

A manifesto

Spatial justice, a proclaimed priority in many territorial policies, is a notion worthy of discussion and elaboration. It seems so obvious it has hardly been questioned. Yet it is as potentially fruitful as it is relatively unexplored. The objective of *JSSJ* journal is to provide an arena for research, debate and controversies around the idea. It builds on discussions started with the *Spatial Justice* conference (www.justice-spatiale-2008.org) held at the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense in March 2008, and is a response to the need felt to share thoughts about the relations between justice and space, beyond disciplinary, linguistic and cultural boundaries. *JSSJ* is edited mostly by geographers but aspires to become a meeting place for representatives of many disciplines of the social sciences (geography, planning, urbanism, urban sociology, history, philosophy, political science...).

The necessary reference to justice

It is widely admitted that while scientific discourse aims to understand, partisan discourse authorizes itself to judge. However, our ways of looking at human societies often carries an implicit assessment of the fairness or unfairness of the situations we describe. Be it at the scale of the world, when considering the poorest countries or societies, at a very local scale, when analyzing urban segregation, or when looking at the problematic access to land-ownership in extremely unequal agrarian structures, there is a palpable empathy of the observer with the most deprived, the most oppressed, the most excluded of populations. Could it indeed be otherwise since a researcher is also a citizen? More importantly, should it be otherwise: is the position of disengaged observer morally tenable? Can social sciences claim a neutrality likely to guarantee their scientific status, or does the notion of justice have a legitimate place in scientific discourse?

Some scholars, and not least geographers, have attempted to answer this question. In France, a fundamental book by Alain Reynaud, *Société, Espace, Justice*, gave food

for thought on those three keywords. But since it was published, in 1981, it has not had many followers. In the Anglophone world, by contrast, a trend was started by David Harvey in the early 70s, and researches on the relations between justice and space have been plentiful (Soja, Marcuse, Fainstein ...).

Following in their footsteps, the journal *JSSJ* believes it is legitimate for geography and other social sciences to incorporate justice in their lines of questioning. In this perspective, it means neither to subscribe to the implicit denunciation of a fact intuitively perceived as unjust as part of an empirical research, nor to accept to conform to the refusal to assess situations, on the grounds that science must be neutral: both these positions are unsatisfactory in opposite ways. The concept of justice should neither be added onto scientific analysis as an afterthought, nor excluded from it. It should form an integral part of intellectual reasoning.

Plurality of approaches of justice

This journal aims to foster debate and therefore favors no theory or school of thought: it merely posits that the concept of justice has its place in social science and helps to make sense of places and territorialized social facts. There are several definitions of *justice* and several formulations of the *social contract*. We call for contributions to *JSSJ* to illustrate the ways the various theories of justice can inform social research, drawing on a wide range of theories, be it ones which emphasize issues of wealth redistribution, and reallocation of services and opportunities, or ones which focus on the procedures of decision-making.

We intend to welcome several conceptions of justice, and refuse the intellectual attitude which would consist in claiming authority to pronounce on what is just or unjust: this would inhibit the free development of thought. Once one accepts the autonomy of reason in defining theoretically what is just, several ways of thinking open up, of which we can broadly define two sorts: stating a theory on the basis of abstract reasoning before confronting realities to the theoretical construct and then qualifying them morally or, conversely, deriving theory from existing social practice.

Diversity of approaches stimulates thought, and obliges each theory to submit to critics the soundness of its reasoning. But in order to make the concept of justice an operational tool in social science, and in particular the concept of spatial justice in the discourse on societies and territories, we should make certain terms explicit to facilitate their discussion.

First, we should clearly distinguish *difference* from *inequality* and *injustice*. *Difference* does not necessarily imply inequality, and may refer to an assertion of personal and collective identities, the diversity of which enhances social interaction and can serve a common good, with each member of a society finding his or her specific and valued place and a meaning to his or her existence. There is however a risk that difference be instrumentalized to legitimize inequality and assign some persons or groups a particular role while denying their freedom. *Inequality* seems a straightforward enough notion, but its relation with injustice is less so. From an egalitarian perspective, inequality and injustice are one and the same. But there are other conceptions of justice, and it should be possible to define what is fair or unfair without positing beforehand that any inequality is unfair. In Rawls's understanding of *justice as fairness* (1971), the equality of rights and the recognition of the intrinsic value of persons are articulated with an idea of optimization of inequalities to benefit the most deprived in terms of allocation of goods and assignment of social roles.

Such ideas necessarily raise the issue of universalism. Depending on which conception of justice, and the procedure of enunciation, one uses, either values are seen as universal, with specific applications to specific times and places, or the variety of social practices induces moral relativism. In the context of globalization, this alternative carries huge implications: is it possible to proclaim universal moral values and to act and think accordingly? Or should one beware of the tendency on the part of one specific, hegemonic culture to impose on others norms unilaterally qualified as universal? Is communitarianism to be respected as an expression of collective identity, or shunned as a constraint on individual identities, a denial of each and every person's liberty to define his or her own life aims independently of the practices of the group, the time and the place where he or she chanced to be born? How to cope with multiculturalism, and arbitrate between specific cultures, individual freedoms and the

common legal framework set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by member countries of the UN and thus theoretically accepted as a norm?

Spatial justice: a useful concept for social sciences

The organization of space, a crucial dimension of human societies, reflects social facts and influences social relations (Lefèbvre, 1974). Consequently, both justice and injustice become visible in space. In other words, the analysis of the interactions between space and society is necessary to understand social injustices and to formulate territorial policies aiming to tackle them.

This opens up several perspectives for social sciences. They may deal with spatial or socio-spatial distributions (allocation of wealth, services and opportunities for persons), in a distributive justice perspective: the access to material and immaterial goods, or to social positions, indicates whether the situation is fair or not. Starting with decision-making procedures, research may also raise the issue of representations of space, of territorial or other identities and of social practices. For instance, a focus on minorities, such as women, will explore their spatial practices but also how these are experienced and managed by various agents, which may illuminate forms of oppression or discrimination which a universalist approach might disregard.

Another field opening up to investigation is the environment. The notion of *environmental justice* was used from the 70s onwards, in North American cities, to describe the overlapping geographies of racial discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, industrial pollution and vulnerability to risks. The notion of sustainable growth has also brought about a reflection about environmental fairness: at stake is our ontological relation to the world, and the possibility of fair policies which take into account the needs of humanity, both present and future, local and global, and new forms of governance.

Whatever the approach, the concept of spatial justice operates at all scales and on the articulation of different scales. Worldwide, the need to reflect on the distribution of resources between the major regions is blindingly obvious: since the debates, in the

70s, on the Third World and with more contemporary ones on the North/South divide, the issue has never left the foreground. The current phase of globalization gives it new relevance. At national levels, questions about the fairness or unfairness of territorial planning are to be addressed. At the local level, cities have been intensively researched, starting with radical geography in the US in the 70s and 80s.

This bilingual journal published both in French and English in electronic form twice a year aims to become an arena of international debate in spatial justice, in an interdisciplinary perspective. It is open to any practitioner of the social sciences who wishes to contribute: theoretical approaches and empirical case studies are welcomed. We hope they will establish social sciences as grounded in reason, and therefore socially relevant.

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