City and culture

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Introduction

Urban studies seek to answer three questions:
• What does a city look like?
• What are its uses?
• What is its significance?
● The first group of approaches is a morphological one. It has been practiced for a long time.
● The second family is functionalist. It throve mainly during the 1950s and 1960s and remains in many respects fundamental.
● The third perspective developed essentially during the last 30 years. It considers the city as a set of scenes city dwellers frequent at different times during the day, the week or the year, in order to play various roles and participate in multifarious activities. The diversity of places and the originality they offer give city dwellers the possibility to enrich their experience. The city is an incubator of cultures.

It is this third perspective that we shall analyze after a rapid glance at the first two: in this way, it will be easier for us to stress its specificities.

What do cities look like? The morphological approaches

Those who use the morphological approaches start from what everybody knows: human settlements do not have the same shape everywhere. There are numerous cases where they are split into isolated farms or hamlets, or divided into more or less important villages. The built areas cover only a small fraction of space, its most important part being devoted to fields, meadows, pastures or woods: we are in the countryside. When buildings become continuous and leave between them only the space covered by streets and some greenery, it is a city.

Streets, green areas and built areas

The city is first a morphological reality. It is made of a patchwork of voids and built-up sectors, the structure of which has to be explored. The areas which are not built are used by streets or roads, gardens, parks, playgrounds, horsetracks, etc. The analysis of street patterns involves a measure of the percentage of urban area they cover, an evaluation of their width and a description of their uses and the way they were conceived and equipped. Squares are devoid of vegetation, or planted with trees and covered by lawns. The areas where nature is still present are diverse: the monotonous lawns of green areas, the well-designed paths and vegetable- or flower-beds of gardens, the flexible distribution of groves, clearings and alleys of parks.

The plans and elevations of built-up areas have both to be evaluated: what is the proportion of urban space which is really built-up? Are houses and buildings dispersed in the midst of lawns or aligned along streets between road and garden? Do they cover the totality of blocks in between the streets? Are blocks opened by small or big courtyards? What is the share of the built-up area which is devoted to factories, warehouses, workshops or stores? Are the different types of building mixed together, or strictly segregated by imperative rules of zoning?

The diversity of built volumes is as remarkable as their plans. In the suburban areas, low houses, one, two or three storeys

high, occupy in a continuous way extensive areas: this is mainly true for British or American cities. Downtowns essentially attracted, and still attract, offices, but there are also department stores, luxury shops, movie-theaters, theaters, night clubs, music-halls, restaurants, etc. In these areas, buildings are generally higher. The skylines of American cities are characterized by the contrast between the proud skyscrapers of the downtown areas and the low horizons of suburban rings. Other configurations exist. In Eastern Asia, where the street pattern results from the superimposition of Western-style wide streets on an older maze of narrow lanes, the main avenues often appear as corridors of high-rise buildings separated by zones which are still surprisingly low. The rapid evolution of techniques had led Soviet planners to build increasingly high apartment houses: the height of the buildings grew upwards pardoxically when moving out from the city centers. In Brazil, where insecurity is such that it is difficult for people to live in isolated houses, verticalization is proceeding all over urban areas.

The projects of planners and property developers

The layout of streets, the design of gardens and parks and the conception of important buildings generally feed much discussion. The decision to build a new neighborhood, to renovate old districts or to open new ways for restructuring congested areas is taken by local authorities after public debates: their registers record the different opinions which were expressed, the critiques against such or such proposition and the final choices. The plans prepared by different developers and architects are submitted to competitive examination. Each group prepares plans, builds models and writes commentaries and explanatory texts.

Social scientists have thus a rich documentation on the ways the built-up areas were planned and carried out. Programs have to meet precise requirements: width of streets and roads, capacity to accommodate traffic flow, phonic protection. The organization of built-up areas has to meet the functional needs, symbolic messages and aesthetic tastes of City Halls or property developers. The morphological study of the city is always more than a simple description: thanks to archives, the perusal of press articles and the interviews with conceptors and decision makers, it reminds one of the ambitions of the people in charge of urban change, the stakes they took on the future, the aesthetic themes which inspired them and the ideological trends they represented (on the history of architectural and urbanistic projects, see BENEVOLO, 1960; on a theoretical reflection on this aspect of urbanism, see CHOAY, 1986).

Morphological studies provide precise photographs of land use, road systems and the volume of urban areas. They explain how morphologies are born out of the impulse given by the decision makers who rule over the urban scene. Their ideas are translated into precise projects following passionate reflections and debates. Specialists, architects, urbanists or engineers, transform them into operational programs. Real choices depend on the legal conditions which favor public housing here and private property development there. They vary according to financial conditions: the mortgage system, the more or less easy access to loans. They reflect the modes which prevail at a given time among architects and urbanists.

The morphological approach does not stop when a precise picture of built forms is provided. It establishes the time and the reasons for which specific architectural and urbanistic programs were chosen. It explains the conceptions that ruling groups on one side, architects and urbanists on the other, developed about what is an urban neighborhood, a district or a city. It stresses the symbolic dimensions that people wish to confer on such or such a type of official building or company

headquarters. The creation of built-up areas is a life-size game of construction: the participants get information on the programs to carry out; they are given a kit in which there is a choice of models to be used in order to discover satisfying solutions; they get notice of the actors which are willing to finance the equipments and the construction of residential or office neighborhoods. The morphological approaches to the city linger long on the work of conception and programming which shaped the spaces they analyze. On the other hand, they tell nothing on the way a city functions, and the difficulties, griefs and joys of those who inhabit it or work in it.

It is thus necessary to develop other approaches.

What is the use of the city? The functional approaches

What is the use of the city? Functional approaches seek to answer this question. For them, the specificities of the city do not come from its visible forms, but from the tasks it performs.

The diversity of urban functions

The list of functions performed in a city is generally a long one. Political power is normally exerted from cities: the Sovereign settles in the capital city, the most important of them; all the information he needs in order to ensure the security of the population, to maintain civil peace and to ward off external threats, converges towards it; he prepares orders and diffuses them to his agents, located in the other cities: these civil servants implement them and look after the respect for laws and regulations. Religions which rely on a centralized organization, Roman Catholicism for instance, also require cities in order to harbor their hierarchies.

Cities are market places. Traditionally, the farmers from the neighboring areas offered their products for sale to urban dwellers who consumed them or middlemen who resold them further. Craftsmen working in the city marketed their production in the same place; traders, some of whom were pedlars, offered rare and exotic commodities. With the modernization of transport and the industrial revolution, the volumes exchanged increased, forms of transaction became more differentiated, but market and trading functions remained essential.

In order to provide children with education, treat sick persons, advise enterprises on legal or economic matters and establish contracts, specialists are needed. In order for them to live, the demand for the services they provide has to be high enough. Service activities are specifically urban; they are hierarchically distributed according to the size of cities and the areas they attract.

The high density of the built-up areas prevents cities from producing the food they need – even if the proximity of a market place is a stimulus for farmers, who display treasures of imagination in order to increase the yields of their fields. For a long time, cities participated in the productive process only through the activity of their workshops. With the industrial revolution, they began to attract all forms of industrial activities. Since urbanization accelerated at the same time, the industrial function appeared as the most significant one.

Looking for a unitary principle

Thanks to the growing number of analyses of urban functions during the first half of the 20th century, it became possible to propose a rich and qualified answer to the question: "What are the uses of the city?" but the multiplicity of functions reduced the significance of these results. Urban studies became increasingly precise: thanks to them, it was possible to distinguish between market places, administrative, religious or in-

dustrial centers, and capital cities. In its first stage, the functionalist approach was more useful for emphasizing the diversity of cities than for showing what they shared.

In order to go further than the description of functions to explain what a city is, an effort of abstraction was needed. The new orientation was opened in the 1930s by Walter Christaller's studies on central places: service activities play a decisive role in the characterization of cities (CHRISTALLER, 1933). The fundamental function of urban areas is to serve as market places.

For explaining in a satisfactory way what a city is, something was however still lacking: Christaller did not say why market places were needed; he did not specify why urban activities were mainly linked to services. At the end of the 1960s, the reflection on contacts and face-to-face relations threw light on these points (TÖRNQVIST, 1968). In the 1970s people began to conceive market places as switchboards between social partners (CLAVAL, 1977; RENFREW, 1975; WILLIAMSON, 1975).

By the beginning ot the 1980s, it had become possible to define the city in an abstract way: it is a form of spatial organization which allows for the maximization of social interaction (CLAVAL, 1981). Such a perspective offers numerous advantages. The techniques and equipment of communication which allow for an easy switching between partners evolve. Urban forms change at the same time. As long as face-to-face relations between those who provide the services and their clients are needed, the interactions which are the *raison d'être* of the city are located in the downtown area. With the use of motorcars, the avenues which converge towards it are increasingly congested. The city becomes polycentric.

With the expansion of modern telecommunications, an increasing share of social transactions can be realized without direct contacts: services which were until then restricted to the populations who lived in urban areas are now available in regions with lower densities: it is the reason for suburban sprawl and, further, for the development of rurban areas.

For urban theory of the 1980s, the morphologies which give access to a high level of social interaction are not set once and for all. Thanks to the universal access to the telephone, the possibility to consult the Internet and the democratization of car ownership, the dense and continuous urban texture of the past has become outmoded. In the contemporary world, the forms of activities linked to urban life have ceased to be limited to dense and continuously built-up areas.

The diversity of interaction forms

The functional approach places emphasis on the economic dimension of cities. It also explains some of their other aspects. The interactions which take place in an urban area, in its downtown sector more particularly, are not always of the same type. In the traditional world they were developed between individuals who spoke for themselves, their families or the family firms they belonged to. Today most of those who meet work for private companies or public administrations.

The reasons for which people meet are diverse: imperatives of trade, exchanges between industrial enterprises, family relations, leisure, entertainment, political affinities, religious practices, shared ethnic origins, use of the same language, etc. In this way the functional approach opens perspectives on the cultural dimensions of urban life (CLAVAL, 1981).

What is the significance of cities? The cultural approaches

The morphological perspective conceived the city as a whole, the unity of which was expressed by the continuity of built forms. The functionalist approach apprehended also urban spaces in a global way. It relied on the following argument: the population who inhabited an urban area could only live on the foodstuffs imported from outside; in order to pay for what it imported from other regions, the city had to develop either a levying power or non-agricultural productive activities.

These global approaches contrast with those which start from the city dwellers. The problem ceases to understand what is a city as a totality, but how it is lived by those who inhabit or visit it: a cultural point of view has to be adopted. Morphological and functional analysis had cleared the ground for it in two ways:

• they had shown the perspectives of those who had presided in the building of cities or participated in their extensions;
• they had placed emphasis on the diversity of interactions which developed between city dwellers.

These themes are useful, but do not touch the heart of the problem.

Urban life trajectories and itineraries

The cultural approach follows step by step the individuals throughout their existence. The orientation was given, from the early 1950s, by a map published by Chombart de Lauwe (1952): it showed the trips of a young lady living in the 16th arrondissement in Paris. She frequented and used only a very small portion of the whole urban area; she was going back and forth in the streets close to her home in order to meet her daily requirements, make normal purchases and encounter her friends and parents; she was a student at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, so that another bundle of trips was organized around the Saint-Guillaume street, in the 6th arrondissement.

The mode of analysis imagined by Paul-Henri Chombart de Lauwe was resumed and systematized by Torsten Hägerstrand (HÄGERSTRAND, 1970). When a student, he had been fascinated by the publications of a demographer, Lotka. Instead of studying the dynamics of populations through the evidence provided by censuses and birth and death data, this statistician adopted a longitudinal approach: he followed the life of people, retracing their moves and noted the places where the events – marriages, divorces, births, deaths, etc. – occurred which interested the specialists of populations.

Hägerstrand systematized this type of procedure: social sciences do not study realities which are shaped once and for all, but sets of people constantly renewed by births and deaths, and migrations. Most social scientists are glad with the drawing of maps. But the reality they map is changing. They need a movie which captures moves, and not a snapshot which freezes reality. Their observations concern three dimensions: the coordinates of the place where each individual is located at a given time, and the time when the observations are made (PARKES and THRIFT, 1980).

Reflecting on these techniques of analysis, Hägerstrand made a few simple, but fundamental, remarks. The trajectories followed by individuals are never exactly similar, since they do not frequent the same places at the same time. The luggage everyone receives for his (or her) life has not been given to him (or her) once and for all, at the time of his (or her) birth, by the society in which he (or she) evolves. It has been progressively built. Within his (or her) family, parents, brothers or sisters serve as living models; they provide many pieces of advice on what has to be done – but what the younger boys or girls learn necessarily differs from what their elders have experienced. School also plays an essential role in the acquisition of attitudes, practices and norms, but even when programs did not change over time, teachers and schoolmates are not the same, which means that what is transferred evolves. The changing opportunities of encounter that life offers explains why culture differs from one person to the next: it is constantly modified, enriched, or gets critical.

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This inventory of life trajectories puts emphasis on the complexity of the settings people move in, and the variety of their itineraries even when their lives are inscribed within the same spatial unit, a city for instance. The experiences of everyone differ. The cultural approach is mainly centered on the analysis of these experiences, the meaning they confer to life and the significance they give to places and people.

Organized and arrowed spaces

In order to multiply the opportunities of encounters and the relations urban dwellers wish to have, the space in which urban life takes place has to be organized. The city is for the city dweller a labyrinth of streets and public squares through which he has to get oriented. As long as societies were purely oral, people had no other means in order to find their way than to ask where they were and what road to follow. It was time-consuming and sometimes inefficient: in order to get better results, people carved or painted signboards to mark the most important thoroughfares and indicate shops, inns or restaurants. The habit, for all the traders working in the same branch, to locate in the same street in medieval towns or in the same alley of a bazaar in oriental cities, had the same significance: to simplify the information that city users had to master.

The use of the written word and techniques of numeration made the urban organism more easy to read: it was enough to have a map and look at the name or number of streets to find one's way and explore urban space by oneself. The system appeared at a time when most streets had already been drawn and continuously lined with houses: it was enough to have all the gates numbered, even numbers on one side, uneven on the other, to find out the shop you were spoken about, or the house where friends lived. New roads were not continuously lined with buildings. If those which were already built had been directly numbered, the numeration had to be modified whenever new houses appeared. The only solution was to measure the distance of each building to one or the other end of the street: Mr Jones's house is 322 meters or 657 yards from the end of the street.

A new phase is reached with the arrowing of itineraries. It is a necessity for people travelling by car: at a crossing, they have no time to consult a map in order to know whether they have to turn left or right, or go on. Signs located adequately ahead of the crossings inform the drivers of the choices they will have to make, and the streets they may take in order to reach their destination.

Marc Augé explored the extension of the procedures of signalling. They transform a part of urban space into no-places, i.e. locations which do not speak about themselves, but about more or less distant destinations. "It is evident that by no-place, we designate two complementary, but distinct, realities: spaces constituted in relation with some aims (transport, transit, commerce, leisure) and the relations individuals develop with these spaces" (AUGÉ, 1992, pp. 118-119). What is the result of these practices?

In this way are created the conditions of circulation in spaces where individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, without any other enunciators than artificial persons or institutions (airports, air companies, etc.) [...], the presence of which looms vaguely or is more explicitly affirmed [...] behind the injunctions, pieces of advice, comments and "messages" transmitted through the innumerable supports [...] which are an integral part of the contemporary landscape (AUGÉ, 1992, p. 121).

The spatial layouts and equipment which transform the city into a place for encounters and opportunities vary with the modes of communication people know and use and the techniques of transport. In public areas, the internationalization of life leads to the growing substitution of pictograms for text, since they may be understood by persons who do not use the same language.

The city as a scene

In a city, the trajectories of men and women continuously cut across each other. Every place appears as a scene where plots are constructed and dramas or comedies performed. The atmosphere is created by the actors and the scenery behind them.

The city appears in this way as a complex theater: there is the city of the working days, the city of weekends and feasts and the city of riots and revolutions. The urban space is made of a juxtaposition of scenes doubled by wings. The opposition between private and public space is a founding one (KOSTOF, 1992; PAQUOT, 1996). It gives city dwellers the opportunity to participate in a multitude of interactions, to be members of various groups, to be mingled with the crowd of big events and to find oneself back in small groups, or alone, in order to reflect, work, relax and resume one's forces.

The city offers its inhabitants an inexhaustible repertory of forms of interaction. The diversity of built forms gives an idea of this wealth, but a weakened one, since the same settings often serve for different forms of encounter depending on hours and days. I remember Boston about 5 pm, when flows of employees leave the office buildings where they have worked all day. At the same time but in the other direction come those who will give the evenings and nights their rhythms, music, dances, disputes and crises of violence. The only change in the setting comes from the lights which indicate the entrance of night clubs located in basements.

When conceiving the façades of public buildings, department stores, temples or churches, architects of the past sought mainly to emphasize the symbolic dimension which was attached to their uses. Law courts had to be stamped by solemnity and to recall, by their borrowings, the grammar of classical architecture, the Greek and Roman tradition which inspired modern law. The palaces of rulers spoke about power and stability. Big office towers stressed by their verticality the wealth and ambitions of the companies which located their headquarters there (GOTTMANN, 1966). Coffee shops and restaurants were the only buildings to break with these conventions: they were open to the street, occupied it partly and invited passers-by to eat, relax and enjoy the mutual exhibition they made of themselves.

Cities had their feast days, but the scenery which was set up for them was ephemeral: paper chains, cardboard triumphal archs, banners, lattice work of greenery and flowers (KIM, 2000). All had faded before the last lantern went out. The city offered in this way two faces, the serious one of its political, religious and economic functions, and the passing one of its moments of relaxation and rituals of social inversion.

The city of today is conceived differently. Those who draw it purposely rub out all that speaks about the work really done in the buildings, which they transform into dream decors in order to make city dwellers oblivious of their daily difficulties. They disguise the working cities of the past as festive cities: the change in the role given to the scenery speaks about a fundamental transformation in the meaning given to urban life. The city was the place where people worked, where those with political, religious and economic responsibility built up the collective destiny. Today it is there that people have fun and forget their daily difficulties. The city has ceased to speak about those who mold the fate of others. It is designed in order to meet the longings of masses in societies where consumption dominates, the religious experience has ceased to be a dramatic one, and faith itself is accompanied by unbridled music and dance (GRAVARI, 2000).

The diversity of cultural experiences

Meeting points, ways, scenery, everything is set out to allow individuals to multiply their encounters, frequent people they confide in, or experiment with new conceptions, perspectives or rituals. The city offers an unequalled field of cultural experiences (PAQUOT, 1996).

These experiences differ according to income or social class. A good example is provided by contemporary Brazil (BRUNO, 2000): the poorest people have no place to take refuge from their neighbors because they have no homes; the only space open to them is that of streets where they often squat at night, sheltered by cardboard. Slightly higher in the social scale, families have a room in a *favela*, only a few square meters, without security (there are no property titles in these neighborhoods), under the pressure of the *bicheiros* (local *mafiosi*) who control these areas; children are condemned to live in the streets, with its temptations and dangers – crime, prostitution, drugs. Families with high enough incomes have an apartment in a residential tower, the entrance of which is controlled by armed guards; their children spend their afternoons in *clubes*, where they are protected from the risks of the streets. All Brazilian people like to live on the beach, to practice dancing; they are all fond of football and schools of samba, but the cultural universes they are immersed in differ by most of their characteristics.

Encounters and forms of cultures they generate are linked to the professional activities for which life and school prepare them. Many possibilities exist also in this domain. The strength of the city comes from the juxtaposition of know-hows and the knowledge it favors.

After work, people meet friends, within a community where they feel at ease: it is often a group from the same village when urbanization is recent, or the same country when urban growth is fed by international flows of populations, as is the case in most contemporary metropolises. Local dialects or the languages of the home countries survive in this way, transforming cities into multi-ethnic realities.

People participate equally in religious communities: there is a multiplicity of cults, which tend to diversify at a time when sects proliferate. What people seek there is the support of those who share the same opinions; they wish to preserve the feeling of identity which stems from their spiritual roots; they hope to find an answer to the existential questions about life, illness, death, injustice and violence that the urban environment compels them to ask.

Modern urbanites have often forgotten their origins and practice halfheartedly the religion they pretend to believe in. They prefer to learn, cultivate their minds or entertain themselves. They attend evening classes, visit museums and frequent theaters, opera houses or concerts. They go out at night for eating, drinking or dancing. In the morning, they jog, practice modern forms of gym, play tennis, fence or practice judo, etc.

All the forms of activities and sociability we just evoked are generally consonant with the dominant values of society. They are sometimes in conflict with them: the city is often the place where countercultures develop. In traditional societies, they were mainly characteristic of the lower classes where oral traditions were still alive, and the memory of old animisms or paganisms persisted. With the development of the modern press, it was in the intellectual spheres that the efforts to think the world anew and criticize the existing practices and institutions became the more noticeable.

In contemporary societies, countercultures thrive thanks to the blending of several components of the population: marginal groups, who refuse work disciplines and make permanent availability their essential value; intellectuals ready to surf on the web in order to support the causes they espouse; ethnic or religious minorities, who disagree deeply with some of the dominant attitudes.

Age-sets generally played only a minor role in traditional cities. Industrialization strengthened this tendency. Contemporary forms of youth socialization are leading to opposite results : through movies, radio or TV, young people participate in networks the adults do not control, but companies have interest in encouraging in order to open new markets to their activities. Groups of young people turn into gangs and elaborate, on the margins of society, countercultures all the more worrying that their content is generally negative and exalts violence.

Landscapes, identities and heritage

Just as for any other group, the identities of city dwellers have to hold on to material signs. Landscapes and monuments drawn in the past by commissioned architects to meet official orders are often accepted as a shared heritage by people today. Is there a Parisian who is not proud of Sainte-Chapelle, Notre-Dame, the mansions of Le Marais, the Palais Royal, the urbanism of Haussmann, the Eiffel Tower and the collections of the Louvre and Musée d'Orsay? This reading and reinterpretation of artistic forms by the populations who frequent them is one of the most fascinating fields of the cultural analysis of contemporary cities. Tastes and sensibilities evolve: the significance given to vernacular forms grows.

The contestation coming from the countercultures attacks what it considers a dangerous conservatism. Concerning landscapes, a few scores of taggers are enough to besmirch the image of architectural realizations which tried to be harmonious. It is by calling into question built forms that revolution then starts.

The city as a multicultural reality

The city is a multicultural reality: it allows bearers of different practices and plans to live in close vicinity and intervene. Everyone gets richer on that occasion. The urban community in this way gains useful competences for economic competition.

The co-existence of cultures modifies the components of each one. It happens sometimes as the result of conversions, when people abandon the values they had learnt when they were young and adopt new ones. The industrial world experienced this type of process when rural people or international immigrants forcefully strove to internalize the cultures of the cities they had settled in, since they judged them superior. It was only religious convictions which kept diasporas alive.

It is today fashionable to refuse the fusion in a common mold. Each group asserts loudly its identity. As a result the dominating impression is that of a mosaic of pieces with no shared features. Further analysis leads to more qualified conclusions. The transformations which occur within cultures do not always pass through the adoption of new values. They result from the discovery of new horizons of expectancy. Individuals receive from the environments they live in rules to respect and principles to honor. Through the haphazard encounters they have, they parallelly develop an idea about what life may offer, and has to offer them. It is these horizons of expectancy that the encounters between cultures deeply modify in contemporary cities. It is not because people proclaim their diversity that their longings have ceased to get closer.

The fundamental problems of modern cities result from that: the multicultural situation deeply transforms the horizons of expectancy of those who live there and makes them more similar. Since it is impossible for everyone to enjoy the status and the level of well-being one aspires to, tensions accumulate in the lower classes or minorities unable to meet their expectations. The rise of violence bears witness to this evolution. At the same time, the city remains a melting pot which brings the people who live in it closer. How are we to take advantage of these convergencies and avoid the conflicts which reduce the possi-

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bilities open to all?

A few years ago Samuel Huntington became famous by suggesting that we are entering a world threatened by the clash of civilizations (HUNTINGTON, 1996). The book mainly covered the international scene, but in the contemporary world, the clash of cultures is generally closer: the groups which are struggling are there, in the city. Contemporary analysis shows that multicultural situations are not only bearers of conflicts; they deeply transform the behavior and expectations of the different collectivities. How can we take advantage of the positive side of this evolution and abjure the negative one ? It is the fundamental problem of societies caught up by globalization and the mobility it creates (TAYLOR, 1991 and 1992).

Conclusion

The cultural approach to urban realities has a long history, but it is only during the last 20 years that research has given it the coherence it was deprived of until then. Starting from the way individuals build their culture in a haphazard way along the itineraries they follow and depending on the people they meet, research stresses how cultural facts are linked to space and shows the originality and depth they take in the places where social interactions are the more highly differentiated.

The cultural approach introduces new ways to understand the construction of urban policies. The narratives of those who conceived them yesterday were often long monologues. Today those of the people in charge of cities are increasingly open to the aspirations of the populations they are destined to.

The substitution of cultural approaches to morphological and functional ones was mainly achieved from the 1970s. Some authors had however understood earlier the interest of combining these different perspectives: it explains the interest of Jean Gottmann's contributions to the study of big modern cities (GOTTMANN, 1966). He started from the skyscraper, a classical element of the morphology of great American metropolises, but he immediately went a step further than other urban theoreticians: the vertical circulation the skyscraper accelerated could be substituted for horizontal ones. Thanks to it, switching from partner to partner became easier; the skyscraper contributed to the efficient functioning of the social and economic switchboards downtown areas are. At the same time the skyscraper fired the imagination by its boldness and its architectural quality: it thus gained a symbolic value; it reminded one of the power of the company which built or operated it; it participated, thanks to its presence among buildings of the same type, in the symbolic affirmation of liberal economy and capitalism. It was the reason for which Islamic terrorists chose, on the 11th September, 2001, to strike the World Trade Center in Manhattan.

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