The role and potential of urban social movements (a critical examination) essay e...

Introduction to urban planning policy

Introduction

Social movements in most countries aim at resisting social change and are politically motivated. The social movements formed in London created a big political impact in terms of power sharing and running of the government. According to Eder, social movements are seen as new post-materialist politics and encourage individualization and democratic participation (Pacione 421-425). In addition, social movements have a lot of value for grass root activities and informal organization that contradicts to the politics of a country. This leads to emergency of green politics that come up with new politics of neighborhood and community based experiments. In general, social movements appear as public spheres since they develop outside the dominating institutions. Moreover, their actions raise questions on the nature and legitimacy of power relations because their issues are centered to the civil society. On the other hand, various theories and practice play role in analyzing the role and potential of urban social movements.

Urban movements vary in their roles because some focus on a particular change while others seek fundamental change from universal point of view. Urban social movement groups are grouped into three categories. The first category consists of groups involved in collective consumption issues. The following groups aim at ensuring the urban life is based on leaders that concerns more with need (use value) rather than with profit (exchange value). The second category consists of groups that seek to defend the particular cultural identity of communities. This category is also involved in community movements. The last category consists of groups that pursue the

goal of local self-government and ensuring decentralization of service provision. This category fights for a free city with the central state (Della Porta & Diani 6-7).

Urban social movements have a lot of impact in transferring political power to the grass roots and neighborhood level. Even though these movements are seen to possess a lot of power, do they really have the potential to replace class based politics? According to the New Social Theory, the movements were formed with a sole purpose of replacing the organization of labor to create attention of political activism. Some of these groups lack an identity as a social movement questioning their ability to argue for an inclusive progressive alliance of social movement. In London, various urban social movements fail to transfer political power to the grass root because of lack of identification. For a social movement group to be active, it must have an identity and clear evaluation in accordance to how they promote their interests and changes the condition of excising societies for better (Chesters and Welsh 13-16).

On the other hand, urban social movement has concentrated more the introduction of transnational urban protest networks and politics. The protests create a lot of local impact that is interconnected with economic and social functions of a nation. All these functions focus more on street politics but, urban social movements in London lack structural leverage and vision. Most movements have limited advances have no social revolution, and also fail to adhere to the constitution of the country. In addition, when a nation shifts focus on urban social movements and identity politics leads to

neglecting of politics of class interests and material power. Civil activists play a significant role in defending the interests of social movement groups where political exploitation seizes and become replaced by culturally defined groups and communities. The activities results into the introduction of social politics and elimination of cultural politics. Moreover, the movements ensure democracy is maintained by maintaining economic and social rights (Chesters, G. & Welsh, 22-33).

Urban social movements also struggle for the betterment of urban space in an aim of expressing criticism and develop political and economic alternatives linked to everyday's cultural and social practices. The Critical urban theory also helps in analyzing the role and potential of urban social movements in changing the politics of a nation. The theory focuses on the political, ideological, and social contested characteristics of urban space whose analysis creates an outcome of historically specified social power relations (Brenner 198). The uses of theoretical analysis for criticism and political action enables an individual understand the role of urban social movements in manipulating the politics of a country. From the theory, urban space is defined as an area where social transformation and conflicts are compressed and resistance spaces made. The political potential of urban politics is given more emphasis due to the need to link theoretical approaches to direct political actions. One of the principles of autonomous principle is to ensure everyday life of citizens is not interfered with either economically or socially (Brenner 176-184).

The political process theory also mobilizes civil activists in one way or another by emphasizing on political opportunities. The following theory

strongly links with the London urban movement history of the 20th century. The emergence of large numbers of urban movements created an increasing interest in evaluating their democratic potentials as political actors. More political opportunities were created as the civil groups challenged the strength of the current political stand of the country. In addition, the action of urban movements to transfer the political power to the cultural and social level was fruitless as more powers emerged underpinning the actions of urban movement groups. The urban politics play a role of regulating the conflicts that are endemic to capitalist urbanization. The urban social movements have the potential to transform the nation politically but, their efforts are overcome by political opportunities through protests (Marcuse 195-197).

Urban social movement groups also ensure collective treatment of daily consumption patterns of households through contemporary organization of urban space using advanced capitalism. The groups assume the responsibility of the reproduction of labor power from private capital into the state. The importance of this role come play considering that mass consumption is crucial if a nation's economy has to be maintained at levels of production close to capacity. Secondly, the state takes the biggest responsibility of ensuring collective means of consumption and producing labor power. Finally, there has been an increase in competition and conflict due to the allocation of the collective means of consumption. Under these circumstances, the Resource Mobilization Theory comes into play. People participating in the urban social movements do so to change the status quo of political stand of the nation. In addition, the groups end up protesting on

order to make their voices heard by the top government officials. Most of these protests aim at ensuring collective treatment of daily consumption patterns. Moreover, the focus on urban social movement protests is mainly addressed from democratic and cultural studies (Mayer 66-75).

The Resource Mobilization Theory also analyzes the values of symbolic actions of civil society groups in the political aspect. The collective consumption emphasis explains the differences between large metropolitan and monopoly capitalism. Depending on the political space, the civil society groups have different arguments although, some protests end up unsuccessful due to use of force. Urban protests also aim at adopting new position in the consumption system leading to the formation of urban class alliances. These alliances play the role of ensuring that collective consumption is taken as a major element of social dynamic in order to serve as a uniting element in the ant-capitalist struggle. The urban social movements should focus on reconstructing the urban sociology to ensure the urban system focuses on political conflicts to ensure provision of major public services. This eliminates the idea of urban sociology being seen as a location of geographically contained social processes (Pacione 155-161).

The burning issue should focus on the extent at which urban social movements exist or rather, might place themselves to act as vehicles of self-socialization with the ability to overcome liberal institutions. The problems raised in the discussion above can be resolved by placing social movements within the vicinity of everyday life. Urban social movements must value themselves as popular bodies capable of prioritizing global and private forces in order to make proper use of public resources and avoid unlawful politics.

In addition, the movements should be able to place an identity against forces misusing the urban space for personal benefits. The specific role of urban social movements is not fully realized as some of their leaders are more concerned with the allowances given by donors rather than the core function of the group. In addition, it is expected that the specific role of social movements be revealed in the production of urban forms and meanings. This aspect will enable citizens see the impact of these movements in both victory and defeat.

On the other hand, the role of urban movements should be revealed in various state institutions on the bases of changing the cultural forms of the city. The movements have a role in imposing new meaning on urban space since it represents one of their constitutional rights. Understanding the direction and extent to which this impacts the networks of relationships between space, state, and society has a significant value on public policies and spatial structures. Moreover, understanding cities and citizens at the same time requires an analysis of the relationship between people and urbanization in order to bring out the argument of the city and the grassroots. The relationship comes into action when groups protest to change the city in order to take changes to the society. The urban social movements have tried to ensure this relationship but they always face challenges from the state.

Conclusion

Urban social movements have a lot of emphasizes on maintaining a democratic state where politics and governance go hand-in-hand. The above

discussion focuses on the challenges that urban movements face in implementing their constitutional rights using different theories for the analysis. From the discussion, the following summary was arrived at. Firstly, a city can be termed a product of conflicting social interests and values. Secondly, the outcome of grassroots mobilization and demands are meaning and structure as the society restricts change. Finally, there are other sources of social change apart from urban movement mobilization like gender relations and ethnic and national movements.

Works cited

Brenner, N., Marcuse, P. & Mayer, M. Introduction, London: Routledge. 2009.

Chesters, G. & Welsh, I. Complexity and Social Movements: Multitudes at the Edge of Chaos, International Library of Sociology Series, Routledge, London. 2006.

Chesters, G. & Welsh, I. Social Movements: The Key Concepts, Routledge, London. 2010

Della Porta, D. & Diani, M. Social movements: An introduction. Malden: Blackwell. 2006.

Marcuse, P. From critical urban theory to the right to the city, London: Routledge. 2009.

Mayer, M. The changing scope of action in Urban Politics: New Opportunities for

Local Initiatives and Movements, in INURA (ed), Possible Urban Worlds.

Urban Strategies at the End of the 20th Century, Basel: Birkhäuser-Verlag. 1998.

Pacione, M. Urban Geography. A Global Perspective (3rd Ed). London:

Routledge. 2009.