

Call for papers “Cartotête”

Study days – Genoa, 28-29 October 2021

The social dimensions of cognitive mapping

Cognitive representations of geographical space are often studied in order to better understand how individuals perceive and deal with everyday spatial problems (Down and Stea, 1977), including orientation, trip planning or navigation. Since these works focus particularly on the functional dimension of such spatial representations, maps are read in a literal, rather than metaphorical perspective. Also, individual geographical experiences, both direct (trips and visited places) and indirect (spatial information) are considered as the main factor contributing to their construction. Therefore, this “cognitive tool” is essentially perceived as an individual and personal construction. The current popularity of neurocognitive approaches, favoured by the 2014 Nobel Prize on research on place cells (O’Keefe and Dostrovsky, 1971, O’Keefe and Nadel, 1978) and grid cells (Hafting, Fyhn, Molden et Moser, 2005) has pushed aside the analysis of social dimensions, focusing instead on the individual and functional character of spatial representations. In social science research, this mentalistic approach has led the term “mental map” to gradually replace the concept of cognitive map (Hatlova et Hanus, 2020, encouraging a literal, rather than metaphorical view of these maps.

The social dimensions of such cognitive representations of space began to be investigated in the mid 1970s, showing the significant recurrence of symbolic elements of urban space in free hand drawings (Milgram and Jodelet, 1976). Since then, many studies have looked to the psycho-sociological paradigm of social representations to demonstrate that spatial representations are real social representations (Jodelet, 1982).

Today, however, the analyses of social dimensions of spatial cognition are diverse. Some are based on cultural approaches (Helft, 2013), while others are simply focused on contrasts in socio-economic conditions. Moreover, sociologists have recently started addressing the socialisation of public spaces (Rivière, 2017), while demographers have long examined socialisation processes in residential spaces (Bonvalet, 1993). In terms of the sociological construction of “geographical experiences”, geographers and psychologists have recently developed research on the socialisation of geographical mobility and on territorialisation processes. However, we believe that these analyses from the angle of socialisation should also provide us with elements for understanding cognitive cartography.

The Cartotête network aims at exploring the social dimensions which contribute to the construction of cognitive representations in space and, consequently, to territorialisation processes, in order to stimulate exchange of ideas on cognitive socio-mapping. Without neglecting the functional dimension of such representations, the network seeks to unify a research approach dealing with “mental maps” as objects revealing the articulation between relation with geographical space and relation with other individuals. While the first three study days (Clermont-Ferrand, 2014; Strasbourg, 2017 and Besançon, 2019) mainly focused on methodological aspects of socio-cognitive mapping, the forthcoming fourth study day of the network aims at fostering exchanges on empirical work on socio-cognitive processes or socio-spatial processes of cognitive mapping. This is an international edition, to be held by the Department of Political Sciences (DISPO) of the University of Genoa.

Three main research areas are proposed:

1. Cognitive representations of space and relations to others

The aim here will be to identify social dimensions of spatial representations, in terms of inter-individual and intergroup analysis. What are the links between group membership, trajectories and people's social positions and representations of space? What can we learn from spatial representations about relationships with others? Proposals may tackle both appropriation conflicts over a given space and the articulation of different forms of appropriation of the same space. How can cognitive mapping contribute to underlining issues arising from differences in perceptions, conceptions and experiences of the same territory?

2. Social, symbolic and collective dimensions of cognitive representations of space

In this case, two levels of analysis can be considered. Firstly, focusing on the ideological level, proposals may track the links between social representations and social dimensions of political, religious, cultural, technological, etc.) ideologies, beliefs, opinions (with a focus on practices of socialization to space underlying the ideological dimension of relations to space. Studies may pertain to a variety of spatial scales, from buildings to neighbourhoods, the city, etc. Secondly, focusing on the individual or collective level of relations to space, the proposals may evidence the connections between the meaning assigned to places and their spatial arrangement. How does the symbolic content of geographical objects (a monument, a neighbourhood, etc.) organize their spatial distribution? On these two levels, particular attention may be given to the link between spatial representations of individual or collective memory and to the relationship between local and institutionalized memories (Halbwachs, 1941, Violi, 2014).

3. Cognitive representations of space and spatial distribution of the relationship network

This area is specifically dedicated to investigations into the relationship between social practices and spatial representations, focusing on the effects of the spatial distribution of the relationship network on the cognitive representation of geographical space. If the current social network is clearly of paramount importance, it is also important to track its evolution across time and space, in order to capture its historical thickness and traces of the past in current spatial representations. This will be the opportunity to discuss how cognitive representations are constructed in relation to the spatial-temporal distribution of an individual's social network.

Cartotête 2021 timeline

January 25, 2021: call for papers in English, Italian and French.

April 30, 2021: deadline for the submission of abstracts (max 2500 characters).

July 2, 2021: response by the Scientific Committee.

September 30, 2021: deadline for the submission of papers.

October 28 – 29, 2021: study days (if necessary, in video-conference form).

The abstracts (2500 characters max, images included) must be written in English or French and include the topic addressed, the method used and the main results that will be presented. The proposals should not exceed two pages (Word document, Times New Roman Font, Size 12, 1.15 line spacing) and include a title, the author(s)'s name(s), email addresses, the

thematic area addressed and at least one illustration of the socio-cognitive representations of the geographical space identified in the research. The proposals must be sent to the email colloquere@seu.cartotete@gmail.com by April 30, 2021 at the latest.

Accepted papers will be published.

Organising committee

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