

Habitats and societies : Introduction

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Since the Second World War, the problem of the habitat in many countries has been considered mainly in terms of economic and construction policy. The objective has been the massive construction, through collective housing, of functional dwellings with a certain degree of comfort, all very similar from one country to another. The underlying assumption has been that the residents will adapt to the housing conditions, and if not, they can always be "taught" how to live in these dwellings.

However it has gradually become evident that such functional and rational buildings give rise to a number of problems; the residents attempt to transform their homes with varying degrees of success, the wealthier elements show their dissatisfaction by moving away, and those who form the "captive" population manifest a lack of interest in their home. Thus it has become apparent that mechanisms exist in a person's way of life that do not depend solely on economic, political and technical parameters. Research undertaken by the social sciences in particular shows that the habitat as an element of the way of life — defined as the canonical forms of daily life — is also a problem of social practices.

The research done in our *Institut de sociologie urbaine*¹ (Haumont, 1966; Raymond & Haumont, 1966; Haumont & Raymond, 1971–1972; Haumont, 1975; Raymond, 1983) has shown that the inhabitant organizes his living space by creating "places" related to each other which acquire meaning through the way in which he delimits and arranges them. This qualification or "appropriation" of space is not only the expression of needs of a functional type (sleeping, eating, recreation, etc. . .); it is also a way of expressing a symbolization of social life (Haumont, 1976). For example, the French inhabitant does not arrange the "conjugal bedroom" and the "living room" in the same way. In the first case, space is qualified by signs of "intimacy" that symbolize a model of sexuality as a private act: the "conjugal" bed, curtains, subdued lighting, carpeting, dressing-table, etc. . . . In the second case on the contrary, the space is arranged in order to be shown: beautiful furniture, carpets, paintings, etc. This staging of one's socio-economic status finds its meaning in a model of sociability, i. e. a model

1) The name is today *Institut de l'Habitat*.

of the relations established between the family and outsiders. Yet, this "public" space inside the dwelling is understandable only when seen in relation with the "private" space of the bedroom: taken together they qualify family privacy, both relations within the family and its relations with the outside world. The intimacy of spaces where private activities, such as the conjugal exchange, take place can only be assured because there are other "public" spaces where the family's social relations with others can be situated or contained.

Thus, contrary to what some might think, it is not space that structures the inhabitants' practices but society itself. In fact the inhabitant possesses a "competence" (Raymond, 1976) to organize space which corresponds to what Bourdieu (1972) has called "habitus": "a system of lasting dispositions and constructed structures predisposed to operate (. . .) as the principle governing the generation and structuring of practices and representations" . . . (Bourdieu, 1972, 175). This "competence" is generated by the models of society in the forms they have taken in the course of history, and in its turn it generates practices for organizing and qualifying spaces as places that are the material substratum for concrete activities. An example: the model of sexuality as a private act generates a capacity in the inhabitant to organize a specific place and to qualify it as a private space, through a socialization which begins in childhood (we will return to this topic later). This place, the bedroom, secures privacy for sexual practices; this privacy, in its turn, reinforces the initial model.

In France the cultural and social models which generate a "competence" in the inhabitant are for the most part the structural models of the family and sociability. We call cultural models those models which are acknowledged by all of French society (Haumont, 1968): for example, monogamy, the incest taboo and the sexual division of tasks. Social models, on the other hand, relate to the position of different groups in production relations and to their strategies with respect to the dominant models of society.

In the course of history some of the social models have become cultural models. In the XIXth century each social group had its own family model. The bourgeois family was related to the primacy of private property — arranged marriages, permanence of the marriage ties, a limited number of children, great importance attached to the children's education, the privacy of the family — whereas among the proletariat, concubinage, a large number of children, their early departure from home to enter the work force, and family involvement in neighbourhood life, were customary (Aries, 1973; Flandrin, 1976; Shorter, 1977).

Improvement of material conditions and the development of the wage-earning class progressively allowed the proletariat to take over the family model of the dominant bourgeois class while "adapting" it to its own position and models. Legalized or non-legalized conjugality, the importance attached to love and sexuality, a certain

differentiation between masculine and feminine roles, attention paid to the children's education and privacy of the family currently form a structured family model that is widespread. Indeed this model appears to be more the cultural model of a wage-earning society than the social model of a given group (Michel, 1970; Ségalen, 1981; *Colloque*, 1983).

This does not mean that there are no differences in the way in which social groups put the cultural models to work. For example, in France it is the women who are responsible for the housework even if men quite frequently participate in domestic chores. However several forms exist for putting this model to work: in certain groups the energy displayed by the "housewife" will be valued, in others it is her ability to manage the domestic help that will be considered important.

As a historically situated and relatively unified structure of the modern family and its sociability, cultural models generate consistent patterns in the practices of organization and qualification of French housing: creation of an intermediate area between the outside and the inside of the dwelling (gate, front-garden, door, entrance hall, but also interphone), a "reception" space, a place reserved for the couple, etc.

Seen on a historical scale, these consistencies have a certain permanence. The reason why changes observed in the inhabitants' practices take place so slowly can be found in the fact that their "competence", defined as a "set of dispositions to act" has been inculcated from earliest childhood through the socialization of space. Thus the child "learns" very early that he cannot enter the parents' bedroom whenever he wishes, and that he must not make the living room dirty or untidy "because someone is expected", even if the precise meaning of such rules is not given. In this way the models of privacy and social relations are inculcated in the child, and more generally his status in the family, masculine and feminine roles, as well as a set of gestures which enable him to take his meals at a table, to sit down on a chair . . . Society treats "the body as a memory" as Bourdieu puts it, adding: "Thus what is incorporated is outside consciousness, safe from voluntary and deliberate transformation" (Bourdieu, 1972, 197). This inculcation is reinforced by a set of explicit prescriptions transmitted by school, the media, etc. . .

This is why it is so difficult for an inhabitant to introduce basic and lasting changes in the organization of his living space. How many "free plans" have been progressively reorganized into places with an "appropriate" set of meanings without the inhabitant being aware of the sense of this reorganization! "Competence" remains at the level of "integrated marks" even if it does not immediately generate new practices. Thus observers periodically think they have discovered new ways of life among "youth", only to realize a short time later that once they settle down in marriage and have children these same young people have adopted the "traditional" way of life.

Does it then follow that the models, and with them the ways of

living, are immutable? No, but it is necessary to add that these models take shape and evolve on a historical time scale. Earlier it was noted that today in France models such as those of the family and sociability have become cultural models. However, this does not mean that new social models might not be in the process of being constituted. Thus, more and more young people tend to live together (Gokalp, 1981) but this is only one of the forms of conjugality (Haumont & Raymond, 1981); single parent families and communities do exist, but they are not currently alternatives to the cultural model of the family and sociability; as more women get jobs, more men share in domestic chores, but the women remain responsible for the children's education and the housekeeping. In fact it seems that basic changes occur only when a social group comes into being, proclaims its historical vocation and gives itself the models it needs to exist.

Be that as it may, space does not seem to play a major role in the transformation of models. It can be observed that when space presents difficulties for putting the inhabitants' "competence" to work (no entrance hall, the bedroom opening onto the living room, etc.) it is the space that is changed and not the models that have generated the "competence", the transformations made by residents in Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation at Marseille (Haumont & Raymond, 1972) and in the Pessac houses (Boudon, 1969) are only two examples of this phenomenon.

However, space can be an accelerating factor in the transformation of social models into cultural models. As an example we can refer to the prescribed surface and occupation norms in the social housing sector. Coing (1966) has shown that the move into a "modern" dwelling enables residents who came from a "traditional" working class neighbourhood and home but who had a fairly high socio-economic status, to put the dominant models of the family and sociability to work.

We have considered the relations between inhabitants' practices regarding their habitat and the family and sociability models within French society. In other societies different family structures (the "joint family" in India, the hierarchical family in Japan, polygamy in Senegal) all generate a specific organization of the original space. Furthermore, other models come into play, the pure and impure in the Indian habitat, or religion linked to the domestic cult in Japan.

The articles by C. Bauhain, J. C. Depaule and S. Noweir, V. Gri-maud and A. Osmont concerning very different societies (industrial societies and developing countries) show that within each society the inhabitant has a "competence" for organizing and qualifying his space, and that this competence is generated by social and / or cultural models.

If those who design housing projects take into account the models which belong to each society at a given time, the inhabitant will be able to put his "competence" to work — he will be able to "live" in his home and not merely "occupy" it.

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