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CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOCIETIES AND THEIR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Abstract

Drawing on recent structuralist approaches in urban studies, the paper proposes a conceptual framework for cross-national research on societies, built environment and the relationship between them. It directs attention to the need for studying processes of change in environment, society and their interaction and particularly, on the conditions of production. Two spheres of research are proposed and related: the political economy of the built environment and also, of social and cultural change. The emergence of a global system of production in the late 20th century requires that urban/building developments in 'first' and 'third world' environments ('Westernisation'/'modernisation'/'bourgeoisification'/'de-industrialisation'/'counter-urbanisation') be seen in a single perspective. The ideological context of research in SPPS/MES is examined in this framework.

1. The term 'culture' is used to comprehend the material culture of the constructed environment, non-material culture (beliefs, values, ideology, institutions) and the relationship between them. The paper draws on work on the political economy of cities and regions, urbanisation and the world economy and other fields to address three issues:

- the relationship between economy, society and the production/transformation of the built environment
- the role of that environment in the maintenance and reproduction of economy and society
- the transnationalisation of buildings and the larger built environment in the 'first' and 'third' world ('Westernisation'/'de-urbanisation' etc).

2. Since the 1960s, extensive growth in MES/SPPS research, understood in its broadest sense, has occurred. Previously, much research in the human and social sciences (psych/soc/anthrop) frequently ignored or took for granted the context of the physical and spatial environment; research and practice in regard to the built environment itself (arch/bldg/plng) was frequently based on unquestioned assumptions about how buildings and environments might be used. Work in SPPS/MES has made explicit the relationship between the two spheres, highlighting cultural, social/class/gender variables.

3. In studying this relationship, however, insufficient attention has been given to the question of change over time - the historical dimension. Where considerable research exists on the built environment itself (e.g. hist, geog, evtl/urban/plng history) or, in regard to society and people (hist, sociology, soc history, psycho hist), the study of change in the interaction between them is relatively un-developed.

A society's culture not only 'changes' but is produced: physical and spatial environments are also produced. Today, when psychological or sociological research examines people's responses to environments, what is it which is being examined? What is responsible for the environments to which people respond and for the values, ideologies or structures which they manifest in responding to them? More needs to be known about the conditions of production - economic, social, political: the nature of the political economy, the social formation/structure to which it is related, the way in which societies with comparable structural characteristics are differentiated according to tradition and culture.

Such questions pre-suppose a broad cross-national and long term historical perspective.

4. Two spheres of enquiry are proposed: the political economy of the built environment and also, of social and cultural change.

In the first, attention is given to the physical and spatial forms (including building and urban forms) related to historic forms of production within an emerging international division of labour. The correspondence between 'first' and 'third world' environments within this division is discussed. In the late twentieth century, developments in an increasingly global system of production (with multinational corporations responsible for 40% of international trade) are related to the move to consumer-oriented urban and building forms in the 'first world' (counter-urbanisation/suburbanisation/dwelling form/time-share and vacation developments/leisure centres) and to low-cost production forms in the 'third world' (rapid urbanisation/self-build settlements).

In the second, illustrative aspects are examined: social restructuring in terms of the ethnic composition of cities; changes in household structure, including the multiplication of household units, household fission; value change and 'privatisation'. Social and cultural change is related to research in SPPS/MES ('public/private', 'privacy', 'conservation', 'environmental satisfaction' etc), surface manifestations of underlying structures.

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CONTRÔLE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET PROCESSUS DE DÉCISION LOCO-RÉGIONAL : LE PROJET MAB-UNESCO X.7 EN FRANCE ET LE PLAN URBAIN

Introduction

Les relations entre l'homme et l'évolution de l'écosystème urbain sont à l'ordre du jour. L'homme crée son espace en se créant lui-même. Il agit en fonction des contraintes physiques du milieu d'une part, du système culturel et légal d'autre part, et aussi de ses possibilités financières, de son histoire, de ses motivations en fonction d'un projet.

En cette fin du XXe siècle, l'adéquation entre le projet individuel et le projet social est un problème de fond et il convient d'étudier en permanence l'écart entre les deux. Par ailleurs, l'explosion démographique urbaine est une donnée essentielle de l'évolution actuelle de notre planète. Il ne peut être question de la sous-estimer. L'UNESCO en avait bien pris conscience et le programme MAB comprend un certain nombre de projets tels que : démographie, perception de l'environnement, évolution des écosystèmes urbains qui nous concernent directement.

Cependant, le bilan effectué par l'UNESCO à l'occasion des dix premières années du MAB avait bien mis en évidence que le M de MAB avait été sous-estimé.

Ceci s'est passé pour de multiples raisons : incidences politiques, sociales, culturelles, dans la prise en compte de l'action de l'homme et surtout conflits d'utilisation de l'espace et du temps entre les hommes.

L'introduction des nouvelles technologies, les crises économiques, crises de valeur des sociétés, la montée du chômage, ont abouti à une augmentation des tendances anomiques, avec repliement de l'individu sur le plus petit groupe : la famille.