KNOWLEDGE ENVIRONMENTS. SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Presenter: Peter Meusburger holds a PhD in geography from Innsbruck University (Austria). In 1983 he was offered a chair of Social and Economic Geography at Heidelberg University. In 2007 he became the first Distinguished Senior Professor at Heidelberg University. His main research interests are spatial and social disparities of educational achievement; the nexus between knowledge and space; milieu of creativity; relations between knowledge and power; spatial “mobility” of knowledge; knowledge and economic performance, and related fields. Peter Meusburger is editor of the series “Knowledge and Space”. One of his recent publications is the Wissenschaftsatlas of Heidelberg University: Spatio-Temporal Relations of Academic Knowledge Production (in German 2011, in English 2012). He was awarded the Presidential Achievement Award of the Association of American Geographers in 2010.

Abstract: There exists broad consensus that science has a history. But does science also have a geography? Was science not supposed to be placeless? In recent years scholars have pointed out that the generation and diffusion of scientific knowledge is influenced by local knowledge environments and spatial relations, that scientific practices vary in different places, that universities are not simply locations but social spaces, epistemic venues, and knots of scientific networks with differing degrees of resources, authority, and reputation.

Talent, motivation, and wealth of ideas are not the only characteristics determining how successfully a scholar’s research and academic career develop. A number of external factors come to bear as well, such as material and nonmaterial resources; the availability of research infrastructure; institutional regulations; formal organizational structures; integration in international networks; and not least the experiences, scientific stimuli, and critique of other scholars active at the same site. A university’s knowledge environment is definable as the result of systematic interdependencies and causal interactions relevant for the generation and diffusion of scientific knowledge.

In my paper I address four questions: What elements make up a local knowledge environment? How can a local knowledge environment affect learning and research processes? How can an explanation of a knowledge environment’s impact avoid the trap of determinism? How can we measure the impact of a knowledge environment.

CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES OF GEOGRAPHIES FROM AN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Presenter: Judit Timár is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Békéscsaba and teaches at several universities (in Szeged, Debrecen and Gödöllő). She has held various visiting positions in Europe and North America. She was an editor of the ‘European Urban and Regional Studies’ and on the editorial advisory board of the ‘ACME’, the ‘Gender, Place and Culture’ and serves on three editorial boards of Hungarian social science journals. She was a full member of the Gender and Geography Committee of the IGU and still works as a member of the steering committee of the International Critical Geography Group. She has been working on suburbanization, gentrification, peripheralisation and gendered spaces of socialism and post-socialism. Her research interest focuses also on the peculiarities of knowledge production, especially in critical and feminist geographies in Hungary and East-Central Europe.

Abstract: In this paper I will revisit the European debate organised for the promotion of a real internationalization of academic discourses in geography more than a decade ago. Relying on the experiences of the special era of post-socialist transition in Hungary, my then point was that if there was convergence between the national “schools” of geography within Europe, then it was, at best, “uneven convergence”. What are the recent tendencies, scales, dimensions and possible social results of convergences and divergences?

Discussing this question in the context of power relations I will concentrate on i) the changing practices and socio-economic sources of Anglo-American and/or Western hegemony in the geographical knowledge production in the enlarged European Union, ii) the growing diversity of epistemological approaches and the potential results of the generational differences in the positionalities, iii) the dangers of the divergence between theory and practice, academic and “lay” discourses.