

## Call For Papers

### **Product as Process, Position and Promise: Exploring the qualities, qualification and spatial dynamics of goods, services and experiences**

RGS-IBG Annual Conference: July 3-5 2012, Edinburgh

Session Conveners: Brian J. Hrac and Jenny Sjöholm - Uppsala University

Against the backdrop of a highly globalized and competitive marketplace, this session will interrogate the interplay between two important concepts. Acknowledging that 'a product is a process' (Callon et al. 2002), we are interested in how specific 'qualities' or 'agents of difference' can be added to products at multiple stages of the value chain. In some cases products are positioned based on material properties including the design, inputs, production process, labour arrangements and distribution. However, immaterial or symbolic qualities including the reputation of the brand, marketing, the retail experience and consumption as identity construction are also key sources of value and differentiation. In an increasingly saturated marketplace, promising products that are high quality, ethical, authentic, green or exclusive has become a popular strategy to 'stand out in the crowd.' Yet, the mechanisms through which these qualities are imbued, projected and evaluated remain poorly understood.

In general, studies tend to focus on one aspect of the process, such as design or marketing, without considering how the qualities of a product can evolve over time. Although the qualification process is understood to be socially constructed through the interplay between users, suppliers, intermediaries and producers across the entire value chain, empirical examples that highlight this interplay are difficult to find (Jansson and Waxell 2011). Similarly, there has been a consistent lack of research explicitly addressing the geographic origins and dimensions of specific qualities. Experiences have often been used to help differentiate and add value to traditional goods and services but there is a need to study them as products in their own right (Lorentzen 2009). Moreover, it is imperative to explore the implications of digital technologies and spaces for existing strategies while also theorizing the ability of virtual worlds and online forums to hybridize and create new qualities and mechanisms of qualification. Finally, it is important to apply a critical lens to these processes and to question the effectiveness and sustainability of these market dynamics.

This session will provide a forum to highlight and unpack research from diverse conceptual and empirical perspectives that address the use of qualities as agents of difference and the qualification process.

Potential topics may include but are not limited to:

- Conceptual critiques of the usefulness of quality and qualification
- The construction of qualities and value within socially embedded networks
- The role that producers, intermediaries and consumers play in the construction of qualities
- The active and reflexive role that economic agents play in the positioning, projecting and qualification of products
- The relative and evolving importance of different qualities

- Case studies on quality-driven fields such as food, craft and manufacturing and emerging sites of quality including services, experiences and the cultural industries
- The implications of digital technologies and spaces on the creation and consumption of new and existing qualities
- The spatial dynamics of the construction of quality
- How specific places are increasingly viewed as products that can be produced, marketed and consumed
- Challenges and innovative solutions to the maintenance and sustainability of specific qualities and the qualification process more broadly

**Please submit abstracts (of no more than 250 words) by Wednesday January 25th, 2012 to Brian Hracs ([brian.hracs@kultgeog.uu.se](mailto:brian.hracs@kultgeog.uu.se)) and Jenny Sjöholm ([jenny.sjoholm@kultgeog.uu.se](mailto:jenny.sjoholm@kultgeog.uu.se)).**