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Spatial justice is more relevant than ever

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Publication date
2022

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
A Manifesto for the Just City 2021

Citation (APA)
Rocco, R. (2022). Spatial justice is more relevant than ever. In R. Rocco, & C. Newton (Eds.), *A Manifesto for the Just City 2021* (pp. 21-23). TU Delft OPEN Publishing.

Important note
To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
Please check the document version above.

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A Manifesto for the Just City

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TU Delft BK Bouwkunde

TU Delft OPEN

GLOBAL URBAN LAB

COLOPHON

02 // - A MANIFESTO FOR THE JUST CITY 2021

EDITED BY ROBERTO ROCCO & CAROLINE NEWTON.

This workshop and lecture series took place online over four days in October 2021. Representatives from 106 universities around the world took place in the discussion. 256 students from 48 universities submitted a Manifesto.

This activity was supported by the Delft Design for Values Institute (DDfV), the TU Delft platform discussing values in design and engineering.
https://www.delftdesignforvalues.nl

This is the second **Call for a Manifesto for the Just City** organised by **TU Delft**, now joined by the **Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies** (IHS) of the **Erasmus University Rotterdam**, the **Winston-Salem State University** of North Carolina, US, the **University of Illinois at Urban Champaign**, US, the **Morgan State University** of Baltimore, US, and the **Cape Peninsula University of Technology** of Cape Town, South Africa, and a host of universities around the world who took up this exercise as a course exercise. The results of the first Call for a Manifesto were published by TU Delft OPEN and are available at: **https://books.open.tudelft.nl/**

Published by TU Delft Open
The Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands
Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment/ The Global Urban Lab
Julianalaan 134, 2628 BL. Delft, The Netherlands

Edited by: Roberto Rocco & Caroline Newton
Cover and graphic design by: Roberto Rocco

DOI: HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.34641/MG.36
ISBN/EAN: 978-94-6366-561-2

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An earlier version of this text was previously published in the "Manifesto for the Just City", volume 1.

Social justice is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges of our times, as rampant inequality erodes the fabric of our societies everywhere, undermining trust in governments and institutions, leading to violence and extremism and eating at the very core of democracy.

Growing inequality, socio-spatial fragmentation and lack of access to public goods are threats to the sustainability of our cities, especially when we consider sustainability in its three fundamental dimensions (social, economic and environmental) (Dillard, Dujon, & King, 2009; Larsen, 2012). Social sustainability is under-explored in sustainability studies. Spatial planning and design must engage with "two converging, yet distinct social movements: sustainability and social justice"(Campbell, 2013, p. 75) to continue to be relevant. The European Union has made big steps in this direction in its European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019) taking up the notion of just transitions as a core tenet for policy-making.

SPATIAL JUSTICE IS MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

Justice underscores social sustainability because it helps boost the legitimacy of institutions. In also helps increase support for, compliance with, and suitability of policy. For John Rawls (Rawls, 2005), truth concerns validation, and justice determines acceptability: what is acceptable or not acceptable as outcomes of reached agreements.

Justice is inscribed in the very notion of sustainability: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The same report advances the idea that "… even a narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern between generations, a concern that must be logically extended to equity within each generation" (p.43). This speaks to the concept of intergenerational justice having a logical extension to the idea of intragenerational justice, that is, justice in this generation, here and now. And indeed, it seems implausible to imagine a world in which we are so worried about future generations, and not worried about people who are alive now.

For Amartya Sen (Sen, 2009), there is, however, a case to be made for the preservation of the environment beyond the satisfaction of our needs and the preservation of our living standards. Sen appeals to the responsibility we have towards other species due to our incommensurable power in relation to the planet and all living beings. We shall call this responsibility our "duty of care", similar to the duty of care that befalls any adult in relation to a small child. The adult is so much more powerful and stronger than the small child that a duty of care automatically ensues. An adult may not allow a child to come to harm through action or inaction.

This speaks to the case for the rights of nature, by which not only we have a duty of care, but where we can also imagine jurisprudence that describes inherent rights associated with ecosystems and species, similar to the concept of fundamental human rights. In this theory, human rights emanate from humanity's own existence, that is, every human being has fundamental rights just because they exist, independently of their country of origin, race, gender, age and other issues. In this perspective, babies do not have fewer human rights than adults because they are smaller, or because they cannot communicate with words or write petitions. Babies are born with the full set of human rights for the mere fact they exist as living sentient beings. In this sense, all living beings should have fundamental rights because they exist, are alive, may experience pain. We could go further by asserting that this is

Edward Soja at the closing dinner of a workshop called Spatial Justice in Singapore held at Select Books, Singapore. By Smuconlaw. - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24186543

also the case for eco-systems, rivers and forests: we have a duty of care towards them, and they have rights, even if they cannot communicate with us using words and therefore cannot petition for their rights. Justice is a human invention; it doesn't exist in nature. Justice allows us to keep interacting with each other. Nonetheless, it is clear that we must extend the notions of rights and justice to the natural world if we wish to keep interacting with it, lest a purely predatory interaction will lead to our mutual destruction. For Sen, by doing so, we are in fact extending our own freedoms, including the freedom to meet our own needs. He calls it "sustainable freedom": the preservation and expansion (where possible) of the substantive freedoms and capabilities of people today, without compromising the freedoms and capabilities of people in the future (Sen, 2009, pp. 252-253). But we must question even the emphasis on our own needs. For Sen, people have needs, but they also have values, conscience, rationality, freedom, ethics, moral feelings and codes. I would go even further to say that we must also consider the needs of the planet and the various eco-systems that make it a living entity.

THERE IS A GEOGRAPHY OF JUSTICE CONNECTED TO HOW CITIES ARE PLANNED (OR NOT PLANNED), DESIGNED AND MANAGED.

But what about the city, this "second nature" we have created, in which "factors relating to human actions and economic incentives" (Gonzalez-Val & Pueyo, 2009) influence the geographical distribution of public goods and life chances? Cities are the predominant mode of human inhabitation in the 21st century (Gross, 2016), and they seem to exert an enormous pull towards those seeking for a better life. However, they do not offer the same opportunities to all who share and construct the city collectively. There is a geography of justice connected to how cities are planned (or not planned), designed and managed that we must understand. Cities are spaces where we simultaneously cooperate and compete for resources, and where we must decide together how these resources are distributed and shared.

For Doreen Massey, the city is the "space of simultaneity" (Massey, 2011). Massey claimed urban space as the dimension of multiplicity: "If time is the dimension of sequence, then [urban] space is the dimension of contemporaneous existence. In that sense, it is the dimension of the social and therefore it is the dimension that poses the political question of how we are going to live together" (Massey, 2011, no page). Massey calls this idea "radical simultaneity", in which stories, ongoing trajectories and multiple voices happen simultaneously, but not symmetrically. Space is permeated by asymmetrical power relationships, practices and interactions. In a world of growing inequality, scarce resources and climate emergency, this conception feeds increasing uncertainty about how the burdens and benefits of our coexistence can be fairly distributed among us and whether there is a spatial dimension to social justice. Simultaneously, this triggers a deeper reflection on how to foster spaces of true democracy and participation in deciding how those burdens and benefits are distributed.

This is why SPATIAL JUSTICE seems to be especially relevant, as it allows us to focus on the spatial dimension of the distribution of the burdens and benefits of our association in cities and on the manner this distribution is governed. Spatial justice focuses on mainly two dimensions of justice: distributive justice and procedural justice. On one hand, distributive justice seeks the creation, fair allocation of and access to public goods, resources and services throughout the city. On the other hand, justice or injustice can also be found in how resources and public goods are negotiated, planned, designed, managed and distributed. Justice or injustice can be found in the procedures of negotiation, planning and decision-making. For example, planning processes that are transparent and allow some form of citizen participation are bound to be more just than those that don't. This is because the incorporation of multiple voices in decision-making processes increases the chances that the wishes, needs and desires of those voices are integrated in policy. Despite the serious critiques to participatory processes put forward by many, it is difficult to imagine the Just City without participation and co-creation, following the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and his concept of Right to the City.

Spatial Justice is also intimately related to the concept of Life Chances, which is the ability of households and individuals to access educational, economic and environmental opportunities and to design their lives upwards (Johnson & Kossykh, 2008).

One of the first proponents of the idea of spatial justice was Edward Soja (2010) as he stated that Spatial Justice "(…) seeks to promote

more progressive and participatory forms of democratic politics and social activism, and to provide new ideas about how to mobilise and maintain cohesive collations and regional confederations of grassroots social activists. (…) Spatial justice as such is not a substitute or alternative to social, economic, or other forms of justice but rather a way of looking at justice from a critical spatial perspective" (Soja, 2010, p. 60). In this perspective, "the spatiality of (in)justice […] affects society and social life just as much as social processes shape the spatiality or specific geography of (in)justice" (Soja, 2010, p. 5).

OURS IS A CRISIS OF IMAGINATION: WE CANNOT IMAGINE A FUTURE THAT IS NOT MARKET-BASED.

For Soja, Spatial Justice is not only about distribution and procedures, but has a potential for insurgent action that disrupts and re-imagines the status-quo. And indeed, when imagining this exercise, we were much influenced by Soja's ideas and the need to re-imagine the status quo. Our time is a time of successive crises: climate change, the pandemic, indecent inequality, cynical populist leaders that cater for the interests of economic elites by subverting the public realm. These crises seem to have a common root in our economic system: capitalism in its current predatory form is not socially, economically or environmentally sustainable.

With the idea of a Manifesto for a Just City, I want to argue that ours is a crisis of imagination: we cannot imagine a future that is not market-based. Most importantly, many among our fellow citizens and politicians have naturalised the idea of rational choice and the invisible hand of the market to the point where defending the "market" is easier than defending our planet. It is easier to imagine a planet ravaged by climate change than to imagine a different economic and social form of organisation that is fairer, more humane and respectful of the rights of people and nature. Our minds are colonised by ideas of individual freedom and entrepreneurship that are meaningless if we cannot agree on how we will live together in our cities in a planet whose resources are finite. There is no freedom possible outside of a society in which we all collaborate with each other, so we can all be free. And sustainability is meaningless if we don't have Sen's sustainable freedom.

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THANK YOU.

ISBN/EAN :978-94-6366-561-2

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