

GEOG 597B
Fall 2007

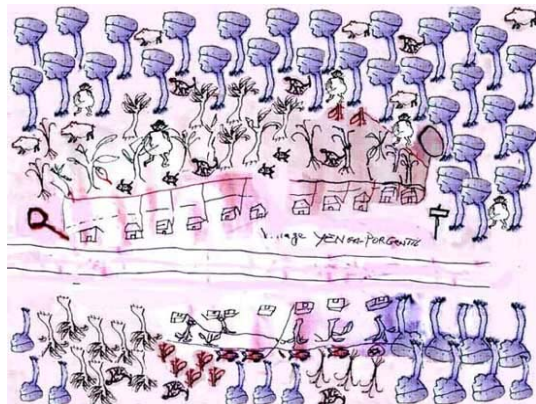
Human Geography Graduate Seminar
Participatory Research, Empowerment, and Transformation

Petra Tschakert

This seminar addresses the contested concepts of power, empowerment, and reflexivity in participatory research. Among critical geographers, participatory research has been proclaimed one of the most exciting new areas for methodological development; some even call it the most promising chapter in the 35-year history of radical geography. Yet, participatory research has not been very visible within the discipline. Collectively, we will review recent calls for more engaged, active/activist, and passionate geographies. These calls have emerged largely from frustration with identifying and theorizing social problems of exclusion, oppression, and inequalities without sufficiently engaging solutions. We will explore possibilities to bridge the gap between the pristine 'ivory tower' of academia and the messy world of the 'streets' or the 'field' and produce knowledge that opens up new, creative spaces for 'doing' geography for and with marginalized populations. By drawing upon a diversity of social and geographical contexts, we will examine participatory frameworks, their intellectual linkages to feminist theory and political ecology, and the most recent tyranny debate. Finally, we will seek to identify the transformative potential of participatory approaches within and beyond critical spaces for engagement.

This seminar offers theoretical, conceptual, and practical tools to enhance the science-practice interface through more empowering research processes and connections to policy formulation and governance. It provides an overview of the origin of participatory methods from rapid rural appraisals to participatory action research and introduces students to a variety of methodological tools and techniques - including participatory video, theatre, mapping, and scenario building - that can be used in different cultural settings in the North and the South.

GEOG 597B is structured around critical readings, student-led discussions, and hands-on experimental activities. For this seminar, active participation means: a) reading all suggested articles prior to our weekly meeting; b) leading one class discussion on one topic area; c) introducing the rest of the course members to one participatory tool/technique; d) writing 2 short reflexive papers; and e) as part of a small group, conducting a participatory research project here in State College during the second half of the semester (incl. IRB approval, class presentation, and written reflections).



319 Walker Bldg.

Tentative Time:
W 5:30 - 8:30pm

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