

How daily life impacts social science

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Abstract - I would like to put forward my point of view as a French researcher on my Portuguese field of research (Mouraria/Lisbon). This reflection is thus the fruit of a back and forth between frequently used social science concepts – gentrification, fragmentation and segregation – and my own field experience. More precisely, I seek to understand why a gap exists between what we observed and these concepts. My hypothesis is that one possible answer lies in a conflict of temporalities: those of institutions and public organisations, those of companies, those of researchers and, finally, those of individuals who fall outside the previous categories. Starting with the latter, I approach the concept of daily life as a relationship between time and space, which is part of a process of remoteness based on the minimisation of risk as envisaged by Heideggerians. This tendency towards spatio-temporal proximity often contradicts our theoretical concepts.

Keywords - Temporalities, spatialities, concepts, spatial being, daily life.

Resumo - A reflexão proposta é a visão que tenho como investigador francês sobre a minha área de investigação portuguesa (Mouraria/Lisboa). Esta reflexão é, portanto, fruto de um vai-e-vem entre os conceitos das ciências sociais frequentemente utilizados – a saber, a gentrificação, a fragmentação e a segregação – e a minha própria experiência de campo. Mais precisamente, busco entender por que existe uma lacuna entre o que observamos e esses conceitos. Minha hipótese é que uma resposta possível encontra-se num conflito de temporalidades: as das instituições e órgãos públicos, as das empresas, as dos pesquisadores e, por fim, as dos indivíduos que não se enquadram nas categorias anteriores. A partir deste último, abordo o conceito de dia-a-dia como uma relação entre o tempo e o espaço, considerada como um processo de desfastamento baseado na minimização do risco tal como vislumbrado pelos heideggerianos. Essa tendência à proximidade espaço-tempo muitas vezes contradiz nossos conceitos teóricos.

Palavras-chaves - Temporalidades, espacialidades, conceitos, ser espacial, dia a dia.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of my research, I have encountered a number of concepts promoted and popularised by the social sciences. In France, among the best known are gentrification, fragmentation and segregation. These concepts have constituted a framework for the analysis of spatialised social processes that can (or could) serve both scientific and civic ambitions: scientific because our role as researchers is to generate knowledge; civic because the collective appropriation of this knowledge constitutes an important element of democratic debate. Based on these concepts, we produce narratives that are made available to public actors, whether they are institutional or not, so that they can use them to debate and act in the public space. Over the past forty years our approach has however been confronted with two obstacles: on the one hand, these concepts have been exhausted and are no longer infallible, either from the epistemological point of view, or from that of our observations in the field; on the other hand, although the institutional public actors easily grasp our concepts, citizens - especially when they are the subjects of our interviews - never use them, nor do they present a reality that could correspond to these concepts. As we enter the field of research, we need to consider the reasons for this dual difficulty and how we can avoid the pitfalls.

THE THEORETICAL DEBATE ON CONCEPTS: GENTRIFICATION, FRAGMENTATION AND SEGREGATION

In France, criticisms began within the social sciences by sociologists such as Bourdin and Paquot. The former doubts the conceptual relevance of gentrification and invites us to 'deconstruct' it (Bourdin, 2008: 33-37); while the latter writes about socio-spatial fragmentation: 'to say that a city is fragmented implies that it used to form a homogeneous whole and that from now on it is made up of different territories, like so many disparate pieces of a necessarily incomplete jigsaw puzzle' (Paquot, 2002: 113). As a result of these objections, fieldworkers have struggled to find a sufficiently tangible framework to justify certain research and form relevant conclusions. Some have sought scientific compromises: with regard to the central districts of Lyon, Authier (1995) concluded that a real process of gentrification could not be questioned, but he argued that its scope remained limited. Giroud (2007) attempted to link the resident (as an autonomous individual, i.e., capable of empowerment in public action) with the collective action of the group to which he belongs. Through what Giroud called 'resisting while living place', he perfectly illustrated the limits evoked by Authier concerning the process of gentrification.

Other researchers have shown that populations are capable of organising their own self-segregation and - whether rich or poor - can promote logics of self-segregation (Gaspar, 2003 and Capron, 2006). By pluralising the same concepts, some thought that they could be saved from extinction (Chabrol et al., 2016). Madoré (2013) more stringently denounces the works and discourses, which - according to him - without

scientific basis put forward an increase in socio-spatial fragmentation. In this, Madoré joins Préteceille (2006) in questioning the Paris region. To conclude this brief account of criticisms laid against the concepts that we are tasked with mobilising, I will mention the recent work on Nantes and Montreal which asserts that 'the right to a neighbourhood' and 'the social acceptance of gentrification' are not incompatible (Ghaffari, 2021).

The weakening of these concepts is due as much to theoretical criticism as to the numerous field studies that contradict their relevance. We must also add thereto the attempts to change the paradigm, thus resulting in the growing interest in mobility, whether physical, material, affective or opinion-based, which has led researchers to question the operational nature of the notion of territory on which these same concepts operate. Some researchers, such as Ascher (1995), concluded very early on that everything was in flux and that the future of cities no longer depended on their territories but on taking into account mobility and exchanges, independently of the location of societies. Fundamentally, we can ask ourselves: is the exhaustion of our concepts linked to the exhaustion of territory in research. In 2007, around twenty French geographers met at the 'Entretiens de la Cité de Grenoble' in an attempt to save the concept of territory or to justify its importance (Vanier, 2009). The concepts are certainly exhausted, but they are not yet dead.

When we start a scientific research project, we are not only entering a field where inhabitants [Isaac Joseph would have said 'considerable passers-by' (1984)] are traversed by remarkable dynamics; we are simultaneously entering a battlefield that presents two types of risks: that of a scientific approach that is impoverished with regard to its aims, and that of conceptual disorientation for the researcher. This is why we must return to the actor-subject, and try to examine what makes it difficult to link him to the concepts that we mobilise.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF TEMPORALITIES

We have all observed that the concepts that we utilise in the social sciences are rarely used by the people living in a given territory. When we interview the residents of a neighbourhood - as experienced by me in the working-class neighbourhood of Mouraria - none of them use the terms gentrification, fragmentation or segregation. None of them mention anything that could be even a rough definition of these concepts. It is as if what we identify in the scientific field is foreign to these populations.

Conversely, institutional, professional or associative public actors appropriate and easily use these same concepts. For some, it is a matter of promoting their aims in the public arena by embellishing them with scientific legitimacy; for others, this same legitimacy grants access to a public arena (Cefai, 1996) where controversies and conflicts over the use of territory are constructed. The mastery of concepts is the result of what researchers call 'the rise in generality' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991): in addition to legitimising the justification of an actor's discourse, it makes negotiation, arrangements or agreements possible.

The associations created around dominated actors experience difficulties similar to those of the researcher: a relative indifference on the part of the residents they are supposed to mobilise and represent. These associations are, however, not always the product of dominated actors: historical leaders have often been politicised, whilst others may not be natives, or - thanks to social media and the Internet - may not reside, or even have been to the territory in question. All the associations already have a certain empowerment and autonomy. When I study the number of members in these associations, I see that there are few contributors, and some even receive public subsidies. When they organise events in the public space - for example, on the subject of “right to the city” or “housing” - participants are often limited to the most dedicated activists, sometimes accompanied by the most blatant victims of public policies. With, of course, a few exceptions, the majority of the populations concerned remain absent.

We could apply the same analysis by adopting the point of view of public institutions: rehabilitation or requalification projects, and more generally land-use planning projects, remain poorly used. Despite the legitimacy conferred in a democratic system by the vote, populations are at best indifferent, at worst hostile, and otherwise intermittently suspicious. This is likely the reason for efforts to develop participatory and so-called permanent democratic modes in most municipalities. Nevertheless, if we look at the case of Lisbon, between 2007 (date of the first participatory budget) and 2019, participation barely exceeded 50,000 votes (2016) out of 500,000 inhabitants.

Working on socio-spatial interactions, their characteristics, but also their effects, translated into a narrative and supported by concepts becomes in this context a challenge. Like all young researchers, my first contact with the field was particularly challenging: The municipal and associative doors were relatively easily opened to me, whereas those of the residents, passers-by and inhabitants closed very quickly. When I asked them if they would agree to take part in interviews, the answers were of two types: They replied either that they did not have the time, or that they did not consider themselves competent, and referred me to association leaders. The difficulty with going through associations is that they filter topics according to their interests. Such an attitude remains useful for analysing the postures and discourses of associative actors, but it deprives us of access to a point of view that is essential to our research: that of public actors who are not part of institutional, associative or professional arrangements, and who are by far the most numerous in the spaces we are studying.

During the preparation of my thesis (Galhardo, 2018a), and in light of the situation, I adopted a strategy that drew parallels to anthropological methods: I entered the neighbourhood early in the morning, I had breakfast there, and then spent the day in the area until the evening, leaving after dinner. I ate meals in the same places as the residents, sometimes at the same table. I visited the same stores, bought the same

products, and took naps on the public benches between two strolls. Whenever the opportunity arose, I conversed with the residents on subjects that had absolutely nothing to do with my thesis work: the banalities of daily life... (Mondada, 2003). After a few weeks, a resident approached me and asked if I had seen José? Of course, I didn't know any José in this neighbourhood, but I understood that I was part of the landscape. What does it mean to be part of a landscape? It is not being an individual of the indigenous community, nor even being fully recognized, but being in tune with the temporality of the inhabitants of the place, in the place they inhabit.

I could therefore envisage interviewing them, but I could not do so in the same manner as the institutional and associative actors. With the latter, one must make an appointment, agree on a place and meet with a pencil, paper and tape recorder on the table. Here too, it is a question of time: the adjustment of the researcher's temporalities with those of the institutions (or associations) does not require the same effort: it is contractual, and each has a particular interest in it. With the residents, we must seize the moment when they pass within our reach, we have to walk beside them, follow them wherever they go, sit on a bench and sometimes lie down on the steps or have a drink in a bistro. In other words, we have to renounce the sacred time of municipal public action to enter the profane time of the residents' daily life. In the case of residents, an arrangement is almost impossible: one must be tamed, like the Fox in *Le Petit Prince* de St Exupéry.

Time plays an essential role in the encounter between the researcher and their subject: they must strip themselves of scientific time to enter into a vernacular time. The situation is not comfortable because it is not always possible to record these interviews so as not to betray the relationship with my interlocutors. It is these difficulties that led me to the method of analysis by photo-elicitation (Bigando, 2013). This method consists of analysing a photographic production proposed by the subjects. Under these conditions, the subjects accept to be recorded because they produce a narrative that they can control, this rebalances the researcher-subject relationship. Because of this method, the subjects suspend the contingencies of their daily lives to tell you about their spatio-temporal relationships through a photographic narrative. We are very close to a sound photo album construction, which deals with an inventory of relations to the dynamics of familiar places.

THE REVELATION OF THE "SPATIAL BEING"

Homo quotidianus cannot apprehend the concepts we use because they cannot be perceived in the short term or in a stable space. The speed and temporality of the processes of *gentrification*, *segregation* or *fragmentation* diverge from those of everyday contingencies. The same is true for spatialities: while the concepts only concern a precise scale, daily life positions the public actor in a wide variety of scales (home, streets, neighbourhoods, city...). Speaking of *gentrification* implies denying the temporalities and spatialities of the public actor. The latter enters a blind spot

where it becomes invisible for institutions, associations and, no doubt, for many researchers. What other alternative is conceivable here?

By carefully studying the order of presentation of the images and the nature of the discourse of the subjects interviewed, I identified a number of recurring matters. Initially, I asked each of my subjects to choose 10 photographs to present their neighbourhood to me. The subjects were then asked to present each photograph to me in any order they wished. It is important to remember that the studied panel includes subjects of different occupations, age and sex. None of them knew each other or the other subjects being interviewed. During the interviews, all residents spontaneously proposed a narrated progression of photographs in the following order:

1. images of the place where they live,
2. images of the social places they frequent,
3. images of urban representations, beyond the first two scales.

The narratives therefore all begin on a small scale (around the home) and a short time frame (that of daily life). They then extend to a larger scale (that of the city) in a longer period (the life of the city). The last series of photographs, corresponding to the representation of the city, evoke municipal interventions and sometimes the action of neighbourhood associations. I observed that the subjects' narration was first precise (in the small spatio-temporal scale), and then became uncertain (in the large scale). This uncertainty is not only the result of disinterest or ignorance, but is also shaped by the idea of risk in daily life. Having conducted similar work with public institutions responsible for implementing urban regeneration projects, I have observed the opposite phenomenon:

1. the urban decor marked by the use of mineral materials, pacified and empty of inhabitants (large scale)
2. idealised social places in artificial images (medium scale)
3. harmless passing residents with uncertain destinations (small scale)

For the public actors that carry out regeneration projects, what is unclear, uncertain and dangerous for urbanity are working-class neighbourhoods that escape urban norms. This explains the justification for municipal interventions: to bring into the urban order what escapes this order in working-class neighbourhoods (waste management, traffic, parking, uses of space deemed transgressive, etc.). The meeting of these two opposing views of public space can explain the conflicts caused by municipal policies (Galhardo, 2018b). The existence of uncertainty about different objects, the impossibility for each to take into account the spatio-temporal scale of the other, and even different conceptions of urban order, all contribute to the emergence of controversies and conflicts. This is where the role of the associations is essential because they attempt to articulate these two types of viewpoints.

How is a researcher situated in these spatio-temporal logics? The researcher has been educated (by his studies and work) for temporalities closer to those of the

institutions than to those of the residents. His thesis was completed in 3 or 5 years, his research programmes are based on timeframes that are barely longer. They are necessarily very distant from the space-time of the residents. Consequently, when they talk about gentrification, they are as Cassandra who is alarmed about the fate of Troy but is not heard by those who live a different story in a different place. What would it take for them to be heard?

I pursued this perspective not from the stance of sociologists, but from that of philosophers interested in the relationship between the individual and space-time (Cohen and Zagury-Orly, 2008; Dastur, 2008), in particular those who reflect within the framework of phenomenology. Heidegger (1927) reminded us that we cannot separate what makes place from what binds it to those who inhabit it. These researchers point to the considerable complexity of the relationship between the individual and space. A complexity consisting of changes in scale, randomness, bricolage, etc. (Lascombes and Galès, 2005). In daily life, the subject experiences space in a permanent tension between determination and indeterminacy. They are led to deconstruct objective spatial distances by a process known as dislocation, which, according to the authors, reveals 'an essential tendency towards proximity' (Franck, 1986). They are led to do this because it is a question of reducing the uncertainty with which they are constantly confronted.

The author of *Être et le temps* urges us to think about the individual not so much as a "person" understood as an archetype, but as a "being" open to the world whose nature is inscribed in finitude. It is this awareness of finitude that drives individuals to act (individually or collectively) by defining actionable strategies. As we have discovered in our fieldwork, many of the narratives delivered during individual interviews convey anxiety over the end of an order that is linked to the contingencies of their own daily life. Alain Bourdin (1984) devotes several pages to the question of 'guarantee', and concludes his work with the idea that 'objects preserve us from death' (p. 227). He develops the same idea around the question of uncertainty (2012: 30-31) as experienced by each actor in a given place. Intervention in public space is always an accident for the daily life of the inhabitants which plunges them into uncertainty. They are forced to evaluate risk and to think about the consequences for their relationship with the place, before redefining the contours of their daily life and symmetrically redefining their relationship to space.

CONCLUSION: FOR A SCIENCE OF SOCIO-SPATIAL EXPERIENCE

Perec wrote:

"I would like there to be stable, immobile, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable places, unchanging, rooted (...). Such places do not exist, and it is because they do not exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, and ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I must constantly mark it, designate it; it is never mine; it is never given to me, I must conquer it" (1974: 122-123).

His reflection encapsulates the question of uncertainty and risk, the difficulty of finding a clear and stable spatial definition, such as to understand the link between the actor and space. Perec shows the importance of the body in the appropriation of inhabited space. All these questions are in fact linked.

If our classical concepts have become exhausted, it is because we have not been able to take sufficient account of the 'spatial being' seized by the uncertainty inherent in the contingencies and complexity of daily life. Given the temporal nature of research, and what it implies for the researcher's position, taking into account the 'spatial being' implies an effort to reveal and evaluate the latter's strategies in relation to those of the dominant actors. This forces us to be particularly attentive not only to the methods we use, but also to the "considerable passer-by" (*ibid*, 1984). In the end, assuming that social science manages to take into account and analyse the relations between the strategies of the "spatial being" and those of the "dominant actors", it then becomes a science of experience with a pragmatic aim. In this way, it can both satisfy its commitment to the dominated social categories and construct its own epistemology.

What happens to the classical concepts of *gentrification*, *fragmentation* and *segregation*? They become artefacts capable of unravelling the complexity of socio-spatial dynamics over time. That is to say theoretical models whose simplification can constitute practical tools for the public actor. These tools remain dedicated to observation, reflection, the implementation of field experiments, but should not be confused with scientific knowledge. By not confusing tools and processes, we can hope to produce scientific knowledge and meet the expectations of citizens.

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