International Conference
1st and 2nd of February, 2012

The sociology of critical approaches of sustainable development and the sustainable city

The notions of sustainable development and sustainable city are part of many researchers’ critical work. However this research is often fragmentary and the “sustainable” object is often secondary. Those two aspects can conceal the critical transversalities that lie within the topics of sustainable development and sustainable city.

Thus it would be appropriate to adopt a reflexive approach examining the theoretical, empirical and scientific foundations of these terms and the research objectives so many researchers focus on. Consequently, we would like to identify all the scientific disciplines involved in these critiques, depict their potential coherence but also the differences they face regarding the practical, the epistemological, the theoretical or any other aspect of the scientific work.

Therefore, this conference has multiple ambitions:

- First of all, it aims at laying the foundations of a sociology of the critical approaches of the sustainable development and the sustainable city.
- This conference should also be the occasion to form an informal network for these questions uniting the researchers carrying a reflexive approach onto their own work and other professionals.
- Afterwards, the publication of the colloquium’s proceedings in a scientific journal or a collective review could improve the readability of this critical diversity. In the mean time, some common theoretical points may become evident.
- Eventually, we would like to be part of the theorization of some foundations linked to sustainable development and the sustainable city, not only in the research area but also in terms of the users and the actors, the links that lie among them and those they could implement.

In order to achieve these goals we set out four research axes which are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. They rather represent a framework which might help researchers to situate their approach.

**Axis 1: An unsustainable growth?** (Moderators: C. Larrère, F. Flipo)

The social conventions structuring the situations and the communities currently suffer from a double process of globalization and fragmentation of society. Supported by most of the international institutions, the analysis of this double process distracts the attention paid to social inequalities towards ecological inequalities, for instance the ecological inequality linked to water-level rising. Consequently nature itself becomes a tool for the creation of a common good. In general, the question of ecological inequalities can be broached by considering the “relative rarity” of environmental goods. It rather focuses on « what nature can endure »

More radical, the concept of degrowth reveals some essential contradictions in the approach of sustainable development. However, to what extent can this radical alternative be nourished from other critical approaches in order to inspire them?

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Axis 2: A governance of conducts? (Moderators: Y. Rumpala, L. Pattaroni)

Approaches towards sustainable development try to control people’s conduct by inventing new practices of social responsibility, a governance able to organize a socialization going beyond the law. The inflation of characteristic indicators for these approaches show the increasing importance of governmental practices of change in terms of maintaining public order and regulating behaviors. In a broader approach, this justifies the deployment of these governmental politics regarding the environment, which is contrary to the dominant liberal construction. However can these governmental politics though also give some instruments able to surpass themselves?

Axis 3: A technical democracy? (Moderators: F. Chateauraynaud, T. Souami)

Notably, the question of the environmental politics is broached through the subject of technical democracy consisting essentially in knowing « how to enter sciences in democracy ». In this framework, the sense of sustainable development relies on the performance of its tools in order to deal with the stakes it raises. Concepts drawn by this research stream (hybrid forums, ballistics etc) are based on the principle of symmetry, which leads researchers to tackle to the construction processes of environmental struggles (GMO, High Speed Trains lines). However, is the focus on the procedural dimension of sustainability based on an excessive confidence in the critical potentialities of these measures?

Axis 4: An ecological justification? (Moderators: J. Boissonade, L. Devisme)

Often starting from an approach in terms of “arenas of public involvement”, the sociology of justification regarding environment firstly tried to identify the strategies, interests and justifications mobilized in infrastructure planning conflicts. Depending on the importance of transformations required, the “green greatness” highlighted by the actors on this occasion, tries either to integrate nature in existing justification orders or to lead to the elaboration of an additional order or even to profoundly question the common matrix of these orders and the support it offers to those critical approaches. Sustainable development is based on the belief in this last alternative in order to reverse the critique. Indeed institutions are the ones which often support this green greatness, facing atomized individuals. However, the latter daily put to the test the different measures which are stipulated.

The theme of the conference suggests many research leads from which only a few are described here. The stakes of this work in progress measure up the importance of a model which saturates the current legitimization modes of the institutions and of the experiences frameworks they try to implement.

Key Words

Sustainable development – Sustainable city - Critique – Urban democracy – Mobilization

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Organizer

Name: Jérôme BOISSONADE
Status and/or function: Lecturer in Sociology
Discipline: Social and Human Sciences (ULCO)
Name of the research laboratory at Paris 8: AUS (UMR LAVUE n° 7218)
E-mail: jboisson@msh-paris.fr

Date

1st and 2nd of February, 2012

Location


Committee in charge

Jérôme BOISSONADE, lecturer-researcher AUS (associated TVES) / UMR LAVUE
Katja HACKENBERG, lecturer-researcher University Cergy-Pontoise, AUS / UMR LAVUE
Gérard BAUDIN, lecturer-researcher AUS / UMR LAVUE
Albert LEVY, researcher CNRS, AUS / UMR LAVUE

Institutional and Financial partners

Research Group AUS
University Paris VIII
UMR LAVUE (CNRS)
Ecole Nationale d’Architecture Paris – Val de Seine (location and logistics)

Scientific committee

Chaired by:
Catherine LARRERE (axis 1): professor in philosophy (PHICO), University of Paris 1
And
Francis CHATEAURAYNAUD (axis 3): Director (GSPR), Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris

Moderators and responsible of axes:
Fabrice FLIPO (axis 1): associate professor in philosophy (ETOS), University of Evry
Luca PATTARONI (axis 2): lecturer (LASUR), Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne
Yannick RUMPALA (axis 2): professor in Political Sciences (ERMES), University of Nice Sophia Antipolis
Taoufik SOUAMI (axis 3): associate professor in urbanism (LATTIS) Institut Français d’Urbanisme
Jérôme BOISSONADE (axis 4): associate professor in Sociology (AUS - associated TVES), Littoral University, Dunkerque
Laurent DEVISME (axis 4): senior lecturer in Town Planning-Urbanism (LAUA), Ecole Supérieure d’Architecture de Nantes

Other members of the scientific committee:
ABDMOULEH Ridha: senior lecturer in Sociology (FLSH-GEDES), University of Sfax, Tunisia
BONNIN Philippe: research director (AUS), Paris
HACKENBERG Katja: associate professor in Sociology, associate professor in architecture (AUS), University Cergy-Pontoise
HRISTOVA, Svetlana: professor in cultural sociology, University of Sofia, Bulgaria
LEVY Albert: researcher in associated sociology (AUS), Paris
SUBREMON Hélène: post-PhD (AUS), Paris

Welcome public

Specialists, academics, PhD-Students, Students