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On the way towards exopolis? Critical geographies of constructed and lived urban regions

Abstract

Cultural & regional geography were focused on the representations of space & place until the critical approach established the call towards combining material & immaterial realms (Lees, 2002). The cultural turn within non-representational geography is seen through the lens of what Henry Lefebvre names a double illusion (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 27). In Lefebvrian terms, cultural geography in the XXth century has executed a shift from the material / perceived space towards the conceptual space of representations, but the forthcoming critical paradigm is concerned about the third realm, that is the “representational spaces: the space directly lived through its associate images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39), or ‘thirdspace’ (Soja, 1996).

The contemporary urban space is stressed to be complex, heterogeneous, multifaceted, interrelated. This vision of the new space constitution revives the idea of a palimpsest (Mitin, 2010), as the latest embraces that very endless multiplicity co-existing in one & the same (totally urbanized) region. Lived / real-and-imagined urban regions are regarded as palimpsests with everyday practices seen as processes of (re)construction of new layers.

Constructing an imagery of Skolkovo Innovation Centre in Moscow (Russia) as a part of an excursion project is used as a case-study in this paper. Though positioning itself as being out of history & thus non-authentic, Skolkovo claims to be regarded as a city; even a kind of an ideal city. The contrast of that constructed reality & the lived cultural landscapes of the Innovation Centre is used to describe Skolkovo as one of *exopolises* (Soja, 1996). Based on Baudrillard’s simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994), exopolises are “exact copies of representations of everyday reality that somehow substitute for the real itself... The Exopolis itself is a simulacrum: an exact copy of a city that has never existed” (Soja, 1996, p. 19). Skolkovo is seen as not the only example of an exopolis, but rather as a tool to understand *the urban* through its change. The urban is regarded as “a theoretical category, not an empirical object” (Brenner, Schmid, 2015, p. 163), and an exopolis as a new form of the urban & *the region*.

References

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