BLAISON CHRISTOPHE

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Institution Name
Université de Paris

Country
France

Research Area
Sociology, Psychology and Urban Development

Thematic Focus
Social-psychological mechanisms that drive collective representations of urban attractiveness

Stakeholders involved
Researchers, government, citizens

Research Phase
Initial

SPACEFORCE: Affective force fields in urban space

RESEARCH ASSET

What makes places in a city attractive? This question is of scientific interest and politically relevant, given current challenges faced by many major cities with a rise in populations, spiraling rents, and resulting increased social segregation between more and less attractive districts of the city. Such questions have been studied extensively in disciplines such as architecture, urban planning and economics. Here, we propose to address the deeper social psychological mechanisms that drive the emergence of collective representations of urban attractiveness (called here affective meaning of place), which we assume to underlie human decisions about residential location, modes of transportation, leisure activities, etc.

To this end, we propose to combine the first French PI's expertise studying affective judgment of place using an experimental approach, with the German PI's expertise studying affective dynamics of human communication using a computational modeling approach. We aim to develop and validate a mathematically formalized theory of how affective processes govern human perceptions, decisions, and behaviors in urban space. Capitalizing on major theoretical traditions in social psychology and sociology (field theory, consistency theory, social constructionism, affect control theory), we propose that personal and collective meaning-making processes generate affective force fields, which in turn constrain human behavior in the city. We will create a computer model called ACT-space (for affect control theory of urban space) that makes precise predictions about how humans perceive affectively and behave in urban environments. We will then use innovative Virtual Reality (VR) technology, in which the French participant has extensive expertise, to seek ecological validation of ACT-space. The project comprises the following methodological steps: (1) compilation of an extensive dictionary of concepts and vignettes describing social interactions in cities, along with empirical ratings of their affective meanings derived from a survey of French and German respondents; (2) using data from (1) to parameterize a computational model (ACT-space) to predict the likelihood of specific human-environment interactions; (3) generating simulations with ACT-space to explore meaningful cross-cultural differences between French and German urban culture; (4) a series of vignette experiments to test semantic predictions from ACT-space; (5) a series of visual experiments to test spatial predictions from ACT-space; (6) compilation of a visual library of urban identities (avatars) and settings to be used in a VR environment; and (7) a series of experiments using VR technology to test behavioral predictions from ACT-space.

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POTENTIAL VALORISATION AREAS

- **Public outreach**: using research to promote cities and raise attractiveness of those cities

- **Public policy**: using research to propose and make any tourist relevant policy to help better planning of touristic activities in urban areas

DESCRIPTION OF VALORISATION POTENTIAL

- **Promoting cities:** with the potential for becoming urbanised and those that already have urban areas

- **Policy introduction:** proposing and adopting policies with the purpose to promote the cities, increase the attractiveness of cities, and better plan touristic activities

- **Social inclusion**: including stakeholders that have been excluded in the cities and from touristic activities (e.g., citizens, SMEs, local producers, local activists)

VALORISATION TARGETS/POTENTIAL FUTURE COLLABORATORS

Governmental stakeholders:

- City/municipality representatives
- Tourism representatives

I am interested in presenting the research results in front of the government stakeholders to make them understand the value of research on the social psychological mechanisms that drive the emergence of collective representations of urban attractiveness or 'affective meaning of place' which we assume to underlie human decisions about residential location, modes of transportation, leisure activities and so on.

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