a collective identity. This concrete experience of the social space also conditions our relationship with others, and our otherness. It is what mediates it.

-2) Secondly, territory reflects a manner of subdividing and controlling space so as to ensure its specificity and its enduring nature, and the reproduction of the human groups occupying that territory. This is its political dimension. It demonstrates the intentional nature of its creation.

-3) Thirdly, a territory, formed and developed by the societies that have successively occupied it, forms a remarkably symbolic domain. Certain elements, set up as heritage values, contribute to founding or strengthening the feeling of collective identity among the humans occupying it. As noted by Maurice Halbwachs, since territory belongs to the sphere of social representations, it can be seen "in material forms that are often symbolic or emblematic in nature" (Halbwachs, 1938). Symbolic territoriality has even greater importance if it is conceded, again according to Halbwachs, that "it is as if the thinking of a group cannot appear, survive, and become conscious of itself without having some visible forms of space to build on". On symbolic bases such as this, identity-forging territory is a potent tool for social mobilisation. Denis Retaillé, on this score, wonders if territory, via its dual function, political and symbolic, and by way of the solidarity effects it generates, is not ultimately "a spatial form of the society, enabling distances to be reduced within, and creating an infinite distance with the outside, beyond the boundaries" (Retaillé, 1997).

-4) Finally for numerous authors there is the importance of long time spans and history in the symbolic construction of territory. Michel Marié is very representative of this particular issue, and he considers that "space needs the depth of time, silent repetitions, slow maturation processes, social imaginings and reference norms to exist as a territory" (Marié, 1982).

Thus defined in its broadest and most all-embracing acceptance, territory and its many dimensions belongs to three distinct orders. The first is material existence, the order of the concrete reality of this Earth, the terra of the etymology of the word. It is therefore relevant to consider the geographical reality of the world, the way in which the biosphere takes on the mark of human action and

changes under its influence. The second order is that of the individual psyche. In this respect, territoriality in part identifies with a pre-existing, emotional and pre-social relationship of humans with the Earth. The third order concerns collective, social and cultural representations. These are what give territory its meaning, and these representations are in turn shaped by contact with the symbolic universe for which territory provides a basis and a reference.

It can be added that territory, which is by nature multiscalar, can be found on different levels of geographical space, from the local area to the nation-state or the multi-nation entity. Far from being closed, like political territory, geographical territory is clearly open, ready to take on all manner of spatial combinations woven by human communities within the boundaries of the terrestrial space and those of individual experience.

Guy Di Méo

Bibliographie

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