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Statements on Governance, Sustainability and Territorialities

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Colloque Reconstitutions territoriales, confronter et innover, Territorial restructurings, comparisons and innovations. Proceedings of the French-South African meeting on territorial innovation. Actes des Rencontres franco-sud-africaines de l'innovation territoriale janvier 2002

Partie I les expériences françaises et sud-africaines dans le mouvement universel de reconstitution territoriale

Inbasagren NARSIAH (VISTA University):

Statements on Governance, Sustainability and Territorialities

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Governance/territorialities

The concept of governance cannot be separated from the nature of production relations. Production relations impact upon the social construction of space, which conditions the nature of territoriality. I am not suggesting a unilinear relationship between these concepts rather a dialectical one. Furthermore, I would suggest that this is a continuous process.

The hegemony of the concept of globalisation – a shorthand for the globalisation of capitalist relations of production – has masked uneven geographical development. The uneven geographical development thesis rests on two theoretical concepts derived from Marx, viz. the idea of homogenisation, whereby large swathes of space fall under capitalist relations of control, and differentiation, whereby capitalist relations of production develop in geographically disparate localities.

I would propose that globalisation has promoted uneven geographical development. This process has been facilitated by a global governance structure comprising the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO – the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’. The ‘Washington Consensus’ plays an important facilitatory role promoting easier access for global capital to different markets. Not surprisingly the ‘Washington Consensus’ sells policy packages which have a distinctive neoliberal character. A process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation occurs as the nation-state gives up its sovereignty, to some extent, to extranational institutions.

The nation-state also gives up power to lower scales – the regional and local scales. What we are witnessing according to Jessop is a ‘hollowing-out’ of the state. I would suggest that this process exacerbates uneven geographical development because as regions gain greater autonomy, they have to increasingly generate their own capital. The route that is normally chosen is to attract foreign investment. Regions compete with each other for what are viewed as finite resources.

Production relations have to be re-articulated in order for particular regions/cities/localities to be attractive to foreign investment. What this usually means is that there is greater exploitation of labour. Spaces are opened-up for the proliferation of sweat-shops and unfair labour practices. Additionally, capital flows out of these regions as profits are repatriated to the first world. Governance structures are reluctant to stop this process because it could lead to a loss of investment.

This governance structure militates against progressive development of the masses of people who, in South Africa, for example, have lived in a condition of poverty and deprivation. There isn’t substantive investment in infrastructure, as a result millions of poor people do not have access to housing, electricity, water and sanitation. Surely billions poured into waterfront and conference center developments could be put to better use?

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I would suggest that production relations be addressed substantially. Workers need to be given a stake in productive activity. They need to control and determine the nature of the distribution of the surplus. In this way spatial inequalities can be progressively addressed.

Statement on Sustainability

The United Nations estimates that by 2050, two-thirds or six billion of the world’s then nine billion people will be living in urban areas. A significant feature of this urban population growth will be its geographical concentration in the cities and towns of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Such unprecedented urban growth poses serious challenges to the sustainability of these large urban settlements.

The concept of sustainability, including that of urban sustainability, has been contested. There is, however, consensus that the concept has positive connotations. The understanding of sustainability (specifically sustainable development) that has been widely adopted comes from the Brundtland Commission, otherwise referred to as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The Board on Sustainable Development suggests that sustainable development is “the reconciliation of society’s development goals with its environmental limits over the long term.”

The primary development goals that the Board on Sustainable Development has identified are “to meet the needs of a much larger but stabilizing human population, to sustain the life support systems of the planet, and to substantially reduce hunger and poverty.” For each of these categories the Board highlights specific goals:

- Meeting human needs
 - food and nutrition
 - nurturing children
 - shelter -education
 - employment
- Life support systems
 - water quality -emissions control -protection of oceanic/aquatic resources -maintenance of species and ecosystems
- Reduction of hunger and poverty
 - ensuring income growth
 - employment opportunities
 - social security.

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Some have suggested that a focus on sustainable livelihoods is more useful than a focus on sustainable development because sustainable livelihoods places the emphasis directly on people’s lives and livelihoods. Sustainable livelihoods refers to “processes of social and ecological reproduction situated within diverse spatial contexts”. The definition of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ is informed by a theoretical position on sustainability which is construed as necessarily flexible and ongoing rather than fixed and certain; transcending the conventional dualisms of urban versus rural, local versus global, and economy versus environment; supporting the possibility of diversity, difference, and local contingency rather than the imposition of global homogeneity.