



CALL FOR PAPERS

GIS Sociability/Sociabilités Conference 23-24 MAY 2019
University of Western Brittany, BREST

Sociable Spaces in the Long Eighteenth Century (1650-1850) ***from Present-day Perspectives: Europe and its Imperial Worlds***

The GIS (an interdisciplinary Research Interest Group) Sociability/Sociabilités in the long eighteenth century (1650-1850) aims at exploring the different models of sociability that emerged and circulated in Europe and its imperial worlds. In addition to understanding European sociability, we wish to understand how those modes of sociability were imitated, adapted, transformed and exported to European colonial empires through a process of hybridization.

This international conference will be sponsored by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Framework Programme (H2020-MSCA-RISE 2018) DIGITENS and will interrogate the evolution of the long eighteenth-century's *sociable spaces* and their persistence in time. Analysing the interaction of sociability and space and the modes of construction of *sociable spaces* from the modern period to the present day will shed new light on the history of European and imperial societies.

The eighteenth century in Europe saw the emergence of new forms of sociability and the creation of new places devoted to sociable practices. By deeply transforming urban centres and by structuring people's social relationships, those sociable practices became increasingly identified with their spatial features. They were naturally imitated in the colonies and adapted to their diverse local contexts.

The connection between space and society was theorised by the Chicago interactionist school in the 1920s (Park & Burgess, *The City*, 1925) and contemporary researchers have been equally keen to show how spatial theories apply to the production of urban social space (H. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 1974; E. Soja & Allen J. Scott. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, 1989; Michel de Certeau. *L'invention du quotidien*. 1980) and how space can shape social identity (P. Grandjean, *Construction identitaire et espace*, 2009), favour inclusion or, conversely, exclusion. The long eighteenth

century in particular played an important part in the formulation of social theories of space and society, particularly in the works of Habermas (*L'Espace public: archéologie de la publicité comme dimension constitutive de la société bourgeoise*, 1978), Richard Sennett (*The Fall of Public Man*, 2003), and Neil Postman (*Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century*, 2000). What is the relevance of eighteenth-century sociability for understanding the relationship between space and society in the 21st century? For instance, are the coffeehouses, clubs and social networks of today akin to those of the age of enlightenment?

The objective of this conference is to assess the role of the long eighteenth century's *sociable spaces* in the shaping of European and postcolonial societies. This approach will provide an original and long-range lens through which to understand their legacy, as sociability contributed to frame modern social interactions and to redefine space organization for the next centuries. Have those *sociable spaces* survived into the 21st century? How far have they been reconfigured in terms of social, cultural and political significance? To what extent have those spaces, devoted to human interaction, been transformed or redesigned by contemporary architects or urban planners for example?

The divisions established by Jürgen Habermas between the state, an intermediary public, and the private spheres will be further questioned, as suggested by recent criticism which has already led to various post-Habermasian re-assessments. Papers should consider the relation between *sociable spaces* and class, gender, sexuality, race, etc., with social space being understood as “a system of differences” (P. Bourdieu, *La distinction*), a structuring and identifying factor for social organization.

Sociable spaces are first geographical spaces (the built environment as well as the natural world), but they can also be dematerialized, abstract spaces, as happens in correspondences both virtual and interpersonal, or even in the “salon”, which has come to refer to a set of social practices, values and norms more than to an actual physical space. Whether space is understood as geographical territory or imaginary landscape, the very notion implies a relationship between the individual and society, be it harmonious or conflictual. If sociability is linked to the idea of freely conceived interaction (G. Simmel, *Sociologie et épistémologie*, 1981) the building of *sociable spaces* may appear as utopian in essence. Moreover, space can be literary (see M. Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire*, 1955; P. Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, 1999) and cross temporal boundaries through the creation of a space-time concept. This conference also seeks to examine the gap between the conception or representation of *sociable spaces* and the reality of their construction in Europe and its imperial worlds over more than three centuries.

We welcome submissions in English or French from researchers in different fields (history, history of art, geography, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, literature, architecture, cultural studies, urban studies, post-colonial studies) and different periods of history in order to compare their findings and participate in the writing of a comparative history of sociability in Europe and the post-colonial world in the eighteenth century onwards to the present day.

Proposals for 25-minute papers or panels of three speakers are welcome from a wide chronological and geographical reach. Sociable spaces should be considered both in their historical dimension and through a contemporary reassessment of their past legacy. We also encourage innovative methodologies and findings as well as digital technologies and techniques for the collection, storage, analysis and presentation of data.

For example, papers might consider:

The conceptual interaction of sociability and space

- The contribution of sociology
- The philosophical dimension
- Historiographical approaches

The public/private spheres dialectics

- Habermas and beyond: continuities and contradictions
- The emergence of a 'social sphere' or a 'third space'

Sociable spaces as institutions of sociability from the 18C to the present

- Characteristic features and variations (geography, scale, time)
- Comparative case studies, then and now (coffeehouses, clubs, spas...)

Sociability and spatial differentiation

- Urban/rural sociable spaces
- Inclusive/exclusive spaces
- Center/periphery; metropolitan/colonial dimensions

The materiality/immateriality of sociable spaces

- Mapping sociable territory: methodology and new technological challenges
- Material space (architecture, interior design, furniture and objects)
- Abstract space or virtual communication (periodical press, literature, correspondences...)

Sociable spaces and identities

- Gendered spaces
- Sociable spaces and class distinction
- Sociable spaces and national character

Sociable spaces: connecting people

- Sociable spaces and the role of friendship
- Sociable spaces and power relations
- Social networks: an eighteenth-century invention?

The cultural dimension of sociable spaces

- The cultural values underpinning sociable spaces (community, mutual improvement, politeness...)
- Sociable spaces and the revolution of leisure
- Sociable spaces through travel experience

Sociable spaces and representation

- Social spaces and the performance of the self
- The artistic representations of sociable spaces

Sociable spaces and transgression

Deadline for submission of proposals: October 1st 2018

For individual paper proposals, please submit a title and 200-word abstract, along with a short biography. For panel proposals, please also include a title and 200-word abstract and a short biography for each speaker and contact details for one speaker on the panel. Please send submissions to:

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GIS Sociabilités website: <http://www.univ-brest.fr/gis-sociabilites>

A selection of papers will be published.

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