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The fifth cheap factor. Space and landscape of capital in the case of Valtrompia

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Abstract

The ethnographic research conducted in the case study of Valtrompia has led to new hypotheses that complement the critical theories on space already present in the literature. By reinterpreting some of the most prominent theoretical references capable of bringing space back to the center of socio-ecological thinking (spatial turn), the author joins this debate by reflecting on Jason Moore's theory of four cheap factors, with a territorial analysis based on two continuous years of fieldwork. The investigation served to precipitate the spatialist theoretical mass into the study of a specific locality, produced in a historical-social context strongly conditioned by industrialization, which has progressively become, over its long history, its predominant ecological feature. In the analysis, the landscape, as a sociocultural construct, becomes the privileged setting for the deconstruction of production relations and hierarchies inscribed in the local socio-ecological organization, as well as the empirical basis for original theoretical proposals such as cheap space, plus-space, and ecological peripheralization, thus offering them as possible keys to refining the interpretation of the relationship between spaces, phenomena, bodies, and power.

Keywords: space, power, ecology, capital, landscape, value

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Riassunto

La ricerca etnografica condotta sul caso studio della Valtrompia ha favorito nuove ipotesi integrative alle teorie critiche sullo spazio già presenti in letteratura. Attraverso la rilettura di alcuni dei riferimenti teorici più prominenti capaci di riportare lo spazio al centro del pensiero socio-ecologico (*spatial turn*), l'autore si inserisce questo dibattito ragionando sulla teoria dei *quattro fattori a buon mercato*, proposta da Jason Moore, con un'analisi territoriologica basata su un lavoro di campo delle durate di due anni (continuativi). L'indagine è servita per precipitare la mole teorica spazialista nello studio di una specifica località, prodotta in un contesto storico-sociale fortemente condizionato dall'industrializzazione, divenutane progressivamente, nella lunga storia, la cifra ecologica predominante. Nell'analisi il paesaggio, come costruito socioculturale, diviene l'ambito privilegiato per la decostruzione dei rapporti di produzione, delle gerarchie inscritte nell'organizzazione socio-ecologica locale; nonché base empirica per proposte teoriche originali quali: spazio a buon mercato, plus-spazio, periferizzazione ecologica, offrendole in questo modo come possibili chiavi di lettura per affinare la lettura del rapporto fra spazi, fenomeni, corpi e potere.

Parole chiave: spazio, potere, ecologia, capitale, paesaggio, valore

This article is grounded in ongoing debates on the epistemology of territory (Brighenti and Kärrholm, 2023). From this perspective, space — understood both as an analytical category and as a psycho-physical dimension — constitutes a fundamental condition of the inquiry. Drawing on the theory of the “Four Cheaps” (Moore, 2012, 2023), developed within the broader framework of world-ecology (Moore, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2023), the article examines the role of space by foregrounding its centrality within socio-ecological processes through the lenses of critical political geography, political ecology, and systemic approach to landscape (Morelli, 2011). It investigates how power relations embedded in processes of spatialization reshape territorial relations and conditions of habitability in ways that are functional to capital accumulation. The analysis primarily engages with the epistemological trajectory inaugurated by Lefebvre and Harvey, whose work has been pivotal in bringing space back to the center of social theory (*spatial turn*). In this tradition, space is examined as a socially produced reality embedded in property relations and linked to the forces of production, while simultaneously functioning as a means of production (Lefebvre, 1976:35) through which the hegemony of a given society is exercised (Ivi:102). As Gardini (2010:88) has argued, working on space also entails working on the internal dimension of human experience and on the social systems of representation through which it is mediated. These systems can be understood as forms of “spatialization” that fix and distort experience, exerting a significant influence on individuals