



Wageningen School
of Social Sciences

The politics of Place: Spatial thinking in the social sciences

Coordination
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In collaboration with
James Ferguson
Scott Prudham
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Hannah Wittman

April 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, 2017
May 8, 9, 2017

**Course organised by the Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS),
Wageningen University**

Introduction & objectives of the course

Today, the concept of socially produced or constructed space appears in publications with little apparent need for justification or explanation. Yet it was not so long ago that “space” was generally ignored in social theory. It was generally accepted that sociology had a historical rationality. During most of the 19th and 20th centuries, sociology was concerned with explaining (and forecasting) the making of the world, applying a preconceived picture of what modernity was supposed to be. Conceptualizations like “stages of development”, “phases”, and “backwardness” were expressions of the social as intervals on a time-scale. Difference was explained from a perspective of stage or phase difference, thus time. Eventually, the obsession with time and history in modern thought came together with a loss of a “spatial consciousness.” In this course, we critically engage with the spatial turn in social sciences. Building upon a brief introduction into the return of spatial thinking in the social sciences since the 1970s, we will discuss three themes: *our understanding of the local* in relation to one of the key-concerns in development studies, the social organization of time and space in global capitalism, *constructions of the rural* in relation to the urban and *constructions of nature* in relation to the emergence of a new political economy.

Local and global

Much of what has been written about the global invokes the notion of an annihilation of space by time, representing the contemporary world as one of flows and connections, in which distances are considered as no longer existent, hence the idea of a ‘global village’. Yet does this idea survive a critical inspection? Referring to the work of Doreen Massey, we will introduce the concept of ‘power-geometry’ as means to question unequal development, namely the ways different social groups and different individuals in different areas are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and connections, that some are more in charge of mobility than others. Developing our thinking even a step further, we will question the distinction between the locale as the ‘in here’ and the global as the ‘out there’, and introduce a relational approach which does not conceptualize globalization in terms of boundaries and relative or hierarchical positions between scales, but in terms of connections and (power) relations.

Rural and urban

The classic nineteenth century thinkers devoted comparatively little attention to the rural, concentrating their work on the coincidence of the urban-industrial as the modern spatial and socio-economic “setting” of modern life. While the urban-industrial was considered contemporary and developed, dynamic and active, modern and progressive, the rural was regarded as archaic and backward, static and passive, traditional and conservative. The rural emerged as a residual category in our thinking of modern society. Over time, rural sociology has been plagued by the question of what the rural is. Some have argued that the rural is a socio-spatial category, namely, the space of agriculture. However such definitions are intrinsically instable, as shown by the occupational basis of rural populations, which has become only loosely connected with agriculture today. Attempts to differentiate the rural and the urban on the basis of other social characteristics, such as population size and density, have also proved untenable. Again others have argued that the urban ‘exploded’ into the countryside and the world we live in has become one of planetary urbanization, leaving us behind with the question not only what, but also where the rural has gone?

Nature and capital

A rich body of literature investigates the many ways in which nature is impacted upon and transformed by capital. In this course, we will look at how nature and biodiversity in specific places (*in situ*) are increasingly turned into commodities that can be traded in international financial markets. This process of leaving material nature untouched while at the same time having it circulate in commodity markets is accomplished by monetising and calculating its so-called “environmental and ecosystem services.” In this course, we will critically discuss the spatial and material implications of this move and the subsequent challenges and prospects it holds for conservation.

For whom?

The course “*Spatial thinking in the social sciences*” is intended for PhD candidates in the social, environmental, and political sciences. In this course, we will move between close reading of texts, workshops, and discussion. Students following this course will not only learn to think about place as an analytical category, but also learn to “work with place,” by applying various perspectives to concrete cases.

Students participating in this course are expected to write a short statement (max. 1 page A4) to: i) introduce who they are in terms of disciplinary background and education ii) outline how they engage with issues of urban, rural, and/or natural place/space or spatial thinking, iii) questions or issues on place/space with which they would like to engage, and iv) expectations from the course.

Target group and learning outcomes

The course is primarily developed for PhD candidates in the social, environmental and political sciences and geography with an interest in development studies, urban and rural studies, and land use (planning).

After successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- Understand the relational approach to the study of place and space (the urban and the rural, city and village)
- Critically reflect on the relational approach and evaluate its value for social science research
- Apply a spatial-relational approach to her/his own field of research
- Compare and critically assess different approaches to study the character of place and space in a globalizing and urbanizing society
- Engage in active learning and critical thinking.

Assumed prior knowledge

MSc in geography, planning, landscape architecture, social sciences, political sciences or environmental sciences

Course fees

For PhDs of WASS and WIMEK/SENSE there is a fee of 300 euros. For all other participants and for staff members (fellows/post docs), there is a fee of 600 euros for the whole course (including drinks, lunches, course materials and a course dinner).

Session Times/ Outline of the Course in Hours

The course is 4 ECTS. The students are expected to read the course-material in advance. Reading guidelines will be provided.

Program

Wednesday, April 19: Special session with Hannah Wittman
 Friday, April 21: Special session with Hannah Wittman Introduction and the Local-Global debate
 Monday, April 24: Rural-Urban
 Tuesday, April 25: Nature-Capital and the socio-ecological fix
 Wednesday, April 27: -
 Thursday, April 26: afternoon (excursion) (Joost Jongerden, Rik Eweg)
 Friday, April 28: Special session with Scott Prudham
 May 8 & May 9: Special sessions with James Ferguson

(A detailed program including reading will be communicated later)

Teaching methods

The course offers combination of different educational activities:

- i) *Lectures* to introduce and explain theoretical approaches on place/space as well as contextualize these theoretical approaches.
- ii) *Self-study* to further develop the understanding of the theoretical approaches discussed.
- iii) *Assignments* in which to apply a relational approach to the student's own field of work
- iv) *Workshops* to plenary discuss literature and assignments.
- v) *Presentations* by participants

Lecturers

James Ferguson is the Susan S. and William H. Hindle Professor in the School of Humanities and Sciences, and Professor in the Department of Anthropology. His research has focused on southern Africa (especially Lesotho, Zambia, South Africa, and Namibia), and has engaged a broad range of theoretical and ethnographic issues. Running through much of his work is a concern with how discourses organized around concepts such as "development" and "modernity" intersect the lives of ordinary people.

Joost Jongerden is an assistant professor at Center for Space, Place and Society of Wageningen University and has a special appointment as Professor at the Asian Platform for Global Sustainability & Transcultural Studies at Kyoto University in Japan. His main interest is the relation between people, place and power, not only looking at how we do things with place, but also how the crafting of social alternatives comes together with the construction of different spatialities. His area of interest is Turkey and Kurdistan

Scott Prudham is a Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning, cross appointed to the School of the Environment at the University of Toronto. He is a former Editor of the journal *Geoforum*, and past-President of the University of Toronto Faculty Association. His research is situated at the intersection of environmental politics, environmental change, and

political economy. Specific topics include the development of property and regulatory regimes within the commercialization of genetically modified organisms and food in Canada; the uptake of market based instruments in environmental regulation and the institutionalization of so-called “green capitalism”; and the political ecology of industrial and alternative forestry in western North America.

Bahar Şimşek is a research assistant at the Radio Television and Film Department of Ankara University, Turkey. Her research interest is spatial and linguistic variables in film studies. In the context of this interest, she treats urban and rural as the main sites of antinomies of modern subjects. The emergence of the rural as a space of subjectification is a central issue in her work.

Hannah Wittman is professor at the University of British Columbia and her research examines the ways that the rights to produce and consume food are contested and transformed through struggles for agrarian reform, food sovereignty, and agrarian citizenship. Her projects include community-based research on farmland access, transition to organic agriculture, and seed sovereignty in British Columbia, agroecological transition and the role of institutional procurement in the transition to food sovereignty in Ecuador and Brazil, and the role that urban agriculture and farm-to-school nutrition initiatives play in food literacy education.

Requirements and ECTS

4 credits (according to European Credit Transfer System)

Location

The sessions will be held in building “De Leeuwenborch”, Hollandseweg 1 in Wageningen, The Netherlands. The exact rooms will be announced later.

Registration

Registration is possible electronically via the WASS courses page:

<http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Education-Programmes/PhD-Programme/Graduate-Schools/Wageningen-School-of-Social-Sciences/Courses/Registration.htm>

The maximum number of participants is set at 20, the minimum at 10.

Please make sure that you provide the most recent contact details so that in case of any changes you will be notified promptly. After your internet registration you will receive a short notification that your name has been registered. At least two weeks before the course you will receive a confirmation about the location and the schedule. WASS will also send an invoice to the address indicated in the registration form.

Please e-mail to Marcella.Haan@wur.nl in case you have not received the second confirmation two weeks before the course.

Cancellations

Cancellations may be made free of charge until 1 month before the start of the course. Cancellation fee of 100 % applies if participants cancel the course less than 1 month prior to

the course. The organisers have a right to cancel the course not later than 1 month before the course starts. The participants will be notified of any changes at their e-mail addresses.

Further information

On course content please contact the course organiser, Joost Jongerden (RSO). He can be reached through mail at joost.jongerden@wur.nl

On WASS: www.wageningenur.nl/wass

For details about the logistics, accommodation, registration, fees, study materials, etc.

please contact

Marcella Haan

Tel +31 317 484126

Marcella.haan@wur.nl

Contact addresses:

Wageningen School of Social Sciences

Wageningen University

Hollandseweg 1

6706 KN WAGENINGEN

The Netherlands

Useful information on accommodation for participants from outside Wageningen

Wageningen International Centre,
Hof van Wageningen: 75 euro for 1
person room, 98.50 euros for 2 persons
room (including breakfast)

<http://www.hofvanwageningen.nl/>

Hotel de Wageningseberg: 62.50 euro 1
person room, 97.50 euro for 2 persons
room (including breakfast)

www.wageningseberg.com

Hotel Nol in 't Bosch: 83,50 euro for 1
person room, 110 euro for 2 persons
room, also including breakfast;

<http://www.nolintbosch.nl/>

Hotel de Nieuwe Wereld (Hotel School):
50-60 euro for a 1 person room.

<http://www.denieuwewereld.nl> (only in
Dutch)

Bed&Breakfast De Heksenspeeltuin:

25 euro for a 1 person room

Eindhovenstraat 15, 6706JA Wageningen

Phone: +31 317-418161

E-mail: callyd@zonnet.nl

www.heksenspeeltuin.nl

Villaria Bed en Breakfast:

32-38 euro for a 1 person room

Nassauweg 21, 6703CG Wageningen

Phone: +31 317-419636

Emai: villaria@hari.demon.nl

Ons Bakhuus Bed & Breakfast:
 25 euro for a 1 person room
 Dolderstraat 64, 6706 JG Wageningen
 Phone.:+31 317-411994
 E-mail: janny.wijbo@chello.nl

45 euro for a 1 person room
 Generaal Foulkesweg 8, 6703 BR
 Wageningen
 Phone: +31 317-410747
 E-mail: glindenbergh@wanadoo.nl

Knollywood Bed & Breakfast:
 35 euro for a 1 person room
 L. Roggeveenstraat 39, 6708 SL
 Wageningen
 Phone: +31 317-420970
 E-mail: Knollywood@hetnet.nl

Het Torentje Bed & Breakfast:
 60 euro for a 1 person room
 Nassauweg 19, 6703 CG Wageningen
 Phone: +31 (0)6 55 802 865
 e-mail: info@het-torentje.nl
 website: <http://www.het-torentje.nl>

De Herbergh Bed & Breakfast:

From Schiphol Amsterdam Airport to Wageningen

At the Airport you can buy a train ticket in the 'arrivals' area by the baggage claims. You will see the sign "Train tickets" near the exit. Then follow the signs 'Nederlandse Spoorwegen' (NS) or 'Trains and busses' to the railway station.

Purchase a one-way ticket to the Ede-Wageningen train station, this will cost € 14,10 (plus a service charge if you buy the ticket at the ticket counter). It is also possible to buy the ticket from the ticket vending machines in the station.

There are direct connections from Schiphol Amsterdam Airport to Ede-Wageningen every 30 minutes. Additionally, twice an hour there is a connecting service from Schiphol to Ede-Wageningen where you have to change trains in Utrecht. The destination boards on the platform will indicate the different stations where the train will stop. Check for the names Ede-Wageningen or Utrecht and board the train and when necessary change in Utrecht. The trip from Schiphol to Ede-Wageningen takes you a bit more than one hour.

For Dutch train connections use www.ns.nl, www.thalys.com, www.db.de



The train station is not located directly in Wageningen. This lack is fully compensated by fair means of transportation by buses and taxis. From railway station Ede-Wageningen you can take a taxi (approx. 15 min.). Taxis leave at the north side of the station. You can also come by bus: line 52 (direction Wageningen/ Arnhem) departs from the north side of the station or bus line 88 (Valleilijn, direction Wageningen) leaves from the south side of the station. You have to purchase a ticket from the driver in the bus, which will cost about 2 euros.

Preliminary Program (detailed program and reading will be announced later)

April 21 and 24 Introduction and spatial conceptualizations

Joost Jongerden-Bahar Şimşek

Introduction to the course and discussion of opening propositions on spatial thinking. This is followed by the deconstruction of a debate in the social sciences about how to conceptualize the local and the global, introducing relational thinking and assemblage theory. We will continue the discussion of 'spatiality' by questioning our understandings of the urban and the rural as discrete entities and redefine the rural and the urban from a relational and assemblage analytical perspective.

April 25 Nature, capital and the socio-ecological fix

Scott Prudham

In this special session Scott Prudham will discuss how economic crises may be temporarily offset through transformations of nature that may be theorized specifically in terms of the production of nature. We will examine such process as "socio-ecological" fixes, building on David Harvey's idea of the 'spatial fix' as well as Neil Smith's theory of the production of nature. Our goal is to begin to understand the inter-relations among capitalist crisis tendencies, the production of spatial arrangements (including infrastructure), and the transformation of biophysical nature (including how these processes are contested in the spaces of everyday life).

April 26 and April 28 Changing relationship between land, citizenship, and power

Hannah Wittman

In the special sessions with Hannah Wittman we will discuss how struggles for land by contemporary grass-roots organizations prioritizes the creation of new rural social relations. She will link this debate to such themes as 1) agrarian citizenship 2) metabolic rift and 3) food sovereignty and urban agriculture.

May 8 and 9

James Ferguson Rural, urban and the political economy

In the special sessions with James Ferguson we will discuss changing notions of rurality and urbanity through political-economic shifts (in the 1980s and 1990s) and as a result of a new distributive political economy (since the 2000s). In *Give a Man a Fish*, Ferguson argued: "One powerful example of this reversal in South Africa is the shift from dependence of women, children and rural relatives on remittances from men working in the mines in the heyday of the apartheid economy, to the central distributive role played today by women and elderly people. The latter are the main beneficiaries of state grants, and disenfranchised men at the margin of the productive economy have increasingly come to rely on them." Relatedly, we will discuss the 'jobless city' and 'social responsibility'.

