

The (in)justice of community-based initiatives

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In a variety of fields, pursuing different ends, forms of sociality that go under the English word “community” are seen as a useful in journeying towards new economic, cultural, and political settlements. Most prominently community has emerged as a form of eco-community: community used to respond to environmental challenges. This can be community as a social glue used by grassroots actors allowing them to increase agency. Or it could (potentially concurrently) be a form of top-down allocated community, used to guide and arrange populations. Wherever it comes from, and however it is used, the community that is put to use pursuing specific aims and objectives (whether environmental or not), are praised or critiqued. For example Jackson (2005) praises the “double dividend” of low carbon communities: a better life accompanying reduced consumption. Conversely others are highly critical of the use of community to address more structural concerns. Critiques often run along the lines of arguing that community either allows or encourages some form of “neoliberalism”: what MacLeod and Emejulu (2014) call “neoliberalism with a community face”. While these examples are inflected through an environmental lens, community is also used more widely and cross-cuttingly, as can be seen with its role in debates around localism, volunteering, third sector service provision, as much as around purposive activism.

Neoliberalism as a context partly explains the rise of community movements for sustainability, who

hold responsibility for action, or “capacity to adapt” is locally rooted. Here “responses to environmental degradation... are located at the individual/community level and essentially amount to increasing the ‘resilience’ of the affected populations to ‘external’ shocks” (Felli & Castree, 2012: 2). This dovetailing of progressive movements for change, together with a coercive neoliberal worldview gives us cause to be wary wherever we claim that community movements or action can be seen as “just”.

Community, though, is not destined to be enrolled within a neoliberal agenda. In one of Doreen Massey’s last published pieces she, together with Michael Rustin, distinguishes between the emergence of the individualism Foucault traces in “Discipline and Punish”, and a more collective and normatively desirable ‘nurture, improve, and learn’. (Soundings, Spring 2015, 59; pg 20). Community initiatives provide an opportunity to experiment, to model and forge alternative ways to be and become together. Thus, the social and spatial relations that can be found in community initiatives that can be useful tools in building a more just world.

Focus of papers

In this issue of *Justice spatiale/ Spatial Justice* we want to explore how the use of community in pursuing environmental, cultural, and social aims and objectives can be more or less just. Rather than discussing ‘community’ as an idea or concept, still less attempting to define it, we wish to see papers that look to the potential for, or counterproductive uses of, community to achieve justice. Here we see justice in the round – most commonly justice in this area of research is framed as environmental justice, and can also be broadened out to notions of climate justice. However we are also interested in wider and the less often asked questions of justice, including those beyond only environmental deployments of community. For example: what are the effects of community renewable energy on the gender relations and accompanying questions of social justice? Most particularly we are looking for papers that do not only adopt either a critical or a positive perspective on community-based initiatives for change, but seek to understand, analyse, and inflect these through an explicit perspective of justice.

We welcome papers point to what these are, might be, and how they tangibly help produce more just outcomes. Possible topics include: the unevenness of community initiatives. Engagement with specific subfields would be welcome here. Given the Anglo-French nature of the journal, we also welcome papers addressing the specificity of Anglo- or Francophone debates in these areas.

These papers could be, first, broadly critical of the roles and processes involved, perhaps inspired from critical geography, political ecology, or interpretive policy analysis. A second thread of contributions could come from broadly sympathetic approaches to community, and could be written with practical approaches as to what works (or not) within community movements. Here, contributions could use participatory action research, scholar-activism or other approaches that seek to encourage and further the potential of community to achieve justice. Lastly, we welcome contributions that explicitly focus on justice itself, including ideas and framings that seek to go beyond existing or partial characterizations of “justice” in these fields. We welcome contributions that speak to any of these themes.

Papers could engage with some of the above ideas, or strike out into new, creative territory. Please get in touch to discuss any ideas you may have.

Expected Papers

Papers can rely on a case study, or offer a more theoretical perspective. Policy and practitioner contributions from non-academic authors are also welcome. All papers will be peer-reviewed. For the journal’s house style, see an outline here: <http://www.jssj.org>

The journal is bilingual and papers can be submitted in either French or English.

Timeline

We will accept full papers, up until the 31st of August 2019. Papers will then be peer-reviewed, before an expected publication date of early 2020. Please get in touch to discuss any ideas you may have in advance of this deadline.