



Offer: Multicultural cities : urban landscapes as aesthetic encounters with otherness

Description:

ABSTRACT: My project proposal is based on the wealth I would see in extending my PhD research on a European level.

My personal project is based on an anthropological survey of cultural identity bricolages, as they are visible in public space. It's title is « Ethnic, multicultural, cosmopolitan: neighborhoods at a glance. Traces and signs of identity bricolages in urban landscapes ». “Ethnic”, “multicultural” and “cosmopolitan” are concepts I question through how they are experienced by people in everyday life; not in abstract discourses, but rather through their approach to the material environment, and through their aesthetic and emotive perception of space.

I investigate the subjective »perception« of urban landscapes. As you walk through a city you are often able to identify the cultural profile of its inhabitants or users. How does this aesthetic perception occur?

On the other hand I analyse the objects and artefacts that make the street an intelligible space (Joseph). How are those signs, objects, traces of actions produced? How were they dropped or placed on the scene of visibility (Goffman)? I am focusing on this unplanned and non-institutionalized shaping process of the city, as it is done through micro-interventions in everyday life. Individual narratives are meant to bring up the vibrant and alive character of space, through the story telling, the subjective associations, people make.

My working hypothesis is that we have much to learn about how cultural encounters, relationship to the otherness work, once we investigate how people mobilise them by speaking about their material environment, about their “places” they are familiar with. When we analyse objects and signs as artefacts, we try to outline a process we call “identity bricolages”. Namely a do-it-yourself construction where people make a creative use of the multiple resources existing in a diverse city. The narratives about objects in public space – boards, signs, a graffiti... bring about very surprising anecdotes about how people integrate otherness in their storytelling (both material and narrative).





For the HERA JRP Cultural Encounters I would like to propose a joint research project in several European cities, possibly implemented in cooperation with local socio-cultural associations (as for instance Urban Dialogues in Berlin or Recyclart in Brussels). For the academic part, the disciplines involved are : anthropology, visual anthropology, pragmatic sociology, symbolic interactionism. The methodology I use in my phd theses includes some participatory exercises, and experimental parts as a photograph-show in public space which juxtaposes the reproductions to the original subjects, and constitutes the base for interviews and feedback from local population. The concrete aims of this projects are : firstly to create an operational toolkit for qualitative survey of cultural diversity as shown in urban landscapes for European cities. Secondly to generate a photographic database of diverse neighbourhoods all across Europe, and a web-tool to browse this images and collect comments and impressions about the images.

I propose to analyse cultural encounters as they are mediated through objects and the visual : the aesthetic and material relationships and ways of doing ("arts de faire" Michel de Certeau) with the direct environment people are living in. The shared space of multicultural cities is here seen as privileged context for studying moments on "encounter" with otherness.

TARGET PARTNER SOUGHT: I'm searching both for partners of the academic world (sociology, anthropology, architecture...), and from the artistic or socio-cultural one, in order to develop and implement the project in several European cities. Possibly a web-based tool could be created to collect and analyse the pictures, with a participatory part to collect feedback and comments of visitors.

CURRENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT: Planning phase.

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