

SUBTHEME 01

Alternative Spaces/Places of Organizing: Communities, Collective Agency and Social Change

Subtheme Conveners:

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The ongoing financial crisis and the fractures in the hegemonic discourses and practices of capitalist relations have both delegitimized dominant organizational forms, and opened a space within which alternatives can proliferate. Within this space we find a wide range community initiatives and new organizational forms striving to reverse the damaging effects of the crisis on individuals, communities and families, but also to prefigure alternative ways of organizing an economy on more democratic, participative, and equal grounds. At the centre of these organizational forms are contestations over space and place. Strategies of occupation, whether of a public square or park, or an unprofitable factory, create a potent co-presence within which to experiment with new forms of organizing: a kind of social laboratory. But they also actively contest the hegemonic constructions of space as privatized and enclosed. Hegemonic forms of spatial enclosure, structured around private property and the regulation of access through monetary exchange have long been critiqued in the social sciences. Recall, for example, Marx's observation that access to the 'hidden abode of production' was restricted by the edict 'No admittance except on business' (Marx, 1976: 276).

This is not to say that space and place have only become contested with the rise of the Occupy movement. From The Diggers on St George's Hill in England during the civil war, through anti-nuclear occupations, the recent protests in Latin America, Turkey and South Europe, in to the more practical expedient of squatting (SEK, 2013), transition towns (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010). Such contestations are not only directly economic, they are also phenomenological and even pedagogic, enabling a

radical transformation of subjectivity and its emplacement in a concrete, spatial assemblage (Cato and Myers 2011).

In working toward social change, these movements actively engage in forms of political activity and re-organization, building new networks of care around the contested terrain of the community (Land, 2009), inhabiting urban activist/creative places and engaging with social or 'public entrepreneurial' practices (Hjorth, 2013). Blurring boundaries between work and life, and between politics and entrepreneurship, new organisational forms - from occupied factories to social centres and even co-working collectives - enable individuals and networks to express their discontent demanding not only their right to employment but also genuine social participation and democratic engagement as a response to disintegrating established social/institutional structures and policies. The question however remains as to whether these collective, global assemblages can constitute new domains in public life and the re-organization of space/place so as to contribute to social transformation.

In this stream we would like to combine the analysis of these organizational and social movements with an understanding of space and place, to connect locally grounded, community initiatives to the global spaces and flows of capitalist organizing. The phenomenon of self-organized social space and alternative places of social engagement have not still been fully explored and incorporated in the study of urban, social (policy) relationships (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2011; Skelton and Gough, 2013), despite theoretical innovations like the 'critical relational geographies turn' (Thrift, 1996; 1999; Amin and Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Jensen, 2006; 2009) or the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Thrift, 1996; Cresswell, 2006). Instead, most analysis to date has remained decidedly fixed and 'a-mobile'. We want to problematize sedentary approaches that treat organizations as fixed dwellings or fixed geographical containers for social processes. We aim to challenge disciplinary boundaries and explore social-spatial life as a phenomenon of multiple and extended connections, organized through certain nodes or places of intermittent movement. For example we might think of such movements as 'corridors' (Lassen, 2006) of organizing functioning as complex intersections of 'endless regimes of flow', or we might analyze organization in terms of movement, constituting organization in terms of different speeds, scales and viscosities (Law, 2006). These ways of thinking space and place complement the new strategies and organizations of space through occupation or counter-hegemonic, creative movement. In both

theory and practice (if such a separation is sensible) new forms of organization and community engagement are made possible.

In this stream, we would like to pursue these 'corridors' and movements in terms of alternative organization. In thinking of power and resistance in such ways, we invite contributions from theorists and activists, reflecting on practices of spacing, placing, movement, occupation and assemblage as collaborative urban social processes. We see such interventions as socially co-constitutive formations that re-imagine social and organizational relations (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013). Claiming back the city through self-organized, interventionary engagement with urban vacuoles and the creation of grassroots, self-managed social hubs, alternative communities demonstrate the importance of embedding urban interventions in a process of assembling new socialites that inspire and mobilize social solidarity and collective action.

Whilst the city offers a particularly fecund place for rethinking organization and the polis, we would not want to restrict our analysis to the urban, and welcome papers and interventions addressing the rural, or the rural/urban boundary, and the intersection of both with the virtual world. Digital assemblages construct and intersect with alternative spaces in a complex way as 'digital space is embedded and not a purely technological event' (Sassen 2006: 347), a point that has recently come to the fore in the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) to organize movements to contest physical spaces, like the occupation of Tahrir Square. In an open and inclusive spirit, we thus invite papers that engage with the following topics (the list is not exhaustive):

- What are the potentials of occupation as a resistance strategy? How have recent waves of occupation differed from historical precursors?
- How are socio-spatial alternatives organized in local and trans-local environments and how do they interact with established institutional agents and structures? How do they resist/change/subvert them?
- What are the entrepreneurial practices and processes that support the emergence and evolution of alternative spaces and community organizing initiatives?

- What are the motives and the social values that drive individuals and collectives towards the formation and transformation of resistance networks and new forms of organization?
- How do reflexive learning and socially transformative engagement and collaboration intersect with space and place?
- What are the difficulties that these new arrangements encounter and what are the strategies they gradually develop to create sustainable territories of possibility for new organizational forms?
- How are the spatial arrangements of power responding to these new strategies and what challenges might these present?

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