

INFORMALITY, POWER AND THE OTHER SIDE OF URBAN SPACE (INVERSES)

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Scientific Abstract

This project aims at analysing, in a comparative perspective, the emergence and consolidation of a diversity of urban power structures, as well as their role in the governance of urban territories. It studies the role of informality in the production, administration and governance of cities. It studies urban space and territories as a mode of understanding the diversity of political relationships within the city. This project is based on a double hypothesis: first, urban territories are not merely the reflection of more or less institutionalized systems of government; then, they also partake of the transformation and reproduction of systems of government.

This program adopts a comparative perspective in order to avoid localised, national or cultural interpretations that contrast Third World and First World systems of government. Informal logics as foundations of urban Power are not only found in developing countries. They do not testify to political practices that would be either “traditional” or different “by nature”. Indeed, informal power structures are also present in the North. The confrontation of research carried out in different regions (Latin America, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia) will enable us to offer a new analysis and theory of the city. We intend to capture at the same time both sides of urban societies and territories – the formal as well as the informal – in order to analyse the ways in which informality partakes of the functioning of the metropolis: informal processes combine with official politics in the production of territories and in the construction of the urban structures of Power.

Our method is anthropological and sociological at the local level (participatory observation, interviews, etc.). It is reinforced by the experience of the members of the team, who have published numerous essays on formal and informal practices, on security and violence, and in a broader sense on urban development.