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# Co-Construction and Building-in-acts Spatial Practices at School: A Case-Study in an Eco-Neighborhood in Reunion Island (7th Grade class)

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35<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL CONGRESS 2024, Dublin

# Co-Construction & Building-in-acts Spatial Practices at School :

*A Case-Study in an Eco-Neighborhood in Reunion Island (7<sup>th</sup> Grade class)*

Patricia Grondin, Sylvain Genevois & Nathalie Wallian



# Introduction

## Research questions

How can *virtual* fieldtrip and *real* fieldtrip be combined? (not opposed but complementary)

How can the fieldtrip help to identify pupils' spatial practices by comparing them with those of adults in their eco-neighbourhood?



## Aim of study

This research examines the ways in which 11 years old students appropriate and construct geographical space through perceptions, representations and spatial practices

## The *experiential* geography, a special need...

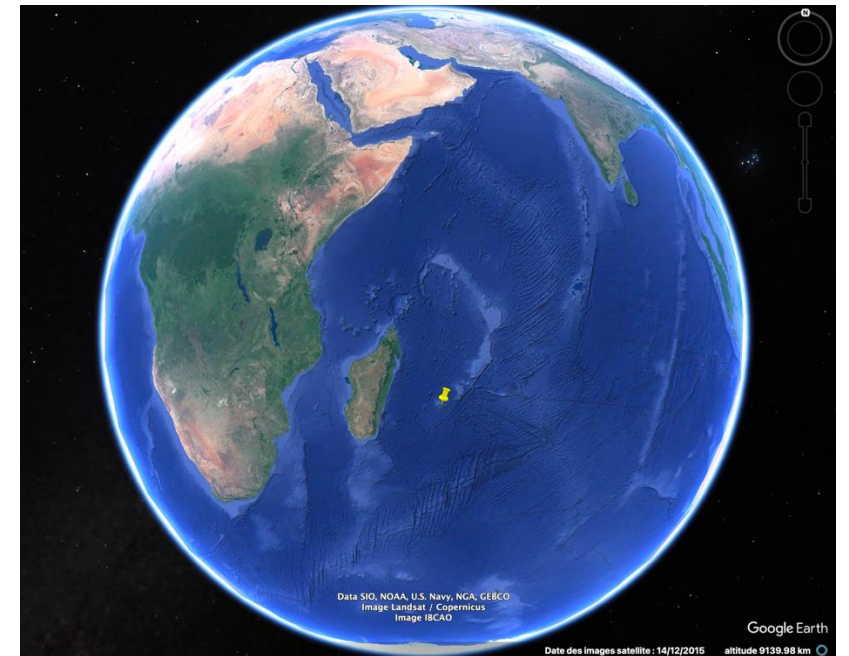
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“ Every experience is an arch through which shines a virgin universe, whose horizon recedes as I advance.” (Poet Alfred Tennyson, 1842, cited by John Dewey, 1938, p. 473)



# Summary

- ❖ Theoretical framework
- ❖ Context
- ❖ Experimental protocol
- ❖ Data collection
- ❖ Results
- ❖ Discussion



# The *experiential* geography, a phenomenological approach...

## Theoretical framework

- ❖ “Work in children’s geographies is diverse but at its heart is an appreciation that children see, imagine and use space in a different way of adults ” (Yarwood et Tyrrell, 2012, p. 124)
- ❖ Experiential geography is a real opportunity for pupils to: “(...) think of space not as a void but as an arrangement that is explored, used and appropriated by players over varying periods of time” (Leininger-Frézal et al., 2020 p. 20 )
- ❖ This didactic approach postulates that the appropriation of space by a society -such as a class group- is the product of a social construction integrated both in and through spatial practices (Stock, 2004; Leininger-Frézal et al., 2020)



# Fieldtrip, agency and representational elaboration in Geographics

## Theoretical framework

- ❖ Spatial practices are examined in the context of a fieldtrip (Calbérac, 2011; Albero, 2022), offering an opportunity to combine experiential knowledge with academic geographical knowledge (Grondin et al., 2023) and to help students develop their agency (*ibid.*)
- ❖ Agency involves not only the possibility of acting but also the recognition of this capacity by the individual or the group concerned (Davies, 1991)
- ❖ Representations play a role in the construction of pupils' knowledge of space. They are at once stable, “ moving, rigid and flexible ” (Abric, 2001)
- ❖ “ There can be no single vision of a place ” (Bailly, 1989 p.76)
- ❖ The neighbourhood is “a mental construct based on the individual representations of pupils and the collective representations of the class group ” (Considère et al., 2009 p.7)

# A 7th Grade class confronted with an eco-neighbourhood in Reunion Island (FR)

## Context

- 7th Grade
- N = 22 students
- aged 10-11 years
- unprivileged social class
- a two years data collection




Ravine Blanche, an eco-neighbourhood in St-Pierre




# Questioning spaces to *augment* the field representations


**Augmented  
vision of  
space**



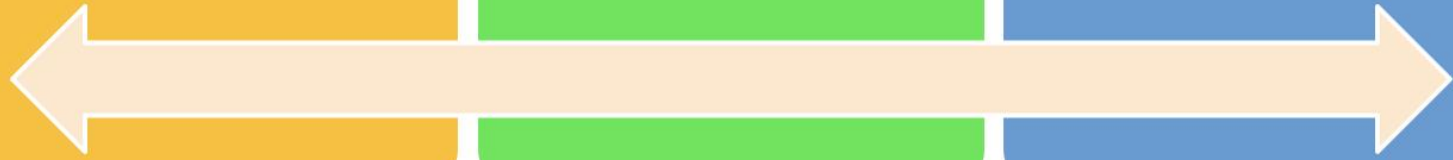
Explored space:  
top view



Travelled space:  
internal  
perspective



Geoshared and  
represented  
space: top view  
and internal  
perspective



# A crossed field data collection

Analysis of ante/post didactic intentions

Ethnographic notes by the geography teacher

Analysis of didactic practice (indicators of space construction)

Traces of activity  
Different types  
N: 100

Analysis of feelings and the evolution of mental and spatial representations

Focus group interviews 3 groups T: 20' per group

Remarkable moments during the session Video T: 460' 216 rushes

Micro-analysis (misunderstandings and decisive acquisitions)

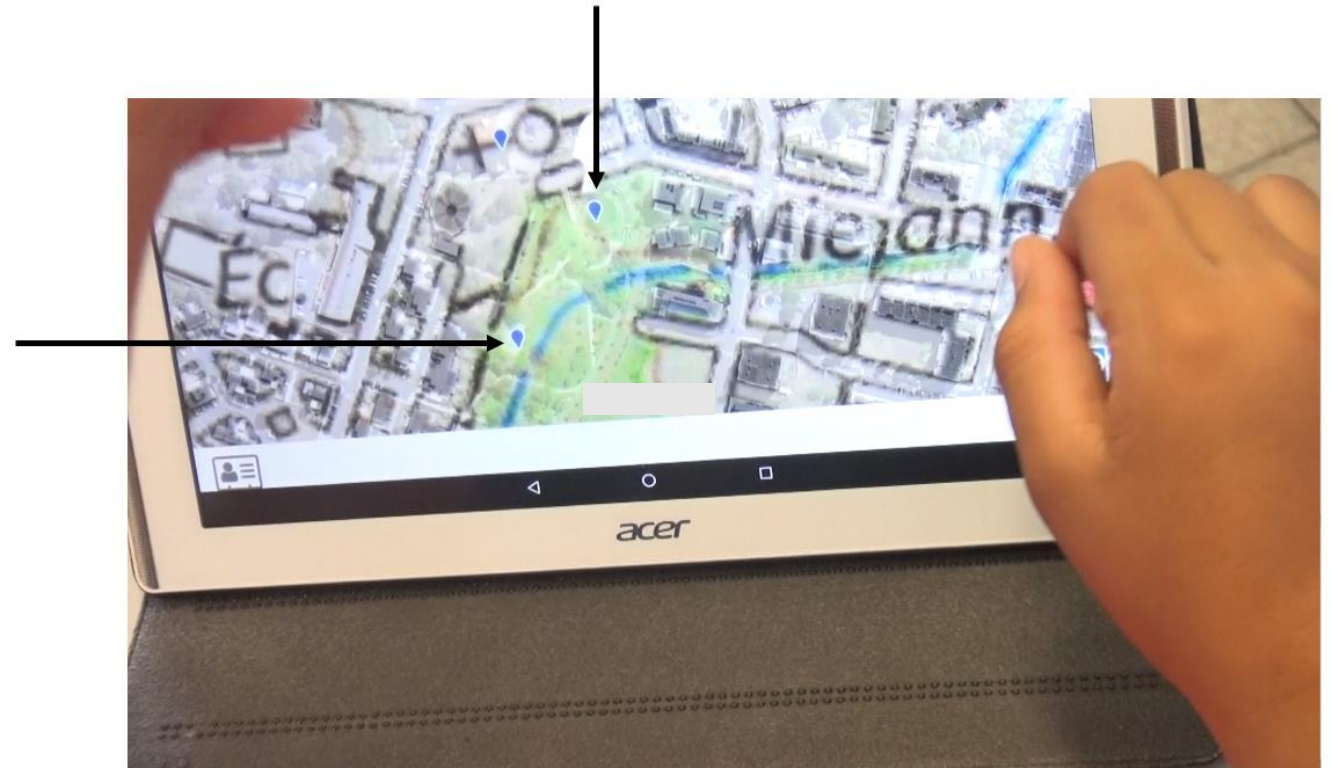
# A recreational conception of the space (James, 1990)

## Result 1

A different view  
of the park than  
adults *before* the  
fieldtrip

Park of  
little  
children

Park of teenagers



Session 1. Two students locating the fieldtrip configuration on a tablet

## An instant and ephemeral vision of the place

### Result 2

Park vision  
**during** the  
fieldtrip: an  
open-to-the-sky  
park

“Hello, today we're in a neighbourhood of Ravine Blanche in the urban park. We've seen lots of things today. We saw a centipede, a butterfly and a red bird - I call it the malbar bird – *paille en queue* flying overhead, red planes and a helicopter. Then lots of people passed by, a lady and her husband holding a pushchair with probably a baby in it, a lady wearing a cap that passed in the path and all the wind. “

Session 2. Discourse on space by a pair of students  
(An excerpt from a multimedia narrative)



# Students' agency encourages world reflection

## Result 3

Students made change their vision of the field and express their agency

**Teacher:** What did you learn this morning?

**Diego:** (...) That there are a lot of people walking over there.

**Teacher:** Oh, you didn't know that?

**Diego:** Yes, I knew, **but I didn't know about the elderly people.** I learned that even if you look at something like a tree or a landscape, you can write something about it.

**Teacher:** And you didn't know that. You thought it wasn't possible.

**Diego:** **I thought I could only talk about it, not write.**

# Comparing geographical knowledge with experiential knowledge

**Instructional setting:** Please complete the table using your experienced field (*memories of the outing, what you do in this place, what you see in this place*).

**Uses, actors, and developments of the urban park of *The white Ravine***

This park was developed from 2010 to 2013. Before 2010, it was an undeveloped green space, but it was used by residents for leisure

## Result 4

Various spatial practices relating to the place

Who frequents the park?	For what purpose?	With what development?
An elderly couple	To walk	the benches are for sitting down, the benches are in stone
Children	To play, to run	There is a park and a <i>round field</i>
Cyclists	To ride around	On the red track
Motorcyclists	To move around	On the red track, but they are not allowed

# Research issues

Students mainly have :

- ❖ a **recreational conception** of the space (James, 1990)
- ❖ an **instant and ephemeral vision** of the place that may be improved
- ❖ **Comparing geographical knowledge with experiential knowledge**, without setting them against each other.
- ❖ Knowledge is mobilised ***before, during and after*** the field trip

## Discussion

- ❖ Student's spatial representations often differ from the academic taught knowledge
- ❖ They are expected (1) to modify their ability to perceive and to read the world through their actions in space, and (2) to share their visions with otherness
- ❖ Issues raise questions about how to embody experience into the geographic content knowledge



# Conclusion

- The fieldtrip provides an **augmented knowledge** of the explored field
- In Geography, collecting students' point of view on space their field makes them being **geography-actors**
- Perspectives are open for shaping a **learning continuum** that reduces the boundaries between the teaching in/outside school, , without opposing virtual fieldtrip and real fieldtrip.
- Students' agency is expressed in a specific learning context, **aiming to encourage them to think about the world** through a research framework

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Thanks for your attention  
Any questions?

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