
Spatial Justice: Derivative but Causal of Social Injustice

Peter Marcuse, Columbia University

“Spatial justice is the ultimate goal of many planning policies,” says the manifesto of this new journal. It is a true statement, as an empirical fact; one might even hope that it would further be true that “spatial justice is part of the goal of every planning policy.” But either statement raises at least two questions: 1) what is spatial justice, and more generally, what is its relation to social justice. And 2) what remedies are there for spatial and social injustices that we would wish planning to adopt. I will take the first (what is justice and what is its role in planning) in the context of a forthcoming book¹, and the second (the role of space) in the context of issues I am struggling with some time, under the title: putting space in its place.

What is justice? What is its role in planning?

There is an on-going discussion, in the United States and elsewhere, on the concept of the Just City as the ultimate goal of planning: the ultimate goal, not only one goal among others, and of all planning, not only of many plans. Susan Fainstein was one of those that has pressed this idea of the Just City for some time, and in the spring of 2006 we held a conference on that theme at Columbia University², with a number of interesting contributions, which a group of doctoral students in our program are editing in volume to be called: *Searching for the Just City*, which Routledge will publish this spring. The Introduction, by James Connolly Ingrid Olivo, and Justin Steil, three of the editors, reviews the status of the Just City debate, and the lead essay is by Fainstein. It opens with a discussion of “what is justice,” with all the usual suspects: John Rawls, John Stuart Mill, Iris-Marion Young, and Martha Nussbaum, whom Fainstein favors. Her opening essay takes up a specific case: that of New York City’s pre-emption of a large wholesale food market in the Bronx, run largely by immigrants and in the center of a poor and working class community, by a major developer in the city with good political ties who will construct a large shopping mall on the site.

David Harvey follows with a piece, on which Cuz Potter, another of the editors, collaborated. He argues that injustice is so integral to the capitalist system, a system fundamentally unjust in itself, that any attempt to achieve a Just City within the bounds of capitalism is doomed to failure. He argues that the problem for planners is not the philosophical definition of justice, but rather the specific historical analysis of the neo-liberal phase of capitalism which today is responsible for obvious and manifold injustices. Harvey contends therefore that a concept of justice in a Just city that assumes that justice is achievable within a capitalist society, and that does not address the need for structural change in that society, is inadequate. Given the triumph of neo-liberalism today, he argues that direct confrontation with its underlying political economy is needed, and suggests “dialectical urbanism” as a better approach.

¹ Marcuse P., Connolly J., Novy J., Olivo I., Potter C., Steil J. (dir.), *Searching for the Just City: Debates in Urban Theory and Practice*, Routledge, (à paraître en mai 2009).

² « Searching for the Just City » Conference, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 29 avril 2006.

I have an article in the book also, in which I argue that distributive justice is a necessary but not sufficient aspect of a normative pitch in planning, which is badly needed. But, while necessary and needing buttressing, it fails to address the causes of injustice, which are structural and lie in the role of power. The Just City sees justice as a distributional issue, and aims at some form of equality. But a good city should not be simply a city with distributional equity, but one that supports the full development of each individual and of all individuals, a classic formulation. I argue that such a concept should lead to a recognition of the importance of utopian thinking but as well to the direct confrontation with issues of power in society. I use the jingle about the Goose and the Commons, from 16th century England:

- The law locks up the man or woman
- Who steals a goose from off the common,
- But leaves the greater villain loose
- Who steals the common from the goose
- And I use it to argue, not for planning to deal with goose, but for Commons Planning, to deal with the underlying common social problem.

Margit Mayer, with Johannes Novy, argues from a European perspective that the Just City concept is peculiarly American, and developed in the context of United States neo-liberal policies, and must be read differently – and the role of justice as a concept read differently – in the social movement battles around welfare and urban policies in most European countries.

Setha Low deals with public space as revealing some of the issues of injustice in the urban setting, and argues that justice needs to include, not only the distribution of material goods, but also interactional quality and procedural democracy as desiderata.

Greta Goldberg introduces the concept of care, and argues it should be added to the discussion of the Just City and that planners and other social actors should strive for a Just Caring City. Justice and care are often seen as dichotomies. Justice is signified by universal rules, regulations, autonomy and impartiality, while an ethic of care employs partiality, locality, situationality, contextuality and the fostering and maintenance of relationships as its guiding principles. She uses examples from the field of biomedical ethics where a synthesis of justice and care has been adopted in practice and professional standards

James de Filippis brings in the question of scale and the relation of globalization to injustice in the city, and uses as an example struggles of community activists to deal with economic injustice.

Oren Yiftachel and Haim Yacobi introduce the concept of 'gray urbanism', referring to the increasingly conspicuous sections of urban population, who are denied full membership in city affairs and resources, and speaks of "centripetal apartheid." He illustrates is points with case studies of Bedouins in Beer Sheva and migrant workers in Jerusalem.

Laura Wolf-Powers presents case studies of urban injustice in New York City, Justin Steil and James Connolly use the cases of brownfields development in the same city, issues involving the re-use of polluted sites of manufacturing plants which have ceased operations. Phil Thompson raises the very contemporary issue of injustice in the treatment of New Orleans residents after hurricane Katrina. And Ingrid Olivo applies the concepts of the Just City discussion to the treatment of cultural heritage in addressing cultural heritage as a politicized endeavor, instead of the traditional, isolated and limiting technical area of expertise.

In a Postscript, I argue that the next step in searching for a Just City is developing the idea and the practice envisioned in Lefebvre's Right to the City, with examples.

So: a book illustrating a variety of ways of approaching the issue of justice in the urban setting. It ends with a conclusion, the first part of which, by Cuz Potter and Johannes Novy, summarizes the main themes of the book, and the second part of which raises the question of "where do we go from here" to make the concept of the Just City actually useful, both as an analytic concept and as a political tool, in the real world today.

Putting space in its place

That is the question I want to raise now. I want to do it by returning to the second question I raised at the opening of this text: what is the relation of space to justice, and are there goals of planning policies that are not spatial? Putting Space in its Place, is the topic; what is the role of space in dealing with injustice.

Let me suggest five propositions to lead from a more theoretical analysis to some concrete approaches and to action. On the first three I think there will be general agreement; the fourth may be less commonly recognized.

I. There are two cardinal forms of spatial injustice:

A. The involuntary confinement of any group to a limited space – segregation, ghettoization – the unfreedom argument.

B. The allocation of resources unequally over space – the unfair resources argument.

II. Spatial injustice is derivative of broader social injustice – the derivative argument.

III. Social injustices always have a spatial aspect, and social injustices cannot be addressed without also addressing their spatial aspect – the spatial remedies argument.

IV. Spatial remedies are necessary but not sufficient to remedy spatial injustices – let alone social injustice – the partial remedy argument.

V. The role of spatial injustice relative to social injustice is dependent on changing social, political, and economic conditions, and today there are trends that tend both to decrease and to increase the importance of the spatial – the historical embeddedness argument.

I will take them one at a time.

I. There are two cardinal forms of spatial injustice:

A. The involuntary confinement of any group to a limited space – segregation, ghettoization – the unfreedom argument.

Frequently we use statistics as a measure of ghettoization, but that ignores the difference between a ghetto and an enclave. A group that wishes to live together and does so voluntarily is not ghettoized, not segregated, not being treated unjustly when it is allowed to cluster. It may in fact cause injustice, if it excludes and limits the opportunities of others, as for instance gated

communities do, but not every clustering is a mark of spatial injustice. Involuntary clustering, segregation, however, is a major form of spatial injustice.

B. The allocation of resources unequally over space. – the unfair resources argument,

including unjustly limited access to jobs, political power, social status, income and wealth as forms of unjust resource allocation. Justice here does not mean absolute equality, but rather inequality not based on need or other rational distinction. One possible definition of a rational distinction is one agreed up by open, informed, democratic processes, one based on legitimate authority rather than relations of power, but that is a question that goes beyond the scope of what I can to discuss here.

II. Spatial injustice is derivative of broader social injustice – the derivative argument.

Addressing the causes of spatial injustice always involves addressing the causes of social injustice more generally. Spatial injustices cannot be isolated from the historical and social and political economic context in which they exist. But by the same token:

III. Social injustices always have a spatial aspect and social injustices cannot be addressed without also addressing their spatial aspect – the spatial remedies argument.

The spatial aspects of social injustice are a consequence of social injustices (the derivative argument) but they also reinforce social injustice. The two are not identical, but neither can they be separated (the inseparability argument). And my final, and perhaps most controversial argument, following from the preceding logic:

IV. Spatial remedies are necessary but not sufficient to remedy spatial injustices – let alone social injustice – the partial remedy argument.

This is not an all or nothing rule: remedying spatial injustice can be a major contribution to social justice, but it will always have limits unless the social injustice which underlies the creation of spatial injustice is also addressed. You will not have spatial justice in a system, political, economic, social, that is itself unjust. That is no reason not to address spatial injustices as such – only a reason to keep them in context.

V. The role of spatial injustice relative to social injustice is dependent on changing social, political, and economic conditions, and today there are trends that tend both to decrease and to increase the importance of the spatial – the historical embeddedness argument.

I will come back to this point after having considered a concrete case of spatial injustice: the case of Harlem, in New York City, illustrating the logic of the four propositions.

As to the first proposition: Harlem is a classic case of spatial injustice, revealing both of its two cardinal forms. It is spatially segregated, ghettoized: we have maps showing the extent of concentration of African-Americans in the city as a whole, in some parts almost 99% African-American, in a city which today is today about 24% African-American. This clustering in Harlem is

indeed partly voluntary, as there is substantial pride in African-American culture and history and achievement in the area. So it has some characteristics of an enclave, but the pattern of housing discrimination, the unjustly limited access of African-Americans to housing, is extensively documented. Harlem was, and still is (I come to changes below) a classic ghetto. And in the second cardinal form of spatial injustice, Harlem has poorer health facilities, greater exposure to environmental hazards, higher rates of asthma and lead poisoning, more crowded schools, poorer parks, weaker security protection, than the bulk of the city of New York.

Following the second proposition, the spatial injustice which Harlem represents is part of a pattern of discrimination against African-Americans that goes back centuries in United States history, starting with the importation of slaves from Africa, white legal privilege, political power, and economic exploitation, visible in all aspects of life. The spatial injustices of segregation and resource distribution are derivative of these broader injustices.

But, following the third proposition, these broader injustices cannot be dealt with without attention to their spatial aspect. Both public and private resources are spatially allocated (schools, health clinics and hospitals, fire stations, polluting facilities, housing, and childcare). Those spatial allocations need to be addressed with spatial measures.

Yet, and this is the conclusion that flows from the fourth proposition, spatially-defined remedies are not adequate to remedy the social injustices imposed on those unjustly treated, such as the residents of Harlem. This is because these injustices are to a large part imposed on African-Americans wherever they live in New York City, and are imposed on residents of Harlem from spaces outside of Harlem. United States social policy, and here European Union policies (I am most familiar with German ones) are quite parallel: they focus on limited spatial improvements, what we call gilding the ghetto, putting resources into the unjust space that is the ghetto but not dealing with the relationships that have caused the injustice to begin with.

The case of gentrification is a classic example of the need for non-spatial as well as spatial remedies. If gentrification, a major threat to the present residents of Harlem, is limited only in Harlem, it will surface elsewhere; the problem will only be moved around, not solved. If segregation is limited in Harlem, housing must be made available without discrimination elsewhere; otherwise African-Americans will simply be escaping from one ghetto to be confined in another. Problems of education, of health care and of environmental quality, are not confined to Harlem; they are the result of city-wide, state-wide, if not even broader, relationships. So the policies we advocate to deal with the spatial injustices confronting the residents of Harlem are not only spatial remedies – allocating resources fairly to Harlem – but also city-wide: preventing displacement and evictions all over the city, rent control limiting profits from housing and speculation in land all over, organizing and strengthening the political power of African-Americans wherever they live, social housing expanded throughout the city.

Spatial remedies are a necessary part of eliminating spatial injustices, but by themselves insufficient; much broader changes in relations of power and allocation of resources and opportunities must be addressed if the social injustices of which spatial injustices are a part are to be redressed.

A final word on what is changing in the relationship of spatial injustice to social injustice – my fifth proposition. On the one hand, again using the case of Harlem, segregation is going down; the figures are quite clear. And more resources are being invested in Harlem. Why? The control of a potentially troublesome and exploited group, poor African-Americans in the United States, has changed from simple spatial confinement in ghettos, from segregation, to a more sophisticated

form of control, in which the most troublesome are simply removed and put in prison – over 2,000,000 altogether in the United States today, the highest of any developed country in the world. The working poor in the ghetto are being displaced by the process of gentrification, so incomes seem statistically to be rising, but not for the same people. And many of the older residents, and newcomers who cannot move in to replace them when they leave, continue to suffer from all the problems of social injustice that they had before, but simply not in the same space. Spatial injustice has become a smaller component of social injustice in the ghetto.

On the other hand, the importance of space itself, and the built environment requiring it is increasing, in the global economy, for reasons that David Harvey has documented in detail. They have to do with spatially dependent loci for capital investment: ever increasing profits demand a target for investment, and that target is increasingly the built environment, spatially dependent. So while the political and social causes of spatial injustice may be attenuated, the economic causes may be increasing. Change is constant, and neither spatial nor social justice can be intelligently addressed without attention focused on the historical political, economic and social causes of all forms of injustice.

About the Authors: Peter MARCUSE, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University

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