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Spatial justice as a praxis of solidarity in everyday life

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A MANIFESTO for the JUST CITY

volume 3

Edited by Roberto Rocco & Caroline Newton

Colophon

A manifesto for the Just City

Edited by Roberto Rocco & Caroline Newton

This book is based on a online workshop and lecture series that took place over four days in October 2022. Representatives from 106 universities worldwide participated in the discussion. 315 students from 63 different academic institutions submitted 82 manifestos for publication.

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DEDICATED TO PURSUING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH THE LENS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT, THE CENTRE FOR THE JUST CITY VALUES ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, DIVERSE THOUGHT, AND COMMITTED ACTION.

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The Centre for the Just City was set up at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at the Delft University of Technology in response to the pressing challenges of rampant social inequalities affecting the cohesion and the sustainability of cities and communities. Recognising the vital need to address these issues, the Centre emerged as a platform for research, education, and outreach activities for the creation of just cities. Since its inception, the Centre has been at the forefront of bridging theory and practice, fostering collaborations, and influencing policies and actions that contribute to making cities equitable, sustainable, and inclusive.

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Manifesto for the Just Pluriverse City

Spatial justice as a praxis of solidarity in everyday life

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Debates about social justice in the city are not recent. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, social and political movements of unprecedented strength exploded worldwide: civil rights mobilisations and the anti-war (student) protests in the United States, anticolonial liberation struggles in the Global South, the Prague Spring, and the uprisings of the "mass worker" in the Fordist factory. Urban scholars were then propelled to include a moral dimension in studies about the urban environment and the urban living condition. This was the beginning of critical urban theory.

With essential contributions from John Rawls, Henri Lefebvre, Peter Marcuse, Iris Young, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Nancy Fraser, Susan Fainstein, and Amartya Sen, among others, justice scholarship now offers a robust framework for understanding (1) where injustices emerge, (2) which part(s) of the society is ignored and excluded, and (3) which processes exist to include the ignored to reveal and reduce such injustices (Jenkins et al., 2016). These three perspectives refer to distributional, recognition, and procedural justice, respectively. They are not exclusive and should be addressed together, as inequitable distributions of benefits and burdens, lack of recognition, and limited participation in decisions all work together to produce injustices and claims for justice (Schlosberg, 2007).

More than 50 years later, social movements continue to fight for social justice, and scholars continue to advance theory. With increasing computational capacity and data availability, we have also become capable of visualising and quantifying socio-spatial inequalities in the city. Yet, urban inequalities continue to deepen worldwide, exacerbated by austerity measures and climate change impacts: People and communities already in a socio-economically

vulnerable position are also the ones that bear most climate risks, with the least capacity and resources to adapt and recover from climate disasters. Worse yet, the IPCC reports that climate action has, in many cases, pushed people into further vulnerability, which was coined 'maladaptation'.

As news outlets report daily on the disastrous consequences of climate change, it is difficult to believe that another world is possible. It is not easy to remain hopeful. With a "pessimistic mind" that acknowledges reality and an "optimistic will" that seeks social justice[1] , I outline a call for spatial justice as a collective praxis of solidarity in everyday life in this manifesto.

Spatial justice for climate action

Justice in the practice of the law refers to the act of determining rights and assigning rewards or punishment accordingly. When understood as the quality of being just or fair, the concept of justice has a much broader meaning. From a philosophical point of view, justice is seen as the fundamental virtue of institutions (Rawls, 2017), "the one that secures the basis for developing all of the rest" (Fraser, 2012). Furthermore, the symbolic force behind justice has the potential to foster collective action across cleavages of class, race, and gender, creating a sense of solidarity based on shared experience (Soja, 2013). This is important because the level and scope of action necessary to address climate change requires a collective focus on the most challenging problems in

1 While imprisoned by the Italian Fascist Regime, Antonio Gramsci reflected on his state of mind: "my mind is pessimistic, but my will is optimistic. Whatever the situation, I imagine the worst that could happen in order to summon up all my reserves and will power to overcome every obstacle" (Letter from Prison, December 1929). These reflections were later encapsulated in the quote, "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will".

the contemporary world in ways that span large segments of the socio-political spectrum. Calls for justice in urban climate action also resonate with increasing calls for environmental and climate justice (Walker, 2012; Sultana, 2022). Explicitly addressing justice is thus not only normative but also instrumental to achieving public support for climate action efforts.

In response to a dominant historical account of (in)justices, Edward Soja (2013) calls for a spatial turn in social sciences, where the spatial dimension is prioritised over the historical dimension. The emphasis on the spatial dimension is intentional and focused, though temporary. Soja stresses: "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".

What is interesting and particularly useful to analyse climate action is that spatial justice encompasses injustices both at the body (or citizen) level and the global level. Describing the scope of spatial justice, Soja (2013) explains: "we can speak of unjust geographies involving the human body, as in debates about abortion, obesity, stem cell research, the transplantation of body parts, sexual practices, or the external manipulation of individual behaviour. At the other extreme, the physical geography of the planet is filled with spatially defined environmental injustices, some of which are now being aggravated by the uneven geographical impact of socially produced climate change and global warming". Seeking spatial justice in climate action thus also addresses historical and future injustices between the so-called Global North and South, contributing to debates related to both intra- and inter-generational justice.

Solidarity: From response to action

Amid pervasive injustices, deepening inequalities and increasing segregation, when crises happen, solidarity among people, communities, and nations often emerges as a collective response, driving mutual aid and crisis relief initiatives. Two recent 'crises'[2] illustrate the importance of solidarity. During COVID-19 pandemic, the elderly and the sick have been assisted by volunteers in safe walks, food was distributed to migrants, protective gear was crowdsourced for healthcare workers, among many other solidarity stories (United Nations Human Rights, n.d.). Similarly, upon the start of the Ukraine war, thousands of people rallied in support of Ukraine worldwide, and many European families opened the door of their homes to refugees (DutchNews, 2022). These reactive moments of solidarity during times of crises may even be a window for bringing justice to the forefront (Cappelen, 2021).

The sociologist Emile Durkheim distinguished between two forms of solidarity: mechanical solidarity, based on what individual members of a community have in common, and organic solidarity, based on mutual differences, with individuals functioning much like the interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body. Interestingly noted by Veraart et al. (2021) in the editorial Solidarity and COVID-19, organic solidarity also resonates with the South African philosophical concept of Ubuntu: "I am, because you are". The word ubuntu is part of the Zulu phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", which literally means a person is

2 The term crisis is used here in a broad sense, according to the Oxford Dictionary: "a situation or period characterized by intense difficulty, insecurity, or danger, either in the public sphere or in one's personal life; a sudden emergency situation".

a person through other people.

The positive impact of solidarity in these two cases does not hide the impression that solidarity with essential workers seems to have ended as soon as "we got back to normal life" or that Ukrainian refugees seem to have been received more warmly than other refugees (Mhaka, 2023). The question here is how to bring solidarity from response to action in a sustainable manner. I argue that spatial justice as a praxis in climate action, encompassing individual and global injustices, has the potential to foster solidarity locally and internationally.

The power of everyday: Towards everyday utopianism for pluriverse cities

In response to spiralling socio-ecological crises, cities have relied on various urban concepts, including the smart city, the 15-minute city, the circular city. When it comes to climate change, narratives around sustainability and resilience have become the main responses. However, 'successful' some of these cases might have been considered through specific lenses of efficiency or economic growth, much of the criticism towards current city concepts comes from their lack of justice perspective. Critical research and empirical evidence have shown that these initiatives have often failed to deliver on their promises and, instead, have been exacerbating inequalities and creating new forms of dispossession (Shelton, 2015; Wiig, 2016; Thatcher, 2016; Savini, 2019; Amorim, 2021).

In addition, some scholars argue that the focus of cities on strategies and action comes at the expense of efforts in developing coherent long-term city visions. An imbalance between

vision, strategy and action leads to the disconnection between short-term action and long-term planning. Obviously, the fact that political cycles are short-term and climate change challenges need long-term action exacerbates this disconnection. Not surprisingly, maladaptation is associated with short-term, fragmented, single-sectoral, and non-inclusive governance.

Another major criticism towards sustainability visions is the strong reliance on so-called experts: City visions are at best informed by the needs and aspirations of citizens and other "non-expert" urban actors. These highly exclusive processes often do not lead to disruptive alternatives, resulting in business-as-usual visions detached from citizens' lived experiences. Such a lack of a collective vision arguably leads to public detachment from transition decisions, protests against proposed actions, and political polarisation, issues further fuelled by fake news and populistic narratives, ultimately posing a threat to democracy.

For as much as the academic discourse around questions of (spatial) justice might sound abstract, the consequences of injustice are very much material in everyday life: the transportation and health systems we use, the house we live in, the productive and reproductive work we do, and so on. Addressing injustices thus means imagining another 'everyday life'. Simultaneously, 'everyday life' has disruptive power: "It can equally be the locus for the development of non-alienated or emancipatory tendencies" (Gardiner, 2006). Resonating with Gardiner, I call for a practice of 'everyday utopianism' to imagine "utopia not as an ideal society located in some romanticised past 'Golden Age', or in some distant imagined and perfected future understood in a 'blueprint' or 'social engineering' sense, but as a series of forces, tendencies and possibilities that are immanent in the here and now, in the pragmatic activities of daily existence" (ibid).

As important as visions, utopian or not, are to give direction, the reality is that many different visions (and utopias) 'compete' in a context pervasive by uncertainties and seemingly random events (Loorbach et al., 2017). Therefore, from a decolonial perspective, I finally argue that collective visions are only truly collective, truly alternative, and truly disruptive if they accommodate various ways of living in a pluriverse vision (in the city and beyond) (Escobar, 2018).

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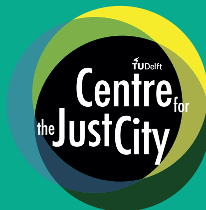
The workshop **Manifesto for the Just City** is a digital lecture and debate series composed of four online sessions with leading academics and practitioners in the fields of urban theory, urban planning and spatial justice. Upon participation in the online lecture series, teams of students are invited to draft a **Manifesto for the Just City**, expressing what their visions for cities that are sustainable, fair and inclusive for all.

This activity is organised by the **TU Delft Centre for the Just City**, and partners.

This activity is supported by **Pakhuis de Zwijger**, a unique independent platform for and by the city of Amsterdam and its inhabitants and the **Delft Design for Values Institute (DDfV)**, the TU Delft platform for discussing values in technology and design.



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