NEW STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING LANDSCAPES AND STRENGTHENING IDENTITIES AS TOOLS FOR A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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A 1 New social, political, environmental and landscape problems

The growing consumption of energy has injured or destroyed the resilience of local, regional and global ecosystems.

The emergence of a global environmental unbalance involves the search for another type of development: sustainable development.

Traditional local identities suffered with the transformation of local vernacular cultures into more or less global mass cultures: people have lost the intuitive knowledge they had of their home landscape and the way it had to be managed.

A more general crisis of identities grew out of the increased mobility of persons and information: there is a general deterritorialization of modern populations, with a multiplicity of faraway links and less local solidarities.

Many people react to this threat of identitarian dissolution into a more or less homogeneous environment by building communitarian responses: they try to anchor a renewed form of local identity into the traditional landscapes they wish to preserve in spite of globalization.

A 2 The need for multiscalar policies to foster sustainable development

In order to meet challenges, multiscalar policies are required.

We need a global impulsion in order to determine the limits to respect in the global use of energy, the emission of greenhouse gases or the use of chloric gases which destroy the ozone layer.

Large scale policies have to be launched in order to struggle against acid rains and extensive zones of aerial pollution, or avoid the pollution of coastal waters and inland seas.

Nation states have to enact the laws and regulations which are necessary to control land uses or limit the emission of pollutants.

Local authorities have to apply global recommendations and national laws and adapt them to the specific conditions of place, landscape and people.

A 3 The inadequacy of existing political structures

The existing political structures do not match the necessities of sustainable growth. The decisions which have to be taken at global or large scale levels are not supported by strong political structures. They have to be negotiated between many participants. Their application relies on the goodwill of States, which are the only institutions with the capacity for enforcing laws if needs be.

A similar situation exists for local State decision – since Local State is often a multi-layered reality: parishes, departments, circles, provinces, etc. Every one of them has particular responsibilities, since the scale of environmental problems is variable. The existing administrative and political structures do not always fit the ecological necessities: hence the necessity to create ad hoc authorities, for the management of river basins for instance.

A 4 A wider set of political participants

Most decisions have effects on different scales. When dealing with the problems they create, political action involves a plurality of actors: political ones (as international or supra-national institutions, national or locale states) and other decision-makers (persons, enterprises, associations, political parties, local groups).

Administrators and politicians have ceased to possess better information than most of the other participants: because of the new means of communication/new media, many of the local and general data on particular places and problems are now available to the enterprises, political parties, associations or non-governmental organizations which have an interest in contemporary territorial problems. It is better to cooperate with them than to try to enforce regulations: hence the contemporary emphasis on governance.

In so far as associations and political parties reflect public opinion, citizens' positions – at least those of active citizens – are taken into account in the decision-making process. In order to achieve good results in building and applying local policies for sustainable growth, a strong involvement of people is required.

Political consciousness generally arises from the solidarities people feel significant. In traditional societies, the main social ties were woven within local communities – hence the role of local squires or big landowners in the Parliaments of early democracies. At the time of the industrial revolution, class interests were essential in the development of workers' awareness and movements. The contemporary situation is utterly different. Local solidarities are certainly weaker than in the past. Workers' consciousness plays a minor role in post-industrial societies were industrial employment is lower and highly differentiated. Because of the new media, the networks people are connected with are diverse and characterized by very different territorial structures. This is one of the reasons for the low mobilization of citizens for elections in most post-industrial countries: people do not feel involved in local or national problems.

How can one create a new involvement in politics – and an involvement which would be centered on sustainable growth?

A 5 Landscapes, identities and political consciousness yesterday and today

Kenneth Olwig has shown how the strong identities of many traditional communities were based on the perception of the landscape (or *landskip)* as a fundamental natural and social unit (Olwig, 1996). The local communities of coastal Schlewsig-Holstein, for instance, were proud at the same time of their environment, of the way they inhabited and exploited it, and of the rules they had chosen to manage it.

Geographical mobility was already important in the upper classes at the time of the Renaissance, and ideas travelled widely: the aesthetic conception of landscape rapidly spread all over Western Europe. It was used as an instrument of class domination by the elites of Venice and Britain, as demonstrated by Denis Cosgrove – and in other Western countries (Cosgrove, 1984).

With the democratic and industrial revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, new forms of communities had to be invented and taught (Anderson, 1983). Landscape was used as a political tool in another way: in order to give strong support to national consciousness, essayists and painters selected landscapes with which a large group (either regional or national) could identify.

Nation states are still important since they are the only institutions which can enforce laws, but they have ceased to appear as almost self-contained and self-sufficient worlds: with the enlargement of the circles of travel, economic exchange and intellectual cooperation which characterizes contemporary societies, solidarities have become wider – and at the same time, much more diluted. Hence the often difficult mobilization of citizens on political issues!

The question is the following one: would it be possible to rely on a new sensitivity to landscape in order to make people more aware of contemporary ecological threats, and provide them with a new basis for identities centred on local problems and conscious of the role played by interterritorial relations?

During the Conference, John Adam will sum up the lessons of landscape as a tool for the construction of national consciousness. Is there any possibility to use such a tool in a different context and with different aims? Landscapes have a strong appeal on people because of their ecological complexity, efficiency and fragility, and because of their beauty. This appeal may serve different causes: in some cases, it is used today to reinforce a feeling of local specificity and legitimate a will to protect it against whatever comes from outside. This communitarian use of landscapes is only one of those which can be imagined.

Under what conditions could landscapes become useful instruments for the construction of modern identities and the successful enactment of sustainable development policies?

References

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