

Central Place Theory Reloaded and Revised: Landscape Archaeology and Political Economy

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This paper rethinks Central Place Theory and re-evaluates it in light of contemporary developments in settlement archaeology, methods and archaeological thought by bringing together ‘central places’ and ‘un-central landscapes’. It focuses diachronically upon the complex relation between town and country, as shaped by political economies and the availability of natural resources.

Micro-environments with natural boundaries (e.g. rivers, mountains, woods) and desirable resources (e.g. water, arable land, minerals) sustained nucleated communities and remained occupied for almost every period. On the other hand, ‘central persons’ may be as important as ‘central places’ and this is where the concept of political economy evolves. As T. Earle has eloquently argued on several occasions, all economic theories should recognise that, to whatever degree realised, power strategies were built on economic and ideological control over resources.

Landscape archaeology is an area of study that overcomes the conventional boundaries between disciplines such as anthropology, history and geography. It provides a fresh perspective and a powerful investigative tool to address research questions related to the conscious and the unconscious shaping of the land and the processes of organising space, involving interaction between the physical environment and human presence. Temporality, spatiality, materiality and site-based analysis are all encompassed in the concept of landscapes, and therefore through its study much can be said about human responses to the changing conditions of life in the *longue durée*.

This panel welcomed paper proposals addressing ‘central places’ and/or ‘un-central landscapes’ from a political economy or/and a natural resources perspective. Moving away from model-bounded approaches, Central Place Theory was used more flexibly to include all the places that may have functioned as places of economic or ideological centrality (even in a local context) in the past, including urban centres, agro-towns, countryside settlements, as well as burial and ritual *topoi*. The diversity of the different disciplinary perspectives and approaches, combined with dialogues, enriches our task of multiple interpretations, and should be seen as a healthy pluralism.

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