

De l'atelier au territoire: Le travail en quête d'espace (From workshop to territory: labour looking for new spaces)

Thérèse Evette and François Lautier (Eds)

This new book from Evette and Lautier presents a very interesting and stimulating overview of the changing relations between labour and space. It mixes contributions of sociologists, economists, managers, planners, architects, academics and professionals. Nevertheless, the unity of the problematic is outstanding. This book is in my opinion an example of the richness of an interdisciplinary and well-defined problematic.

Specialization, hierarchy and interdependence were the principles governing the development of a taylorist and fordist industry and the organization of space. This pattern became more complex with the emergence of information technologies and new organizational forms. In response to a greater uncertainty, the master principles of firms today consists in flexibility and in the capacity to react speedily. This transformation may be as important as the introduction of mass production at the beginning of this century. However, this book focuses on a particular aspect of it, namely the transformation of real space. In a context where innovation and the reversibility of investments are crucial, the shaping of space becomes a question of scientific interest but may also turn into a resource for development. The most fascinating aspect of this book is the large coverage of most of the dimensions of this transformation, from metropolization to the architecture of firms, the design of workshops and buildings down to labour posts. Globalization implies new connections for the firm through the localization in large cities or the insertion in local networks. There are therefore needs for new town planning, with less rigid zoning and more interconnections. Some agglomerations do not manage to overcome the old spatial organization and face new problems in terms of the coherence of planning of transportation networks and of relations between living conditions and the expansion of land use by firms. At the level of the architecture of the firm, there are several points which are worth noting. The passage to a 'post-Taylorist' organization implies a different rotation to the labour post, less individual and less dedicated than previously. There are also many more spaces for communication than before (meeting rooms, cafeterias, training rooms...). Regarding flexibility and reversibility of investments, another important feature is a design which makes a difference between what is fixed once for all (and which should allow the building to be sold later if necessary) and what can be changed. The emergence of the intelligent building and its impacts in terms of productivity, costs and organization are also examined. Several contributions by professionals are given concerning urban restructuring, the strategies of estate agencies, the building of new industrial plants, the spatial framework of research laboratories, etc. They all give very interesting insights about the diversity of strategies of the different actors and underline the differences depending on location.

Going beyond a mere description of what is going on in the shaping of space, this book insists on the necessary collaboration between managers, architects and city planners. If organization is the key economic resource today, one should be aware of the impact of a well-designed working environment and of an adequate insertion in cities and regions.

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