

Seminar: Locality & Situatedness in Synthesizing Environmental Research

Presenter:

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Time of Event:

Tuesday, April 21, 2015 - 12:30

Location:

National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC)
1 Park Place, Suite 300
Annapolis, MD 21401

Preliminary Notes on the Politics of Synthesis Based on Two Urban Ecology Research Projects in Cape Town, South Africa

Synthesis means to “combine (a number of things) into a coherent whole.” Departing from this dictionary definition of synthesis I will use my talk to explore what synthesis might entail in the practice of running a research project, and in terms of wider knowledge politics. More concretely, and in addressing some issues of what I see is part of the practice and politics of synthesis, I will draw upon my experience of having lead two interdisciplinary urban social ecology projects in which most empirical material have been generated in Cape Town, South Africa. This research has raised several questions in relation to how to synthesize or bring together data, information, and insights, which have arisen from quite different scholarly practices (traditionally grouped as based in social science, natural science, and the humanities). What happens when we try to create amalgams or alloys of knowledge (synonyms for synthesis) but where the parts we are handling originate from different methods and research practices? What politics lies in pushing towards an amalgam, or a coherent whole? What alternatives might exist? Our projects have included a large social network survey or civic organizations, in-depth ethnographic case studies, landscape ecological vegetation surveys and historical archival research. Theoretically I plan to draw upon science studies and knowledge politics (e.g., Latour, Whatmore, and Mol), but also make some use of Jacques Ranciere’s notion of the political and aesthetics. Empirically, I will argue that Cape Town’s highly contested and unequal socio-natural geography, with its racist apartheid planning legacies, might serve as an interesting place from which to pose the questions relating to the politics of synthesis. (In doing so you will also learn something about Capetonian urban ecologies, which as any urban ecology is a mixing of ‘social’ and ‘natural’ things and processes.) While I hope to raise some questions at your center that can lead to a wider discussion about the politics of synthesis, I also like to emphasize the exploratory nature of my talk. Being invited to give this talk, I am seizing the opportunity to humbly bring together some of my, at this stage, quite unorganized ideas to reflect together with you.

This is a preliminary abstract; changes may occur.

Event type:

Seminar

Event Attendance:

Open to the Public

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