

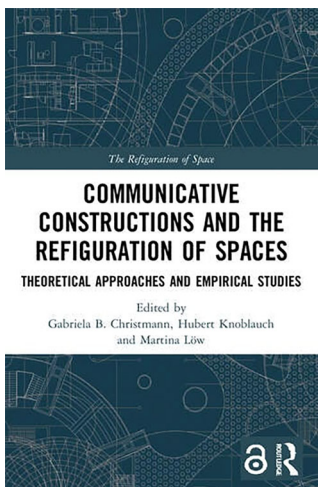


# Christmann, Gabriela B.; Knoblauch, Hubert; Löw, Martina (eds.) (2022): Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces. Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Studies

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Another noteworthy publication has emerged from the context of the Collaborative Research Centre “Re-Figuration of Spaces” (CRC 1265)<sup>1</sup>. The volume “Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces” provides insightful discussions on theoretical understandings and empirical studies related to communicative actions in shaping spaces and their impact on spatial transformations. It contributes to the research field of discursive spatial constructions and aligns with the Collaborative Research Centre’s objective of exploring extensive spatial restructuring influenced by social change processes.

The book organizes its content in three major parts and includes 14 chapters on 300 pages in total. The first introductory part covers the overall topic, the book’s creation, and situates it in the academic debate. The volume is the second instalment in a book series currently consisting of six titles dedicated to exploring (changing) relations between the social and space through current transformations, conflicts and uncertainties. The editors, Gabriela B. Christmann (IRS – Leibniz-Institute for Research on Society and Space), Hubert Knoblauch (Technical University Berlin) and Martina Löw (Technical University Berlin), are important scholars in the field of the German sociology of knowledge and space. Within the Collaborative Research Centre, they are leading project members respectively speakers.

The second part of the volume assembles six texts on theoretical and methodological approaches. It discusses issues such as the differentiation between the constitution and

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(communicative) (re-)construction of spaces, the symbolic construction of spaces, and the role of data infrastructures and augmented realities in shaping space. For example, both the texts of the sociologists Reiner Keller and Gabriela B. Christmann situate their thoughts within established theories in sociology and communication sciences, sharing a social constructivist perspective on space, such as that explored by Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Martina Löw and Doreen Massey.

On this foreground, the authors' aim is to shed light on the crucial relevance of space-related communicative action in the (re)configuration of space. In this context, the significance of discourse analysis is highlighted. Its value lies in understanding communicative action as the process of the communicative construction of space, and its potential for investigation has not yet been overtaken. In addition, the authors refer to Michel Foucault's concept of the so-called "dispositive", underscoring its utility for the analysis of communicative action as it allows the inclusion of more than language, also embracing the world's materiality. Under "dispositive", the authors understand "those institutional regulations and material objects by way of which discourses become socially effective and can be translated into material orders and even spatial arrangements" (p. 9). This leads Reiner Keller to emphasize that spaces are expressions of the relations and politics of knowledge. He proposes a research program following this notion, offering a corresponding perspective on knowledge processes at broader societal scales.

Taking the previous considerations into account, Martina Löw and Séverine Marguin focus on methodological consequences. They suggest that combining methods of talking and drawing is crucial for eliciting space (p. 130). According to them, conducting interviews alone may not be sufficient to research the communicative constructions of spaces. For example, they refer to their own use of mental mapping and mapping analysis as relevant methods to access spatial knowledge, patterns and thus construction.

The third part of the volume provides seven empirical insights that complement the theoretical discussions. Topics include digital urban planning, architectures of asylum and communicative models in spatial planning. In these cases, multiple qualitative methods are employed: interviews with various spatial actors, ethnographic methods such as (participatory) observations, documentary research, and mappings and visual recordings. Two case studies are highlighted below.

In the first, René Tuma and Arne Janz explore how mediatisation changes the refiguration of spaces due to the interrelation of centres of coordination and controlled spaces. They understand these centres, in reference to Knorr-Cetina (2014), as synthetic actors which make a relevant contribu-

tion to the control of spatial processes by establishing material relationships with the spaces concerned (e.g., traffic control centres, police surveillance centres). This approach convinces thanks to its application of the theory of communicative constructivism and its consideration of processes of mediatisation and digitisation.

With their study, the authors reveal a link to the theory of communicative constructivism by analysing how communicative actions in increasingly mediatised control centres establish new forms of communication. Although spatially separated, centre and space interact and intervene via technical equipment and personnel. This leads to new forms of order being established both materially and discursively through subjective knowledge about the spaces controlled and the practices affecting them. The authors refer to this new figuration as synthetic spacing. What is missing is a description of the methodological approach. The authors nevertheless demonstrate convincingly how mediatisation refigures spatially structured modes of communication.

The second case study is highlighted due to its focus on the (re)figuration of spaces in direct, analogue communication. Hans-Joachim Bürkner's contribution explores the social construction of places by focusing on power generated through interaction. Using the East-German cultural space "Schiffbauergasse" as an example and applying Pierre Bourdieu's theories, he derives a distinction between structural and interactive power. While structural power relates to economic, cultural and social capital, interactive power is generated through immediate social interaction, relationship building and local communication. The concept of imaginaries as context-specific perceptions of places, established and produced through structural and interactive power, takes a prominent role. Hans-Joachim Bürkner's analysis reveals that structural power lies with the city administration, while interactive power is exhibited by local cultural pioneers.

The focus on interactive power illustrates that social interaction is an effective lever for advocating one's interests through knowledge of local conditions, everyday culture and networks. The use of the concept of imaginaries offers interesting insights. However, the inclusion of more spatially and performatively oriented concepts generated from the debate on spatial imaginaries (Gregory 2004; Watkins 2015) could have involved a more profound elaboration of materiality and practices within interactional communication about places.

Whereas the contributions listed in the second part provide valuable insights into the theorisation of space-related communicative actions, the empirical insights in the third section only address certain aspects of the issues and questions raised. Some authors empirically approach facets of the communicative reconstruction of space beyond mere representation (Lorimer 2005). However, there is a lack of

in-depth insights that explore the fundamental need for empirical studies, as outlined in the introduction, particularly focusing on material and corporeal aspects of communicative action such as embodied action, experience and knowledge. This is also reflected by the predominant use of interviews as a method, supporting Martina Löw and Séverine Marguin's argument for the necessity of employing diverse approaches, especially visual ones, to better capture the material dimension of the refiguration of space.

Only three of the case studies in the volume report findings from current or recently conducted empirical research. This highlights the aforementioned gap in empirically sound knowledge about the impact of mediatisation and digitalisation on the (re)figuration of spaces. It is thus essential to conduct further empirical research on mediatisation and digitalisation, especially research on social media as a crucial contemporary communication tool. Hence, we would like to reference a recent issue in the same book series. Stoltenberg's publication "The Spaces of Public Issues" (2024) delves into social media discourses and public imaginations.

Overall, the volume provides a well-structured overview of communicative constructions and (re)figurations of space for those with an interest in spaces and their ongoing (re)constructions. However, we sometimes miss deeper insights into newer theoretical and empirical research areas such as post-constructivist's epistemological debates on performativity and the realization of space. This includes considerations of communication practices, as well as daily practices, materials, technologies, etc., that go beyond the "older" paradigm of (communicative/discursive) constructivism and its well-known limitations (e.g. Lorimer 2005).

Nevertheless, this book is a more than valuable read and serves as a helpful introduction to theories from sociology and communication studies, particularly for those who are not from these disciplines.

#### Full reference of reviewed title

Christmann, G.B.; Knoblauch, H.; Löw, M. (eds.) (2022): *Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces. Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Studies*. London/New York: Routledge, 300 Pages, 77 B/W Illustrations

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