

Gecko Laboratory (*Géographie Comparée des Suds et des Nords*, EA 375, Paris X University, France)

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Dipartimento di Pianificazione, Università Iuav di Venezia (Italy)

UCLA Social Sciences Division (USA)

Call for Papers

This international interdisciplinary conference will take place on March 12, 13 and 14, 2008, at the University of Paris X-Nanterre, France, on the initiative of the Gecko Laboratory. This three-day conference will address the issue of:

Spatial Justice

Please send abstracts of no more than one page (in French or in English) to the following e-mail address: Philippe.Gervais-Lambony@u-paris10.fr

The deadline for proposals is April 30, 2007.

Abstracts from a wide range of disciplines and professional affiliations are welcomed and contributions will be accepted in the form of presentations, round tables and posters. Collective contributions will also be considered. The international scientific committee of the conference will examine all proposals in May 2007.

Conference organisers : F. Dufaux (Mosaïques-UMR LOUEST, University of Paris X-Nanterre), P. Gervais-Lambony (Gecko, University of Paris X), S. Lehman-Frisch (Mosaïques-UMR LOUEST, IUFM of Versailles), S. Moreau (Gecko and Laboratoire Etude Comparée des Pouvoirs, University of Marne-la-Vallée), M. Rubin (CUBES, University of the Witwatersrand).

The debate on justice is crucial to democratic societies, at all scales. The context of academic rejection of metanarrative theories and the relativism associated with postmodern deconstruction has, however, undermined a rich engagement with this topic for some time. This process has been reinforced by the rise of various social movements (feminist, ecologist or anti-racist...) as well as the development of multiculturalism which has meant that a range of key political players have

been confronted with differing concepts of what is “just” and “unjust”. At the same time, in a rather vexing development, some ultra-liberal discourses are increasingly ignoring the issue of social justice. Paradoxically, social protest movements, deconstructivist intellectual movements and neo-liberal economics discourses have converged to contest the idea of a universal justice. This context forms the basis of our exploration of the notion of spatial justice.

Spatial justice is the ultimate goal of many planning policies. This idea has held such sway that some have even argued that planning and the search for spatial justice are equivalent¹. The diversity of definitions of “justice” (and of the possible “social contracts” that legitimate them), however, has meant that the political objectives of planning can be quite different and even contradictory. The idea of spatial justice has been taken for granted to the extent that it is rarely questioned (particularly since the work of Anglo-American radical geographers in the 1970s-1980s) and it is often only defined negatively through the denunciation of spatial unfairness. It has become essential therefore that the question of spatial justice be reopened and freshly critiqued.

Two contrasting concepts of justice have polarized the debate. On the one hand, John Rawls² defines justice as fairness. His theory of justice is not strictly egalitarian, but assumes the intrinsic equality of the value of each individual. It justifies inequalities on condition that they maximise the share of the least-favored members of society. He claimed that this theory, relying on a hypothetical and non-historical processual demonstration, guaranteed universal principles of justice. This concept of justice is based on the individual. On the other hand, communitarians have focused their definition of social justice on communities, whose rights precede those of individuals. Justice has yet another meaning for marxists, who pursue the suppression of all socio-economic inequalities. All of these concepts of justice, though, hold a common assumption that justice is about socio-economic equality or inequality and aims to reduce, suppress or appease socio-economic inequality. In the 1990s, however, the philosophical reflection on justice underwent a radical shift, as demonstrated in the work of Iris-Marion Young³. This author dismisses the idea of a universal notion of justice in favour of identifying the specific forms of injustice that affect certain social groups. She argues that the socio-economic dimension was not sufficient to define justice: fair politics should pursue the suppression of any kind of oppression. The five faces of oppression as characterized by Young were soon taken up by David Harvey⁴ who, in a famous article, analyzes how Young’s work could be applied to urban policy. Thus, assuming a processual definition of

¹ Lipietz Alain, « Entretien avec GES », *Géographie, Économie, Société*, Vol. 1, n°1, pp 217-232, 1999.

² Rawls John, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971.

³ Young Iris-Marion., *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁴ Harvey David, « Social justice, Postmodernism and the City », *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16, 4, pp. 588-601, 1992.

justice rather than a structural one, a new conception of social justice emerged, that was based on the recognition and affirmation of difference. This in turn led to planning policies that sought to ensure the rights of different identity groups.

The conference will be organized around the six main themes that are presented in the following sections. The objective of the conference is to open discussion from all intellectual quarters at a range of scales.

What is spatial justice?

Rather than attempting to build further metanarrative notions of justice, it is essential that the question of what constitutes justice be examined. Although the binary opposition of structural and processual is still central, have new theoretical developments emerged, allowing for the reformulation of the question of spatial justice? In this context, is it fruitful to revisit the classical theories?

Even if it is ambiguous, polysemous and perhaps threatened, the concept of justice remains an essential, mobilizing political lever that is understood and practiced in the everyday lives of citizens. It is equally obvious that social inequalities do exist and that they are generally spatialized. We would like to focus the discussion on the interaction between space and society and the question of scale (from the micro-scale of domestic spaces to the grand scale of the global) is crucial. At which spatial and social scales can we formulate these debates? How are these scales linked? At the same time, this central question calls for an examination of representations (how and at which territorial level do people create a sense of belonging) and political negotiation.

Spatial justice and globalization

Does economic globalization lead to more socio-spatial inequalities and, if so, at which scales? To what extent do these spatial inequalities amount to injustice? The answer is not obvious, especially if viewed from an historical perspective. Are globalization discourses an instrument to justify and uphold inequities between different economies or is it possible to ensure equity at the global scale despite the (increasing) differences between countries and regions? Within this theme we will also examine the impact of globalization discourses (on the necessity of global economic competition, on multiculturalism...). Finally, does globalization present opportunities for new forms of resistance and struggles for spatial justice to emerge, especially at a global scale?

Spatial justice: identities, minorities

Young (1990) describes several forms of oppression which target particular identity groups (minority groups). New forms of racism have constructed a figure of the Other on cultural premises.

The systemic violence associated with the exclusion of these Others has a spatial dimension since frequently each cultural group is assigned a particular territory. In many instances these spatial dynamics may be less overt, for example, gender cannot be analyzed in terms of residential segregation but, patterns of segregation are nonetheless visible in the workplace or in terms of mobility. A spatial approach does not merely entail a description of the distribution of minorities in space, rather it enables an evaluation of how this distribution is experienced. It then becomes possible to reflect on forms of oppression which fall out of universalised notions of justice: positing that all individuals are equal may in fact obscure many forms of identity-based discrimination.

Environmental justice

“Environmental justice” emerged in the 1980’s in North-American cities as the spatial correlations between racial discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, industrial pollution and vulnerability towards natural hazards became more and more overt. In the poorer countries of the South, national parks and other conflicts about natural resources have revealed the ecological dimension of economic and political domination. As the global ecological crisis has deepened, the emergence of the concept of sustainable development has favoured a reflection on environmental equity. This concept questions our ontological relationship to the world, and the possibility of just policies which articulate with the needs of humanity - present and future, local and global - and new forms of governance. As ecological inequalities deepen, the politics of spatial ownership and control at different scales has resulted in the co-existence of preserved spaces (for the few) and zones of ecological exploitation. Could a reflection exploring the relationships between ecological inequalities and justice contribute towards establishing and building just environmental policies?

Spatial justice and segregation

Segregation has been widely discussed in the field of social sciences from a range of theoretical perspectives, especially in geography. One of the key unifying themes of this research (be it qualitative or quantitative) is that segregation is inherently a spatial injustice. However, the link between segregation and injustice should be examined more closely: is any socio-spatial division of space – especially in cities – by definition unjust? Both the injustice of the processes which produce segregation, and the effects produced by segregation, should be challenged. In the same way as we have questioned universalised notions of justice, the objective of the socio-spatially mixed city, often considered as a “just city”, must be questioned: for instance, pre-industrial cities were much less segregated, but were these more just than contemporary cities? Finally, does the question of mobility require us to rethink the relationship between justice and segregation?

What is a just territorial policy?

Is the function of public policies (planning, management...) to establish spatial equity? Is their aim to treat all spaces equally? Are these issues the pre-condition for- or even the definition of- spatial justice? Is a "just" policy a policy which rebalances spatial inequalities, through some forms of positive discrimination? Or, should "just" policies be non-interventionist and allow spatial dynamics to balance processes such as those of the market? If we question universalised claims to justice, is it still possible or even desirable to build "just" and stable spatial structures? Alternatively, should we focus on ways to establish flexible regulation, with the aim of reducing spatial injustice in a responsive and context driven manner, without privileging any particular (utopian) spatial pattern? But, even if they can prove illusory, aren't the territorialized images of the actions aiming towards justice a requirement of any action? This questions the validity of the territorialisation of public policies itself.