

Spatial Justice: Towards an Ethics of Spatial Equity

J. Bissett-Scott

Delle Odeleye

Ian Frame

Anglia Ruskin University
Department of Built Environment
FST, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1SQ, UK
+44 1245 493131
sarah.scott@student.anglia.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

‘Regeneration of place that has socially just outcomes’ is taken as the broad definition of ‘spatial justice’ in this position paper, based on a longitudinal case study of North Kensington from 1976 to 2012.

The research topic of ‘spatial justice in planning theory and regeneration practice’ follows the researcher’s experience over three decades as a regeneration practitioner in south-eastern England and London. The component of ‘digitality’ is contained within the three measures proposed to account for spatial justice: spatial relations within an urban setting, longitudinal socio-economic comparisons in an area, and the level of intra-urban/regional governance applied in the case study area.

These measures will aid the identification of principles and basic institutions of governance which, if applied, would support improved ‘spatial justice’ outcomes in large-scale regeneration programmes. By focusing on the impact of digital technologies on urban geographies, this paper seeks to spotlight assumed values and underlying principles for spatial justice. While digitality makes many positive contributions to reductions in inequality (more accessible resources, better services, more freely available information), some aspects of digitalization can give cause for concern, often in the area of values and ethics, the most prominent being privacy issues.

The analysis of the concept of spatial justice may help to uncover how established values might be maintained, if indeed these values are those that our liberal-democratic society wishes to perpetuate, and may serve to highlight positive prospects for increasing the democratization of space through the application of new digital technologies.

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for components of this work owned by others than the author(s) must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee. Request permissions from Permissions@acm.org.

UCUI'15, October 23 2015, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Copyright is held by the owner/author(s). Publication rights licensed to ACM.
ACM 978-1-4503-3786-1/15/10...\$15.00.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2811271.2811277>

General Terms

Management, Measurement, Documentation, Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords

Digital society; geography; spatial justice; urban regeneration; city-region; governance; digitalization

1. INTRODUCTION

A number of different components comprise the contested concept of spatial justice. This research project is designed to examine the extent to which UK regeneration practice is successful in producing spatially-just outcomes over time, identifying what level of accountability supports best outcomes. The element of ‘digitality’ is contained within the three measures proposed for examining a case study of spatial justice: space relations, comparison of time outcomes, and scales of governance applied. From this perspective, an ethics of spatial justice may be examined in an urban form newly shaped by digital technologies.

Through the empiricism of being a regeneration practitioner in south-eastern England and London for over three decades (SJB), experience of the operation of the UK planning system raises issues of whether directing a co-ordinated regeneration of place for creating sustainable futures can be achieved. In addition, the impact of digitalization is clearly changing our cities’ shape, processes and social relations [1]. It is clearly set to be an increasingly influential component of urban place-making [2]. An analysis of both its impact and its potential will aid an understanding of how established values might be maintained - if indeed they are the values that our society wishes to perpetuate [3].

2. CONTEXT

In the UK, there is an acknowledged deficit in the planning system [4] in that it is not constructed to ‘make development happen’, nor to deliver infrastructure, affordable housing or employment in specific places. As such the approach appears to be a conceptually-flawed means of delivering ‘regeneration of place that has socially just outcomes’ which, for the purpose of this paper, is taken as the broad definition of ‘spatial justice’. Ties between funding from the private sector to achieve public sector objectives may well be worsened by economic austerity.

Similarly, the synergy may also be weakened with an environmental threat through a changing climate, or through complex economic or demographic pressures of globalization [4]. Further, this systemic flaw is compounded by a lack of larger scale co-ordination where no regional or national spatial strategy is in place, which is the case in England in the second decade of the 21st century.

In this context, the research aims to investigate to what extent strategic spatial planning may be in conflict with or supportive of regeneration policy and practice, particularly in terms of social justice [6].

3. CONTEXT

3.1 Research question

The research into justice and governance is seeking to answer what is the theoretical context for change brought about by regeneration, whether this change can be measured, and how might change best be operationalized.

3.2 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to examine how democratic decision-taking might be operationalized to enhance ‘spatial justice’ outcomes, through the application of principles in delivering in large-scale programmes. Rawls [7] conceptualized that principles of ‘justice as fairness’ would lead to institutions that are the basic structure of society, although this approach was challenged by, for example, Sen [8]. A key outcome of researching this question may help to highlight whether scale of governance and type of institutions can contribute to making a place more ‘spatially just’.

The objectives of the research are to examine the philosophical underpinning to the theory and practice of planning thereby identifying a relevant research paradigm for developing an initial conceptual framework of the key regeneration factors; to use criteria from factors within the conceptual framework (eg, levels of governance used to achieve measures of spatial justice); to develop a detailed methodology for collecting relevant comparative data (longitudinal and geographic) on key outcomes within selected regeneration projects in London and south-eastern England; to outline an analytical framework use to interpret results from the project studies; and thereby to use the result to articulate a theoretical proposition that provides a predictive / explanatory outcome in a practice-based scenario.

3.3 Theory and context

Theoreticians from philosophical and planning backgrounds are helpful on the concept of ‘spatial justice’, seeking a deeper examination of principles, practice, the links between theory and practice, and the fundamental delivery mechanism of organization.

Fainstein [9] prioritizes justice as a measure of urban development. She states that there are philosophical justifications such as implied or assumed value systems for including ‘justice’ in any assessment of whether regeneration or redevelopment can be concluded to be successful. She also argues that there are practical justifications for measuring justice outcomes. One

element is that by including justice, results achieved will be more sustainable. Thus to achieve Fainstein’s proposition, seeking how justice ought to be defined, measured and translated into policy and action recommendations is an objective worthy of deeper exploration. Philosophically, explicating values that are implied or assumed – intangible – is a research direction that may well yield rewards for regeneration practitioners by highlighting principles that can be pursued in a range of different scenarios.

For Healey [4] applying a theoretical process to bring a planned vision better in line with real outcomes should be an objective of the planning system. Developing and articulating theory is necessary; documenting and analyzing empirical studies is also to be sought. Tracking the translation of theory to practice, or practice to theory will aid a better alignment of theory, vision, policy and practice. Marcuse [10] while developing David Harvey’s perspective [11] identifies that an analysis of the organizational level is missing from philosophical discussions around ‘the Just City’. This admonition to review how regeneration is delivered encourages further exploration of processes and their underlying values. This direction from Marcuse is the setting for exploring procedures, their intrinsic values and the degree or scale or level of accountability at which the procedures may be most useful and efficient to deliver spatial justice in regeneration programmes.

An additional layer of assessing spatial justice employs the theoretical contexts of communicative rationalism [12] later developed into collaborative or relational planning [13]; the political economy, and the examination of urbanization at a scale of social reality [14] [15] [16]. Communicative rationalism as applied to planning, in Healey’s view [12] tests the concept of economic evaluation and the ‘post-modernist critique of scientific rationalism’ while relational planning is ‘place-based practices of governance’ that provides links between spatiality and social interaction [11].

Lefebvre [14] helps us with a conceptual summary: ‘process’, ‘conditions’, and ‘consequences’. These strands combine to provide a structured analysis of organizing for governance, the philosophical principles that define policy, and spatial outcomes. They point the way to the key analytical elements in this research project.

The under-theorized concept noted by Marcuse [10] is spatiality and justice in terms of organizational levels of accountability for regeneration. And Hillier and Healey [3] seek to expand the understanding of conceptual links between planning theory and planning practice. The dialectic of the ‘spatiality of injustice’ and the ‘injustice of spatiality’ [17] is another rich seam to explore, which when translated into examining ‘spatial justice’, might read as the consequences of social justice decisions and how these decisions might look spatially; and the delivery of places where social justice can be expressed spatially.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Defining ‘spatial justice’

In a debate set out at the New Urban Languages conference in June 2015, addressing the value system underpinning the functionality of urban spaces is an essential step in achieving future spatial justice [2]. By translating philosophical and

theoretical concepts into politics and policy, interventions like planning or regeneration that are mediated by democratic structures, are activated to deliver outcomes that may be experienced as measurable consequences.

By developing a framework compatible with this theory-policy-practice approach, the research identifies a method for defining separated but related elements of ‘spatial justice’ for the project.

indicated by social research best practice. The choice of location as noted earlier is from south-eastern England to maximize the advantage of professional experience in London and the south-east, as required by the ‘professional doctorate approach’.

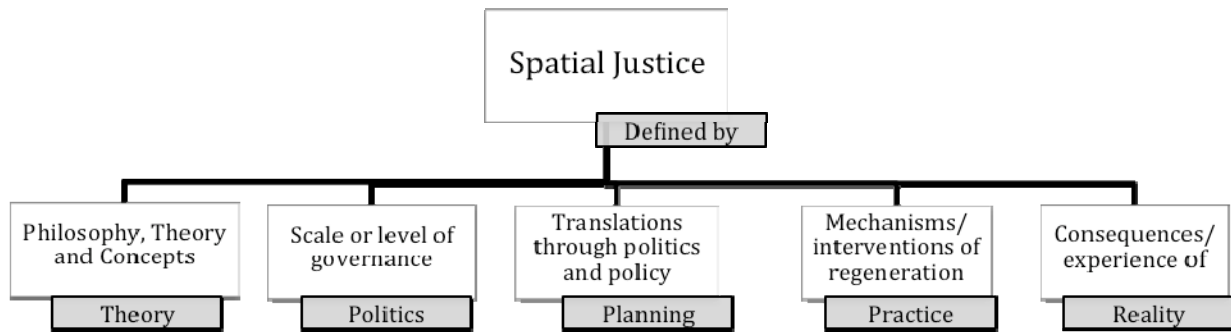


Figure 1. Proposed framework for defining ‘spatial justice’

4.2 Scope

The scope of the research project is defined by time and geography: post 1970 to the current decade of the 21st Century; and the UK, focusing on English regions in the south-east and spotlighting regeneration areas within that focus. The research timespan reflects the long term nature of regeneration, housing (re-)development, infrastructure planning and economic cycles – plans from immediate Post-War Britain continue to have a bearing on early 21st century decisions, viz motorways and Green Belt policy. The geographic choice follows a preliminary literature review and relates to professional experience in London and the Greater South East, and to these regions’ unique role in UK and European economic activity.

With a working framework of what spatial justice might include, the first task has been to seek what might be the success criteria for spatial justice outcomes. Research has begun refining what might be a set of measurable outputs from regeneration that provide a positive or negative rating to the notion of a place being ‘spatially just’. The criteria are designed for measuring how they change (improve) from the start of a regeneration programme, to its completion regeneration programme, and how sustainable are these outcomes post-completion.

4.3 Research Methodology

The research is set in a real world research paradigm utilizing a mixed-methods approach [18]. The methodology uses an in-depth case study [19] of an area where a regeneration programme has been completed. A secondary study will add a comparative dimension and will include a perspective on levels of accountability that support or otherwise the justice outcomes as

The methods employed are bounded by the success criteria outlined in Section 4.4, for analysis of a range of specific documents such as vision statements, reviews and evaluations of selected regeneration programmes, with post-regeneration results being compared with pre-regeneration status. Data collected will be codified to aid analyzing the results. The survey of regeneration-related professionals linked to the case study areas, and interviews with a select number of key stakeholder representatives is providing further information for analysis.

The first study is located in the Royal London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, west of central London, and focuses on the Notting Hill area in North Kensington. It begins with an examination of selected results of planned regeneration for comparison with policy and vision documents that generated that activity. Notting Hill’s 1976 redevelopment plans [20] are compared with North Kensington in 2012, and the relationship of each with the London-wide (city-region) of the GLA (Greater London Authority) or previously the GLC (Greater London Council) is being analysed. The second study planned is of an inner-city ward of a regional city at several points in time, to pinpoint the role of the regional level of governance in European-funded regeneration.

4.4 Framework for Analysis

The analytical framework is applied by comparing selected success criteria (see Table 1, below) at specified points relating to a regeneration programme: pre-regeneration, at completion of a funded programme, and finally some years on from completion. The relationships are cross-referenced and analyzed for each of the proposed ‘spatial justice’ components (see Figure 1 above), along the lines that James et al used for identifying an urban sustainability profiling process [5]. The impact of digitality on the urban form provides a cross-cutting theme entailing issues of privacy, security and equity.

Table 1: Proposed success criteria to measure ‘spatial justice’

Measure 1 Space
Relations between resources and accessibility in a regenerated area
Measure 2 Time
Comparisons of socio-economic conditions in a regeneration area
Measure 3 Scale
Level of accountability and governance at vision, delivery and post-completion stages of urban regeneration

5. CONCLUSION

Results from this research will provide a basis for an analysis of how ‘spatial justice’ can be measured and communicated. The research is also designed to uncover philosophical underpinnings to the original policy and plans of a regeneration programme. Both outcomes have implications for understanding the value-based impact of digital technology on urban form: the geography of a digital society.

It is hoped that comparative results may point to why and how anomalies occur in terms of justice outcomes in the regeneration of place. Any resulting differences between planned regeneration results and the social reality may indicate where there is a potential for improving privacy and security, essential components of spatial equity and the ethics that underpin justness in the digital city [21].

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With many thanks to the Professional Doctorate supervisory team at Anglia Ruskin University, Department of Engineering and the Built Environment, FST, Chelmsford, U.K.

7. REFERENCES

- [1] Kitchin, R., 2015. Geographies Of, Produced By, and Produced Through, the Digital. Keynote conference paper, 7th Doreen Massey Annual Event – Digital Geographies: How is the digital reformulating geographies’ objects and methods? 24 March 2015. Milton Keynes: Open University
- [2] Bourdin, A., 2015. Keynote presentation to New Urban Languages ‘Spatial Justice’ conference. 24-26 June 2015. Netherlands: TU Delft
- [3] Rawls, J., 2005. Political Liberalism (exp.ed.). Chichester: Columbia University Press
- [4] Healey, P., 2010. In The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning Theory. Hillier, J. and Healey, P., eds., 2010. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing
- [5] James, P., 2015. In Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Circles of Sustainability James, P. et al (eds.), 2015. Abingdon: Routledge
- [6] Soja, E., 2010. Seeking Spatial Justice. US: University of Minnesota Press
- [7] Rawls, J., 1999. A Theory of Justice (rev.ed.). Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press
- [8] Sen, A., 2006. ‘What do we want from a Theory of Justice?’ The Journal of Philosophy May 2006 53(5) pp.215-238
- [9] Fainstein, S., 2010. The Just City. US: Cornell University Press
- [10] Marcuse, P., 2009. In Searching for the Just City: debates in urban theory and practice In Marcuse, P. et al, eds., 2009.. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge
- [11] Healey, P., 1996. ‘On planning the ideology of planning’. In Readings in Planning Theory. Fainstein, S. and Campbell, S. (eds.) 2005. Oxford: Blackwell
- [12] Healey, P., 1992. ‘Planning through debate: the communicative turn in planning theory’ Town planning review 63(2) p.143
- [13] Healey, P., 2007. Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies: Towards a relational planning for our times. Oxon: Routledge
- [14] Butler, C., 2012. Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City.. Oxon: Routledge
- [15] Lefebvre, H., 1984; trans. Nicholdson-Smith, D., 1991. The Production of Space. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- [16] Harvey, D., 1992. ‘Social justice, post-modernism and the City’. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 16(4): pp.588-601
- [17] Dikeç, M., 2009. Chapter 4 ‘Justice and the spatial imagination’. In Searching for the Just City: debates in urban theory and practice. P. Marcuse et al, Eds. 2009. Oxon: Routledge
- [18] Gray, D. 2009. Doing Research in the Real World (2nd ed.) London: Sage Publications Ltd
- [19] Yin, R., 2009. Case study research: design and methods. 4th ed. London: Sage
- [20] Palmer, J., 1980. A Decade of New Housing in Notting Hill: a study of the public housing programme in north Kensington from 1969 to 1978. London: Notting Hill Housing Trust
- [21] Harvey, D., 2012. Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. London: Verso