

Cultural Dimensions And Development

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Abstract

The article explores the dimension of culture concerning development in the so-called Third World. It questions the concept of "development" (it is also called "modernization") as it has developed in the West and as it is applied in countries of the Third World. The Western philosophy of development occupies eventually the concept of "development" and determines its criteria. The answer of the West to development of the developing countries has been related to ignoring the cultural peculiarities of these countries and has tried to impose its own concept of development. The result is widely known: deficient development.

The author hypothesizes that the non-material conditions of development have not been enough considered in development projects and development policies. Development projects deal largely with technical problems relating to increasing production and organizational problems. He argues that genuine development must necessarily take place within the so-called traditional culture, i.e. local culture. The latter should be taken into account when planning and carrying out development plans. This implies devising methods and approaches of development which are compatible with needs and power and social relations prevalent in society.

Instances from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Algeria are cited to elucidate the implications of development with or without considering culture as a non-economic factor. The Western philosophy of development is largely influenced by the notion of accelerated transformation of environment, and rejects the "static" character of "traditional" civilizations. It pursues technical advances, and increased control over forces of nature and over human beings. Utility and efficiency become necessarily the supreme values in the service of "development" and higher standards of living". It seems therefore a priori contradictory, even impossible, in the mind of various modernity thinkers, to attempt conciliating traditional culture with development.

Hence, the usefulness of taking the cultural dimension into account barely appears in the case of urban and rural projects. The cultural dimension no longer appears as a coherent whole, but seems to be reduced to a problem of mentality. A number of Western thinkers suggest that development cannot and should not be "neutral" as far as culture is concerned. From the start the development effort is by its very nature opposed to traditional culture. This orientation may mean either that the cultural problem is no longer posed or that it is posed, otherwise, in a "weaker" fashion or as "resistance" to change.

Introduction:

In this essay I want to argue that apart from the intricate division between the so-called less developed countries and the developed ones, embedded in a world system to the advantage of the latter, most development projects have failed to achieve adequate development because the cultural dimension has not been properly handled.

Culture is a social reality contained in a certain collective consciousness (Erdheim, 1982). Culture is not something added after having submitted to the conditions of existence, nor is it an aesthetic supplement presented as the trimming on the means of living. Considered as such, it is wrong to juxtapose nature and culture. Culture is the nature of the conditions of existence as lived by conscious, land free, human beings (Metscher, 1982). This culture embodies the modes of life and the human relations of a given "milieu". It shapes itself according to the diverse concrete modalities in which the individuals and the groups are inserted in the constitutions and the organization and production systems. This time, in this context, it is also the manner in which each one utilises his time, his work, his activities, his presence in the world, and thus establishes the form of relationships with others. In this way, the political configuration of a country, the forms of government and the political traditions are as much a highly cultural phenomenon as the organisation of the productive forces and the relations of production (Althusser 1971).

The majority of the members of a society live this cultural reality in a semi-conscious state, about as aware of it as they are of the air that they breathe. The problems of becoming conscious often do not arise except when the air becomes unbreathable. If it were necessary for us to give a well-balanced definition of culture, we would say that it is the totality of the conditions of existence in the world and the representation of the world that a human group, more or less spread-out and powerful, makes of itself and its relations with others; or that culture is the integrated totality of a common social existence insofar as it is responsible for the direction of its members. The latter see themselves as, and want to be, part of a society having a common fundamental desire to live through the instrumentality of generally applied organisational systems.

Thus ways and means are necessary to co-exist in this world and to create similar patterns of behaviour and common customs. All human groups capable of survival transmit a culture and an ethic (Elias, N. 1976). Considered in this manner, there are no people, who, in their own, are not really developed. Because this fundamental truth has been forgotten, a materialistic kind of development has broken down authentic cultures and created underdevelopment, on the loss of one's identity and the sense of one's existence in the world.

Economic Development and Cultural Impact:

It is indeed regrettable that economists, in their search for factors underlying economic development, have almost totally neglected the nonmaterial conditions of economic progress and concentrated instead on purely economic factors such as the rates of saving and investment, the availability of certain skills, and the introduction of modern techniques; for such factors may only constitute the results rather than the cause of development.

Of course, for economic development to occur, savings and investment must be increased, new technologies developed, and a new class of managers created. But all this may be regarded as little more than the definition of certain aspects of development, while the underlying force bringing it about may be completely outside the economic domain. What certainly seem to be factors favourable to development are the regaining of self-confidence and self-esteem and the spread of a wave of enthusiasm for a rational cause - the emergence of a new drive to prove that the nation is not inferior to foreigners and to encourage the belief that one's own culture is worth preserving. But how is one to hope for such a socio-psychological attitude to prevail in a social atmosphere where national culture is continuously belittled and ridiculed, where the abandonment of tradition is regarded as a sufficient sign of progress, where one boasts of not being able to speak or write in one's own language and where the foreigner is esteemed for no other reason than being a foreigner?

Egypt, for example, poor and overpopulated, has limited resources and has directly suffered from several devastating wars with Israel. At the same time it is an old, continuing, urban civilization, a cultural/Islamic centre in the Arab world, and a Nile culture. Since the 1952 Revolution Egypt has gone from one ready-made, slightly modified mode of development - Nasser's Arab socialism - to another, Sadat's Infitah¹ (Dekmejian, R. H. 1971; Dimbley, J. 1977).

The latter resembles the kind of economic growth accompanied by westernism, materialism and consumerism, and away from tradition and the Muslim ethic. In Iran, cultural tradition was taken for granted and forced to mold itself rapidly into a westernized version (Stauth, G. 1980).

According to the Egyptian economist Abdel-Khalek, Infitah means "opening up the Egyptian economy for direct private investment, both Arab and foreign. Two elements are stressed in the rationale for Infitah: finance and technology. This rationale is based on equating growth with development. But development is a much more fundamental task; it involves eradicating poverty, unemployment and inequality" (Abdel-Khalek, G. 1979:70; see also Jacobs, H. 1971).

The distinction Abdel-Khalek makes is important because there can be growth that is not accompanied by development. However, there is still another crucial dimension missing: a non-economic factor. While "eradicating poverty, unemployment and inequality", **development must take place with the traditional culture.** In other words, not only is development distinguishable from growth, but modes of development can be distinguished on the basis of whether they are truly indigenous. In the face of the two forceful models prevalent over non-Western systems - Western modernizing and Marxist socializing - there has hardly been any room for development outside of them. (According to Tibi, B. (1979), the failure of these two development models led to revitalization of Islam in some Islamic and Arab countries).

It was by no means a coincidence that during the eighth-year period (1956-1964) which followed the Suez war, Egypt not only achieved its highest rate of growth since the beginning of the century and a significant transformation of its economic structure, while greatly reducing income inequality, but also witnessed a most remarkable socio-psychological change and unmistakable cultural revival (Cf. Dekmejian, R.H. 1971). During this period, a feeling of national pride came gradually to replace that feeling of inferiority towards the foreigners which had accumulated during a century of foreign domination. Egypt's middle class was forced to consume Egyptian products until it came gradually to admit that foreign products are not always superior. Members of this class wore Egyptian instead of British cloth, furnished their houses with Egyptian furnitures, smoked Egyptian cigarettes, and drank national beverages in place of coca-cola which disappeared from the market.

Novelists and short story writers wrote what could be considered their best work, a new school of poetry appeared, numerous new theatres were built, Arab classics were republished, translation and folk arts were encouraged and a new type of singing flourished and enjoyed a great deal of popularity - carrying beautiful expressions of love and patriotism (cf. Aboul-L-Enein, F. 1976; Awad. L. 1968).

Under Sadat's rule cultural symbolism became increasingly Westernized. For example, the president's wife, Jihan was not only visible as Egypt's first lady but in her own right. She projected the image of the modern elite woman: westernized, capitalistic and ambitious. Understandably, she appealed to the West. In Egypt her role as model was limited for she related only to a particular kind of urban Egyptian woman. The vast majority of Egyptian women could not relate to her. She was neither real nor meaningful within their conceptual order. Her style of life was not only non-indigenous but anti-indigenous, hence irrelevant and not to be emulated.

Nasser felt the need increasingly to infuse indigenous values and goals in his development efforts. With Nasserism in eclipse under Sadat, the

reopening of Egypt to the West has flooded the country with foreign goods and has offered to Egyptians through films, magazines and advertisement Western styles of living a standard model of "modern life". This stuvesant world which is alien in origin and more-over, unattainable for most, has not been accepted by many as a representative expression of Egyptian socio-political identity. Particularly as the increased pressures of rapid change have already led to a wide-spread religious revival not only among Muslims but among the Coptic minority, too, revitalisation of indigenous culture has gained more and more significance. Sadat's policies did not offer much for the masses to identify with. In other words, as more and more Egyptians have felt, the Western secularist culture has not offered viable solutions for their society, the search for a truly Egyptian identity - which already had started in the first half of this century - has intensified over the last decades.

One of the main economic problems of a poor country in its relationship with the developed world lies in the fact that it does not find, in the basket of goods and services offered by the latter, items which it really needs to buy and which the developed countries are at the same time anxious to sell. On the other hand, a major problem facing a developed country in its relationship with the third world is that the latter has neither a sufficiently high ability to buy the goods the former offers, nor a sufficient desire to obtain them (Cf. Amin, S. 1976; Lipton, M. 1977; Mabro, R. 1974).

If the problem concerning the ability to buy can be solved by making income distribution less equal, the problem concerning the desire to buy can only be solved on the plane of culture.

Just as factors of production as well as purchasing power have to be diverted from the domestic products towards foreign goods, national culture will also have to give way in the interest of the culture from which these goods originate. For in order to teach Egyptians, for example, to enjoy western music, it is highly desirable for them to be trained to despise their own: and if they are to become consumers of modern architecture, it is desirable that they lose their appreciation of the Arabic (see also Amin, G. 1983). In fact, in order to inculcate the desire to obtain a big European motor car, they will have to be taught to give up a whole host of customs and mental habits inconsistent with the possession of a private car. In a word: in order to create reliable consumers for western goods, you are well advised to have those customers "westernized".

One is very much inclined to consider this threat to national culture as a far more serious problem than that of worsening income distribution. For in contrast to the latter, cultural disintegration is a process which is extremely difficult to reverse. Even prolonged economic deprivation of anation's population conceivably be brought to an end fairly quickly through a sudden reversal of economic policies; but a loss incurred in the

domain of culture may be impossible to regain. For example, it is well to note the difficulties met by Algeria in trying to set the people to return to speaking and thinking in Arabic after the thorough process of Westernization to which Algerians were subjected under French rule (Cf. Brett, M. 1973). But there is another reason why one should regard this process of westernization with greater concern: it may represent not only a cultural loss but also a threat to the development process itself. This state of affairs is related to the Western type of ethnocentric rationality of development.

Eurocentric Rationality of Development:

Eurocentrism, the determining influence of the West on the rest of the world, and the absolute priority given to "development" by the expansion of modernity are different concepts by which to characterize the same process (Apter, D. 1965).

It would be interesting at this point, to show how western history has enlarged itself onto world history through the different stages of colonization. This is evident from the Latin word current at the time of the Roman empire, which defines "the colonist" as the one who will clear up the uncultivated land for tillage. All "cultures" originated from agriculture. From the Western colonization of the world was born a culture which superimposed good and bad taste on the cultures of all the other people.

Shaped by several humanitarian poses and by moralising pretexts, Western development could be defined in the last instance as the desire which is subtly joined to the myth of immediate gratification. The supreme value, which hence-forth takes its place over common welfare, to increase in all possible ways the individual and collective life through a radical application of scientific processes and technical powers. The goal is no longer to explain the world and man in the world, but to change them. Technical and industrial progress and the ordering of the economy became the essential preoccupations and the primary objectives of all policies (Cf. White, L.A. 1959). For modern man the world is no longer one which contains and supports human beings. On the contrary, it is a representation that he creates from the transformations that he brings about in it.

Industrial society has its roots in the gradual secularization of values that characterized the waning of the Middle Ages. With this shifting of the guiding values towards pragmatic and utilitarian ends, away from interests in explanation, colonization, development and application of new technologies, the birth of empirical science - and eventually, the growth of competitive capitalism, the industrialization of economic production, and the wedding of science and technology (Grevemeyer. J.H. 1981).

Economic values came more and more to prevail over non-economic ones in social decisions. An increasing fraction of human activity moved into the monetized economy and became judged by its standards. Manipulative rationality came to dominate the knowledge system: that knowledge is valued which can be used to predict and control the physically measurable world. Acquisitive materialism became an accepted way of life (Eisenstadt, S. 1979).

Those who live their lives in such a cultural milieu are hypnotized by it, so that they literally perceive reality as the culture suggested they should perceive it (Brandt, G. 1972). They take as self-evident that industrial society's dominant beliefs and values are "natural" for people to espouse: that the motivations and goals individuals manifest in it are "normal"; the Western science gives the "best" picture of reality. They would find it extremely difficult and it does not occur to them as particularly desirable, to enter into the cultural hypnosis of someone outside industrial culture and perceive as he or she does (David, C. and Fanon, F. 1970).

In the development of modernization there has been a progressively radical extension of the manner in which human intelligence tries to test its mastery of the world. The man of the Renaissance, in an explicit way according to Descartes, desires to be the "master and teacher of nature". Bacon said "Knowledge is power" and his contemporary, a famous Spanish Jesuit, Baltasar Gracion, declared in 1645 that "man is as capable as the amount of his knowledge and the sage can do anything". But it is knowledge itself which has changed direction, according to Plato, Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Science became the exact, systematic and controlled understanding of both the laws of nature and of man in nature.

This new method of learning (episteme), using a new approach, progressively rejected the knowledge previously considered to be certain (Mead, G.H. 1980).

A new vision of the world and of man's place in it gradually invaded the other areas of social existence, particularly, because of technical advances, the greatly increased control over the forces of nature and over human beings themselves. Nearly all efforts of modern thinking have been aimed at setting up, within a superior and exclusive method of learning, a system of explanation where there is nothing above and beyond human reason. The new form of learning, this new anthropology as new manner of existing in the world, forms the characteristics of modernization. We can consider here only the scope of the overthrow: hereafter man relies solely on his humanity which he has created by his own movement. "God is dead", as Nietzsche would say. Humanity no longer turns toward God as a creator. It has only one destiny and that is to pursue its immanent ends which it will shape according to its will.

This anthropological epistemological resolution has been a revolution in the desire and power of man which has had repercussions on the entire economic, political and social order. It is here that one finds the foundation of that which constitutes the dominant culture of our times. It is from here that the concrete and real world in which we live, desire, and construct the world beyond our moralizing intentions (common interest, common property) was created (Laszlo, E. et al. 1977).

Utility, agreeableness and efficiency necessarily become the supreme values in the service of mere temporal and perishable happiness. Therefore this world is primarily one of will, collective power and increasing individual enjoyment.

Therefore one must now consider the real world we live in and how we got there in order to understand something about the cultural problems of our times. We find once again modernity, with its deep-rooted foundations of privilege in the West, and its extension as an "oilspill" over the "rest of the world". It is this Western philosophy, Western representation of the world of the Enlightenment which characterizes the "culture" of modernity.²⁾

Consumption: An Eurocentric Model of Development

Immobile societies have never existed. Yet, it is often propagated that a "developed" society is essentially a consumer society. It consumes (even devours) renewable and non-renewable resources. It consumes fossile energy. It consumes time and space. A "non-developed" society on the other hand limits its consumption according to natural constraints, uses human, animal, solar, wind and hydraulic energy in the forms which are most immediately accessible. It does not work against time, but with it, according to natural rhythms which affect the whole of humanity.

Culture in the West is defined as the relationship of man with the nature surrounding him taken as a whole, in a conceptual and spiritual framework which enables man to act as a relatively autonomous agent in relation to ecological and social constraints (Kofler, L. 1972). The culture of a society, the dynamism of which is based on unlimited consumption thanks to conquering technology, is necessarily completely different from a culture on a natural economy.

It is claimed in the West that the natural economy is no longer in a position to satisfy even the most elementary needs of billions of human beings and ensure their survival. But the fact that the demographic revolution has been made possible by the technological revolution does not in any way mean that the Western model of development based on consumption is the desirable objective or even a feasible one in the Third World.

New consumption models are conceivable. But they can only be con-

ceived as a function of cultural models which have been renewed on the basis of traditional cultural models. Whereas the Shah of Iran opted for the classical model of Western consumption: an all-inclusive package of modern industrialization, Saudi-Arabia - faced with the same challenge - chose a more discriminating path: unrelenting in selecting the most advanced technology yet devising ways to present full-scale penetration of undesired Westernizing into its Arab-Islamic tradition.

Faithful to its own plans, Saudi Arabia, while rapidly absorbing, certain radical urbanizing and development projects, has been able in specific instances to domesticate advanced technology so that development becomes compatible with cultural tradition. By doing so, Saudi Arabia has opted for a mode of development which can be considered an experiment in demonstrating compatibility between Western consumption and technology on the one hand, and Arab tradition and Islam on the other.

For example, one feature of Saudi sociocultural organization is the division of society into two separate but complementary worlds, the men's and women's. In Saudi Arabia this division is relatively rigid and strict: the sexes do not mix. In order not to violate this rule, yet provide education for both men and women, funding and planning energy is channeled into education development that accomodates the tradition rules of sexual space and cross-sex separation. One novel feature is the use of closed-circuit television and telephones which allow male professors to lecture to women students without violating a sociocultural tradition.

It is too early to predict whether such an experiment can realistically be sustained and whether it will actually produce the effects anticipated in the planning. Nevertheless, to its own people, to other Arabs and Muslims, and to the outside world, a legitimacy is extended to Arab Islamic tradition during development. The usual modernization package of development (growth) plus Westernization is challenged and an alternative mode is presented to the non-Western world.

Every development program based on growth presupposes and implies by its very definition an increase in consumption of all kinds whether it be "free" goods such as air, water and space, or of "captive" ones such as mineral and energy resources and natural renewable resources.

Traditional cultures are based on a production system, the economy of which is in keeping with natural cycles. The only element of acceleration they rely on are natural energies (water, wind and sun) and animal ones. Traditional societies consider time as an immutable factor linked to a cosmology where the only changes affecting the life of men are by nature unforeseeable or catastrophic. The will of God prevails over that of man. The human will has no other choice but to resort to propitiatory rights in

the hope of making the arbitrary will of God coincide with his own immediate desires (kandil, F. 1975).

The maintenance of traditional cultures is linked to a specific situation of durable character which makes people think that stability and peace together with social non-mobility are integral parts of the cosmic order. The Egyptian civilization of the second and first millenia gives a fairly precise idea of this order and of this stability as well as of the immutable and static character of this civilization for the mass of people (Staath, 1983:1).

The acceptance of ecological factors in the traditional system supposes that one considers the individual destiny of a person as being entirely secondary to that of the group, the project of an individual to depend entirely on that of the collectivity. Exaggerated consumption is linked to power and restricted to that element of the group which profits from the "accused" part (in modern terms: those who control the dominating heights of the economy).

Western philosophy of development is influenced by the notion of accelerated transformation of an environment and rejects the "static" character of traditional civilizations (Elias, N. 1976). Thus every development project should imply the development of a potential of renewable and non-renewable resources. What high technology civilization has to offer is the freeing of human potential from the servitude of matter, no longer through prayer and religious hope, but by the action of man on his environment with help of energy and technology. Traditional cultures have proved incapable of resisting the challenges with which they are confronted (Fanon, F. 1977). It seems therefore a priori contradictory, even impossible to attempt conciliating traditional culture with development.

So we see the radical difference between cultures based on modernity and those which are linked to traditionality. The glorification of the individual as the agent and ultimate end of the economic and social system results in immediate consumption being increased at the expense of those of future generations and of the continuity of the group.

A society of change and consumption tries to find its justification in the immediate statistical satisfaction of needs which represent nothing more than the undefined desires of groups of individuals enjoying purchasing power and material accumulation.

A number of Western thinkers suggest that development can not and should not be "neutral" as far as culture is concerned. From the start the development effort is by its very nature opposed to traditional culture even if it has been made necessary by the failure of the latter to answer the challenge of internal and external competition and resisting the

powerful attraction of consumer models lying well above the subsistence level (Broszinsky-Schwabe, E. 1979).

The physical and social mobility demanded by development is completely incompatible with the statutory immobility of stable worlds which are organized according to their own cosmos and their sacred pact with the dominant forces which can only be appeased, not controlled.

Anti-indigenous Development

Not always Eurocentric development projects succeed in achieving acculturation by means of imposing the Eurocentric rationality models. The reverse is also true; Western acculturation does not necessarily always succeed in paving the way for implementing conceptualized development projects. In these areas outside the Western world where the cultural, i.e. indigenous social organization and value systems have been ignored, these projects failed to reach their objectives, i.e. to achieve adequate development.

Some vernacular languages have no words for "chair", "table", "bed", "fork" or "spoon". Therefore this culture reflects another type of rationality and demands another type of development which does not mean that non-industrial development is archaic. But the usual answer has been to ignore these peculiarities and try to impose "development". The result is deficient development.

Acculturation can be translated as two forms of reinterpretation by the society affected from the outside: a reinterpretation of internal culture in relation to Western culture or a reinterpretation of Western culture to internal culture. The difference of reinterpretation can be linked to what can be called "strong" or "weak" cultures which induce the sense of reinterpretation (Kindermann, G. K. 1962).

In both cases, there is the phenomenon of double cultural belonging and the psycho-sociological conflicts which this implies at the internal level. Cultures thus have different strategies capacities of resistance to aggression, dispute or integration (Erdheim 1982).

Development projects tend more towards an attempt at normalizing social behaviour on the basis of rules of "scientific organization of work" or Western organizational models. These are based on sociological or psychological postulates which assume that there is one single, universal rationality (Nerfin, M. 1977). They also postulate that individuals are in agreement with the objectives of this organization. This makes the understanding of cultural phenomena and their interpretation into a project of development program all the more complex, insofar as the decision makers do not participate in the cultural universe in which the project must be applied.

Culture appears as a strategic concept at the level of its use, whether in

the rural, urban or industrial field. However, the usefulness of taking the cultural dimension into account barely appears in the case of urban or industrial projects. This orientation may mean either that the cultural problem is no longer posed or that it is posed otherwise, in a "weaker" fashion or as "resistance" to change (Moser, U. 1964).

In the case of rural development projects, production objectives must pass through structural human groups attached to more or less resistant systems of values.³ In the case of urban or industrial projects, the project goals are expressed through individuals, who might eventually be grouped together in association, or the orientation of whose needs, are largely dominated by the mechanisms of the modern market economy. The cultural dimension no longer appears as coherent whole but seems to be reduced to a problem of mentality (capacity to manage, to make a machine function, to plan or forecast) or to a psychological problem relating to something such as the capacity to work. Consequently, industrial and urban projects tend to underestimate or to ignore the cultural dimension.

As a result, industrial or urban projects very often lead to unforeseen consequences which are often the result or reinterpretation of a model of Western functioning in relation to a more or less traditional model, itself in a part transformed by group or individual historical acculturation. They can lead simply to failures at the level of management techniques, for example, or the level of the dysfunction of the urban drainage systems, public infrastructures, etc..

The reinterpretation, unexpected consequences, or failures show once again that a technique is not neutral but related to a model of social organization or a system of values which is partly or wholly in contradiction with the local conditions (Nerfin, M. 1977)⁴.

A case study carried out by Brett (Brett, M, 1973) of a housing estate which had been erected by the french colonizers in a district of Algier is representative. This project was designed to supply reasonable social housing, taking advantage of low-interest loans. The estate was built in squares according to french urban norms without taking into account such factors as human flows, social life and elementary services such as shops necessary to town life. The aim was solely to preserve the residential character of the estate.

The unexpected consequences were sufficiently important within the framework of highly planned urbanization to show how far the cultural dimension plays a dominating role in housing models reinterpreted according to Algerian norms.

First of all, the houses built for four-to-five person European families were occupied by 6-15 persons, the number of persons being proportional to the income of the civil servant, not to the surface area of the home, this

being the classical functioning of the family logic where social elders must help by younger relatives.

All the houses studied by Brett were transformed for demographic and social reasons. The entire available garden space was occupied by new rooms. In most homes an outside kitchen for cooking on a charcoal fire was added to the European kitchen. The advantage of this type of cooking is that it is economical, and that the size of the kitchen permits meal preparation for a large family. Moreover, as the kitchen is outside, it is possible to watch the children playing; it thus becomes a meeting place for women. The "sitting-rooms" were also enlarged so as to increase the area available for group discussion. At the same time, there was a multiplication of rooms which serve not only as personal spaces, but also as sleeping spaces, or as both. Finally, even the garages were transformed into small shops, established by shopkeepers and tailors, despite the official ban on this kind of use of garages.

This restructuring of the houses reflects a community approach to social life. The initial plan just did not correspond to real social needs and ignored the cultural patterns of its intended beneficiaries.⁵

Cultural Aspects to consider in Development Projects

It is usually said that when a development project "fails" it is because no account has been taken of qualitative variables, i.e. of culture in the broadest sense of the term; that cultural models, traditions, or irrational behaviour restrain the introduction of rational and universal technico-economic innovations.

Most development projects applied to rural populations contain their objectives in the title of the presentation document: e.g. "Improve the conditions of life of the peasants" and "increase incomes". The rest of the project usually only deals with technical problems relating to increasing production or organizational problems concerning the intervening body or experts, and their relations with the administration (Jacobs, H. 1971). It is not texts and speeches which are important, but the policy and real content of these projects which will reveal their rational and actual cultural dimension.

To take into account the cultural dimension of development means, for instance, recognizing that peasant behaviour is rational. This does not necessarily imply a harmonious balance in the traditional system which might be upset by progress and technique. This rationality is dynamic, conflictual and contradictory, peasant rationality appears at three levels, which act both as constraints and potentialities:

- 1- the ecosystem: the natural environment.
- 2- the agrosystem: methods of farming, animal husbandry, fishing and hunting.
- 3- the socio-economic system: social relations of production, of

reproduction and exchange which relate back to the system of institutional decision making, to social stratification, and to representation of the world.

Four main variables influence these three levels:

1. land ownership as a means of production.
2. human energy as labour.
3. tools and techniques.
4. the circulation of goods produced by peasant societies.

These levels of analysis of these four variables constitute a system of action which involves a certain number of peasant strategies vis-à-vis development projects.

Agrarian civilizations are marked by certain fundamental characteristics such as the uncertainty of agricultural production due to climate considerations. Another concern is social reproduction in terms of health which is the determining factor of human energy as the basis of production. This emerges as power relations built around an area of uncertainty via the control of "magic", the means to reduce this uncertainty. It involves social behaviour oriented towards provisions for uncertainty, rather than towards prevision, i.e. action in uncertainty. To this is added the fact that simple accumulation dominates extended accumulation.

Peasant society for these reasons, develops strategies when possible, reinterpreting the goals of development projects to reduce uncertainty. Taking into account the cultural dimension thus involves taking into account also this uncertainty and trying to transform and reduce it rather than increase it. On their side, projects often tend to increase uncertainty, on the one hand, because they remove an important part of control by the peasants over conditions of production and reproduction, thus reducing their capacity to provide for the future; on the other hand, the organization of stable prices, of supply of input and sale of products is often irregular.

Thus, one important cause of the "failure" of projects is the fact that they increase the weight of uncertainty. Another cause is that this type of project does not take into account the local concept of land and the various functions it has.

The direction to follow seems relatively simple: all that is needed - from the point of view of introducers - is to introduce new cultural indicators into development projects, even if technically this poses a certain number of practical problems of construction and quantification. At any rate, the cultural dimension still remains the best way of getting technico-economic models across without questioning the legitimacy or adequacy of the rationality of these models in relation to the recipient countries.

The function of the appearance of the cultural theme is thus ambivalent: on the one side it permits and improved realisation of certain social realities, but on the other it favours the destruction of traditional models

thanks to better techniques for diffusing imposed models (Weiland, H. et al. 1978).

From the point of view of recipient countries, the cultural grievance does not always come first. There is often a defacto alliance between national and international decision makers to avoid certain problems and to look only at technical and economic problems. In some cases, the cultural dimension is used as a mobilizing ideology to construct or reinforce national feeling against centrifugal movements of national minorities or underprivileged social groups.

Therefore, the cultural theme in this sense is not neutral because it poses the problem of the direction of development, when it is often reduced to a means of development. It takes on a political dimension and becomes a sensitive and emotional political question which cannot easily be reduced to its instrumental level.

In an agrarian society, the continuation of a group depends on the good health of human energy and a favourable climate. Climatic uncertainties, illness, technical innovations, the questioning of landholding system, emerge as dangers to be combatted on the pain of death. Therefore, any development project affecting the production or the landholding in this area must take into account not only social differences, and unequal access to land, but also its "traditional" nature, and the weak ecological equilibrium derived from the traditional production patterns.

It is also a strategic matter because its consideration in development projects represents a prize disputed between the various national and social forces. Culture thus refers back to the relations of strength which structure international relations and social or regional distinctions peculiar to each country.

Culture is also linked to social stratification and to the place of decision makers in this stratification. The conservation or elimination of this or that cultural form can thus be linked to the interest around which power relations are structured, whether in an old or modern sense.

Under these circumstances, culture can be transformed into a domination ideology, within the framework of social contradictions, the antagonism of town versus country or of developed versus developing countries. Moreover, if culture appears as a specific element of a given society, it also appears as relative to power relationships.

Culture thus appears contradictory, serving both as an instrument of liberation and of domination. In this case, it is a strategic concept whose political dimension is difficult to outline. Thus, it is necessary not only to know how to integrate culture into projects, but also to know which culture to take into account, and for what goals.

In any case, it is clear that to have ignored the cultural dimension of development, leaving aside the culture of populations or human groups concerned by a development project, has been the frequent cause of their failure. Much more important, making "development" the privileged vehicle of "Western culture" has frequently been the cause of the process of acculturation undergone by many third world countries and is today the explanation of many reactions involving high political and social cost.

Taking into account the cultural dimension not only means adding a spiritual dimension to development projects, but also to include a dual reflection on both the logic of projects and on recipient societies. The project itself and its cultural dimension must be questioned, although until now this has been considered as neutral and universal. This implies developing new methods of approach for considering the cultural dimension, in terms of system, strategy and power relations. These methods would permit the rethinking of the way in which projects are constructed, produced, decided, of their limits and "failures" both from the point of view of national and international decision makers as well as from that of the populations concerned.

Notes

- 1) Infitah (opening), the watchword launched by Sadat in the aftermath of the 1973 October war, had two proclaimed aims: one political, the other economic. On the political level, rapprochement with the United States was supposed to permit a rapid solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, by the same token extracting Egypt from its state of war. On the economic level, Egypt was to abandon the path of Nasserite "socialism" and take that of an openly capitalist development. In a straightforward calculation of cause and effect, this choice was supposed to attract foreign capital and inject new blood into the Egyptian economy.
- 2) In order to introduce successfully this culture in countries of the Third World, Western social scientists propagate taking into account the indigenous cultural context: "Theorists of development often did not recognize that indigenous institutions and organizations existed at all.... Analysis of the process whereby change is introduced into social systems or settings has, however, demonstrated that ignoring the influences of.... indigenous cultural patterns and local environment settings may lead to failure, or rejection, of development programs. Niehoff and Anderson (1964), in conducting a content analysis of over 200 case studies of programs in human development, found that many had failed because planners and implementers had not become aware of indigenous factors until they acted as barriers of an introduced innovation." (Rogers et al. 1980:251).
- 3) The characteristics of the population towards which the project is targeted should be the major criterion for conceptualizing a project "... the project concept needs to be assessed on the basis of a more thorough understanding of the people involved in order to find the best method of instituting change; and greater care may be necessary in adapting standard technologies and implementation strategies to the particular social context." (Perett/Lethem 1980:3)
- 4) Foster Suggests that "Technological development programs proceed more smoothly and are more successful when the cultural patterns of the participating peoples, the values and motivations of the innovators, and the social dynamics of the project setting are understood and utilized in planning operations." (Foster 1965:195).

- 5) Rogers argues in this respect that the need of users and their perceptions of the delivery system and of the technology utilized, as well as the perceptions of the user system underlying the delivery system, all influence the effectiveness of human development programs. In the past, user systems have not been adequately involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of development activities". (Rogers 1980:263).

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