

Spatial justice: A fundamental or derivative notion?

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1. Introduction

The concept of “spatial justice” is widely employed in the contemporary debate and academic literature (for instance, in the fields of urban studies, planning theory, and human and political geography). The expression “territorial social justice” was already being used in the 1970s by David Harvey (1973). One of the first authors to systematically employ the label “spatial justice” was Gordon Pirie (1983). Subsequently, an influential work specifically focused on “spatial justice” was that of Edward Soja (2010).¹ The widespread shift of attention to *spatial* justice has occurred in parallel with the recent “spatial turn” in many disciplines.²

The notion of spatial justice is usually deemed decisive for a radical change in urban policies and planning. However, “there is no agreed definition of spatial justice” (Brown et al., 2019, p. 55; see also Przybylinski, 2023). This happens also because the idea, while obtaining an immediate and widespread success, still lacks some necessary conceptual and analytical explorations and clarifications. Any attempt to formalise or operationalise the issue of spatial justice needs a preliminary specification of its possible meanings and scope.

This article revisits the notion itself of “spatial justice”. The intention is not to offer an overview of the state of the art but to suggest a critical reframing of the discourse. The article is organized as follows. The first two sections clarify certain crucial issues connected with the idea of “justice” and that of “space”. The subsequent section discusses five cases

in which space is effectively involved in justice issues. The final section critically discusses the findings and concludes.

2. Preliminary specifications: justice

Before considering what spatial justice could be, it is necessary to specify what *justice* is; and, especially, what *social justice* is. Three main background issues need to be specified. They concern: (i) the subject of justice; (ii) the distinction between the general concept and particular conceptions of justice; (iii) the circumscribed meaning of the notion of distributive justice as a mere component of the more general notion of social justice.

2.1. First specification: public institutions as the primary subject of justice assessments

Justice – and social justice especially – regards *the way in which public institutions treat people* (Moroni, 2020); that is, the way in which they recognise and define citizenship. Public institutions³ are therefore the primary subject of justice.⁴ This is so because state institutions at various levels – national, regional, local – claim an exclusive right to (i.e. monopoly over) the use of coercion. In other words, the question of justice is the question of (public) *power*. This is the original, political meaning of the expression “social justice” (Forst, 2012, p. 195). To quote Horton (1991, p. 125): “Of course, institutions can be assessed from many points

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¹ See also Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2014) and, more recently, Lévy et al. (2018), Watson (2020), Wang and Gu (2023), Fritsch et al. (2024). According to Krivenko (2018), Leibniz was an important predecessor of contemporary discussions on spatial justice.

² See e.g. Warf and Arias (2008); Withers (2009); Richardson et al. (2013); De Villiers (2014); Barrows (2016); Nieuwenhuis and Crouch (2017); Brown (2020); Macaspac & Moore, 2022; De Franco and Pacchi (2024).

³ Here, by “public institutions” is meant, in general, the legal system’s definitions of political powers and of the rights and duties of citizens (and the public bodies and agencies entailed by them).

⁴ See Frankena (1962); Rawls (1971); Barry (1989); Höffe (1987); Miller (2001); James (2005).

of view other than their justice. However, while occasionally the justice of an institution may be unimportant more usually this is not the case: often whether or not an institution is just will be the most important fact about it”.

Note that one of the earliest known uses of the expression “social justice” was by Luigi Taparelli, who devoted to it a section of his book *Saggio teoretico di dritto naturale appoggiato sul fatto* (Taparelli, 1840).⁵ Independently, the expression was used a few years later by Antonio Rosmini, starting from the title of his book *La costituzione secondo la giustizia sociale* (Rosmini, 1848). Subsequently, the expression “social justice” was mostly employed in discussions of institutional issues. The intention was not to direct attention to the social in itself and to ignore anything else, but simply to differentiate certain questions of “structural-political justice” from those more typical of mere “legal justice” (Miller, 1979, pp. 21–23).

2.2. Second specification: Distinguishing the concept and conceptions of justice

It is important to distinguish between the general “concept” of social justice and different substantive “conceptions” of justice.⁶ Following Rawls (1971), we can say that, according to the general *concept* of (social) justice, institutions are just when no arbitrary distinction is drawn among individuals in the recognition of their fundamental duties and rights, and when public rules define a proper balance among competing claims. Specific substantive *conceptions* of social justice (neo-welfarism, utilitarianism, libertarianism, etc.) state what differences and similarities among individuals are fundamental in defining basic duties and rights, and what balance of competing claims is desirable and legitimate (Fig. 1). Here we assume – accept – the general *concept* of justice, but we take no substantive position as regards specific *conceptions*. The article does not aim to defend a substantive normative position.

2.3. Third specification: distributive questions as only one of the issues of social justice

Differently from what is sometimes assumed,⁷ *social justice* and *distributive justice* do not coincide (Young, 1990). Issues of distributive justice regard only “distributable items” (Lucas, 1980); that is, scarce items (e.g. goods, assets, resources) which are, for instance, assignable and transferable. These conditions occur only in certain cases; for

instance, in allocating certain public facilities or assigning specific benefits (e.g. public housing dwelling units or forms of rental assistance and supplements, vouchers to access certain services or stamps to purchase healthy food, incentives for the refurbishment and upgrading of aging buildings, subsidies and grants for the use of small energy plants based on renewable sources, fiscal incentives to start up new forms of urban business). In the case of other goods, benefits or rights – which indubitably raise issues of social justice – this instead does not occur (i.e. there is no distribution at all). Consider, for instance, justice issues such as: the right to profess one’s religion in a place of worship expressly built and arranged for this purpose; the right not to be discriminated against – in public spaces or collective private spaces like restaurants or cinemas – in terms of gender, skin colour, ethnic origin, etc.; the freedom to found or join consumers’ or citizens’ associations and organizations; the right not to be adversely affected by the negative externalities of certain urban activities; the possibility to express one’s own opinions freely in public as well as open private spaces; the opportunity to participate fully in the democratic life of a city.

In conclusion, if we wish to continue to employ the expression “distributive justice”, we must recognise that it applies only to certain scarce goods. Hence a theory of distributive justice can be only one component of a more general normative theory of institutions (i.e. a theory of social justice) and not *the* normative theory of institutions. In other words, in moving towards justice, questions of distribution are important but incomplete.⁸ Note that the point here is not merely that we should also question the way in which certain distributable items (e.g. goods) have been produced (and therefore not only consider what their distribution happens to be at a specific time) (Stanczyk, 2012); the point is more radical: that when it comes to certain advantages and disadvantages, benefits and disbenefits, which indubitably raise issues of justice, it makes absolutely no sense to speak in *distributive* terms.

3. Preliminary specifications: space

Before discussing cases in which space is involved in justice issues, three clarifications concerning space itself are important. They are based on the Searlian distinction between “brute facts” and “social (and institutional) facts”⁹; a distinction which seems crucial also for urban studies, urban archaeology and geography (Brown, 2016; De Franco, 2022; Smith, 2020a, 2020b; Smith & Zaibert, 2001; Zaibert, 1998).

First, the nature of space as a “brute fact” cannot be ignored (e.g. independently from our imagination and technologies, it is impossible to locate many different buildings on exactly the same plot of land A; independently from our culture and means of transportation, the distance between areas B and D is always there). As Brown (2016, p. 103) puts it: “Space existed before philosophy, real property, real estate, urban form, mathematics, law, language, humans, horses and dinosaurs. It is embedded in the ontological substrate of access”.

Second, the brute factuality of space does not always “act” alone; there are cases in which also its dimension as a social (or institutional) fact has also importance. Here is an interesting observation in this regard: “The space of a street is a brute fact, but that it is known and functions as a street is an institutional fact. Dogs, squirrels and small children, for example, recognise a street’s space as a brute fact, but a street can be dangerous for dogs, squirrels and children because they do not recognise a street as an institutional fact” (Brown, 2016, p. 121).

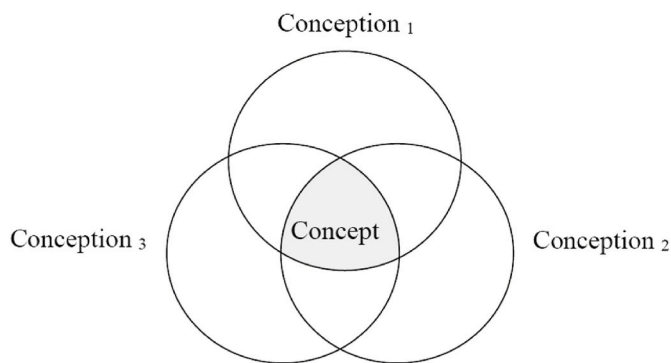


Fig. 1. Concept and conceptions of justice.

⁵ Even if the term makes a brief appearance also in Thompson (1824, p. 314).

⁶ See on this Rawls (1971); Swanton (1981); Korsgaard (1996); Gosepath (2001); Stumpf et al. (2016).

⁷ See in general e.g. Hart (1961), Dobson (1998), and, with specific reference to planning theory and urban studies, Heikoff (1967), McConnell (1981, 1995), Visser (2001), Burton (2003), Israel and Frenkel (2018).

⁸ Compare with Smith (1994), Dikeç (2001), Schlosberg (2004), Marcuse (2009), Walker (2009), Davoudi and Brooks (2014).

⁹ A “brute fact” is a fact that exists independently from human acceptance, agreements or institutions; a “social fact” is instead and conversely, a fact that exists only because of human acceptance, agreements or institutions (Searle, 2010). What Searle (1995) calls “institutional facts” are a subclass of social facts (Searle, 2006, p. 17) that exist as a consequence of a constitutive *declaration* (Searle, 1995, p. 34): for example, “the session of the city council is open”.

Third, even if not all social or institutional facts always need a physical substrate (Lorini, 2000, p. 64 ff.), in the case of spatial issues, social and institutional facts exist only “on top of brute physical facts” (Searle, 1995). In short, in the cases discussed here brute facts and social/institutional facts are often co-present: they cannot be separated. The idea that “geographic entities have more than just brute existence” (Couclelis, 2010, p. 1792) intrinsically entails that they anyway also have some kind of “brute existence”.¹⁰

Note that the view just briefly outlined lies somewhere in between strictly realist-materialistic approaches to space (which reduce space entirely to its materiality), and radical constructivist approaches to space (which reduce it entirely to a social construction).

4. Five ways in which space is involved in justice issues

There are various ways in which spatial dimensions and elements are involved in justice issues, as previously defined. Five of them are identified and considered here, and they concern space as: (i) an influencing factor; (ii) a *unit of allocation*; (iii) a *privately owned asset*; (iv) a *public domain*; (v) a *precinct*. We are not assuming that these cases are exhaustive, but we believe they are particularly significant (especially for urban policies and planning).

4.1. First case: Space as a factor

In this first case, space enters into the discourse on justice as an element influencing the satisfaction of certain rights (e.g. welfare rights) (Barrett, 1973). Let us focus on three welfare rights usually considered in urban policies and planning at the local level: the rights to education, health care, and recreation. In all these cases, granting these rights requires taking space into consideration. Note that granting *positive* rights, like *welfare* rights, always entails taking certain conditions into account (Naess, 1995; Turner & Tam, 2022): this is because positive rights, differently from negative ones, involve providing people with something substantive.¹¹

For instance, to assure the right to education, one (also) has to provide schools in such a way that every local inhabitant has a school building within a certain distance from her/his home, also considering public transport. As Alexander and Massaro (2020, p. 792) write: “Mapping and analysing geographic access to good schools offers a starting point from which to consider spatial justice in educational policy”. The same is true for the location of public hospitals in the case of

¹⁰ It is interesting to quote here what, from a partially different perspective, Harvey (1994, p. 127) writes when explaining his idea of the *social construction of space and time*: “Even though we are dealing with a social construction we are not dealing with something purely subjective or ideal, that is outside of the material world in which we have our existence. What in effect we do is to take some one particular feature of that material world and treat it as if it is the way in which to understand time and space”.

¹¹ For the classic difference between “negative rights” and “positive rights”, see e.g. Fried (1978, p. 110), Jordan (1991), Fabre (1998). As Fabre (1998, pp. 263–264) writes: “There is thus a fundamental distinction between negative and positive rights, which I call the *duty distinction*: some rights are negative in that they ground negative duties only while other rights are positive in that they only ground positive duties to help and resources. From this difference, and from the fact that resources are scarce, a second difference is derived, which I call the *conflict distinction*: since negative rights ground negative duties of non-interference, they are not assigned to scarce goods and therefore do not conflict with one another; by contrast, since positive rights ground positive duties to help and resources, they are assigned to scarce goods and therefore conflict with one another”.

the right to health, and the location of, for example, parks in the case of the right to recreation.¹²

In this case, geographic space influences the possibility of obtaining something. Therefore, space has to be taken into account – by urban policies and planning, for instance – in providing certain rights. In other words, one cannot avoid considering space if one wants to grant certain (positive) rights *effectively*.

4.2. Second case: Space as target

Another way in which space is involved in justice issues concerns the distribution of something – for instance, resources or facilities and amenities like public parks – among different “space units”.¹³ Here there arise problems of distributive justice strictly speaking.

First, there are situations in which space units are (already existing) administrative territories. In this case, the allocation takes place among different territorial entities. Think, for instance, of a national state allocating resources among regional governments or a regional government allocating resources among local, municipal governments. In this case, space is understood as “territory” defined by means of administrative boundaries. Here, territory is clearly an *institutional fact* (Searle, 1995). Indeed, all administrative territories have been created by what Searle (1989) calls a “constitutive declaration” (here this declaration has been made independently from the allocation in question).¹⁴

Second, there are allocation units decided *ad hoc*, that is, in light of a specific purpose. Imagine for instance a local administration working on the city plan that defines new allocative units in order to locate new facilities and amenities. In this case, too, the units are constitutively created through a “declaration” (here, the declaration is made in parallel with the allocation in question).

In both cases (i.e. in the case of already existing administrative units and *ad hoc* created units), different criteria can be adopted to allocate something, let us say X; for instance: the same amount of X to all space units; an amount of X that makes it possible to maximise some parameter W; an amount of X that ensures that all of the space units will be above a certain threshold Z; a higher amount of X to the less advantaged units. In this regard, different *conceptions* of justice can be adopted.¹⁵

As already said, we do not want to take any substantive position on specific normative solutions here. So we immediately move to a final point.

Using space units to allocate something (e.g. resources) has some typical advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is simplicity – especially in the case of already defined and generally accepted administrative units. A disadvantage is that, in allocating resources through space units, one cannot be sure that one will be really able to

¹² These kinds of issues – and approaches and methods to deal with them – are discussed for instance in Cobb (2020), Udnoor, Narayanan, & Anguluri, 2020, Ghasemi et al. (2022), Muhaimin et al. (2022), Li et al. (2024), Zhao et al. (2024).

¹³ These are the kinds of issues discussed for instance in Kirby and Pinch (1983), Powell (1986), Boyne and Powell (1991), Boyne et al. (2001), Holloway (1998), Erkip (1997), Hastings (2007), Tooke et al. (2010), Kabisch and Haase (2014), Wolch et al. (2014), Garrison (2019), Ghasemi et al. (2019), Nesbitt et al. (2019), Kay (2005), Sister et al. (2010), Jennings et al. (2012), Wüstemann et al. (2017), de Sousa Silva et al. (2018), Rigolon et al. (2018), Feng et al. (2019), Kriisk, K. (2019), Asefi and Nosrati (2020), Chen et al. (2020), Liu et al. (2021), Wiesel and Liu (2021), Zhang et al. (2021), Bartl (2022), Hsu et al. (2022), Hussaini et al. (2022), Ferster et al. (2023), Izadbin et al. (2024), Okundi and Varol (2024).

¹⁴ On issues of this kind, see also Smith & Varzi, 2000, Montello (2008). With a more specific focus on how (normative) maps contribute to creating territorial boundaries, see Moroni and Lorini (2017, 2021).

¹⁵ For a critical exploration of this issue, see e.g. Mandelbaum (2021), Feitosa et al., 2024.

reach people: for instance, all the individuals living in a certain neighbourhood or the individuals really in need of something there. As well-known, this is a form of “fallacy of composition”, a “part-to-whole fallacy”.

Note that problems of spatial justice (and injustice) in this sense can arise not only in the case of new spatial allocations of desirable items but also in that of reducing/closing certain desirable facilities and services (e.g. schools) in some areas rather than others (Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). Moreover, there may be issues of spatial justice and injustice also in the case of the spatial allocation of (new) undesirable items such as landfills and incinerators.¹⁶

4.3. Third case: Space as (a privately owned) asset

A third way in which space is involved in justice issues is through the issue of the private *ownership* of land and buildings. As Brown (2016, p. 103) notes: “Property and space have interacted for as long as civilization has been around”.

For the sake of simplicity, let us focus here mainly on the issue of land (which is obviously a crucial issue for urban planning and policies). In this case, the primary question is whether constitutions and institutional frameworks have to (i) preclude the possibility that land can be privately owned (e.g. Bernoulli, 1943), or (ii) recognise the possibility that land can be privately owned (e.g. Heath, 1957).¹⁷ In the first case, the solution could be to maintain all land in public hands and allow private subjects to use it only on some conditions. In the second case, the solution is to instead recognise the general right to own private property (land included) and a specific process whereby specific titles can be acquired to particular assets (e.g. plot X).

Let us examine this latter possibility more in depth (bearing in mind that, in this article, the point is not to take a substantive stance in favour of some positions rather than others, but to highlight the main issues at stake). Here the problem is a general one of social justice as regards the *basic right* to own private property and a more specific problem of distributive justice in terms of *specific titles* to certain items (Moroni, 2018a). Note that recognizing the possibility to privately own land – again, if this possibility is accepted – may imply that land can be a “commodity” (i.e. it is exchangeable for profit) but this is only one of the dimensions of private property; the primary characteristic is having a specific kind of control on a certain asset and being able, for instance, to exclude others from access to it (Alchian & Demsetz, 1973). Note, moreover, that recognizing land as a commodity does not obviously mean (Babcock & Feuer, 1976) that no constraint can be applied on it in light of the public interest (Moroni, 2018b).

Effectively, if we recognise the (general and) specific possibility for private subjects (individual, groups, organizations, companies ...) to own land there are three further questions regarding justice: (i) *acquisition*, (ii) *use* and (iii) *transfer* of land (Moroni, 2022).

The first question is this: how has land been initially *acquired* by someone? Are there acceptable and unacceptable ways to acquire land originally not owned by anyone? Are Nozick (1974), Kirzner (1978), De Jasay (2004) and Narveson (2010) correct in propounding the idea of

¹⁶ See on this Erkut and Neuman (1989), Been (1992) Cutter and Solecki (1996), Jacobson et al. (2005), Hudson (2009), Schelly and Stretesky (2009), Martuzzi et al. (2010), Richardson et al. (2010), Sicotte (2010), Oteng-Ababio (2013), Banzhaf et al. (2019), McKinney and Thomson (2022).

¹⁷ It may be of interest that Spencer initially accepted the first position (Spencer, 1851) and subsequently rejected it in favour of the second one (Spencer, 1891).

¹⁸ Therefore, the owner could be a natural or legal person, an individual or a group (Cozzolino & Moroni, 2021; Moroni, 2014, 2024).

“first-come-first-served”: that is, a sort of “finder-keeper” ethic (provided that certain very loose conditions are respected¹⁹)? The idea in this case is that a resource, until it is discovered, simply does not exist; the right of ownership over something thus arises from creation itself: the “discoverer-creator” has deliberately generated previously non-existent resources and, for this reason, can consider himself/herself their legitimate owner (Kirzner, 1978).²⁰ Or was Locke, 1967 right to maintain that someone must make significant improvements to a piece of land (with his/her labour) to become its owner?²¹ Or do we have to imagine more stringent conditions to become the owner of something not previously owned by anyone (Tideman & Vallentyne, 2001)? Clearly, the problem here arises from the fact that land is available in a finite quantity, and that the supply of land cannot be expanded indefinitely. In short, the original acquisition of a finite item is a very specific and particularly challenging issue (Ryan, 1987).

Second, how can land be *used* by its owner; that is, under what public restrictions and obligations? For instance, is preventing *nuisances* the only reason to restrict the use of privately owned land (Ellickson, 1972; Rogge, 1979)? Are there other reasons (e.g. reducing inequality) based on distributive justice considerations?

Third, how is land *transferred* (from A to B)? Is the voluntary nature of the transfer – be it a gift, a form of inheritance, or a market exchange – necessary and sufficient to have a legitimate transfer of an asset (Nozick, 1974)? Or are there additional conditions to be imposed on transfers (Fried, 1995; Varian, 1975)? For instance, conditions to prevent monopoly on the part of the acquirer or negative consequences for third parties (that is, parties not directly involved in the transfer) (Goldsmith, 1979, pp. 583–588; Wolff, 1991, pp. 83–88)?

4.4. Fourth case: Space as a public domain

A fourth way in which space is involved in questions of social justice relates to publicly held and controlled spaces (e.g. public squares, plazas, streets, sidewalks, parks, civic buildings). The problem here is not one of distributive justice but of social justice more in general.

There are two main questions here.

First, why and how and in what quantity does space have to be publicly held (i.e. held by public institutions, national, regional and local governments)?²²

Second, when and how can public spaces be used by citizens? In this regard, two types of public restrictions may apply to the use of publicly held space: (i) *a priori restrictions* and (ii) *a posteriori restrictions* (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014). *A priori* restrictions consist of restrictions of access: that is, before entry into a publicly held space. In this case, access may be denied to distinct categories on the basis of certain intentions or characteristics (imagine, for example, a place barred to people under or above a certain age, or the barring of parks to street vendors). *A posteriori* restrictions are instead behaviour-related: they start after entry into a

¹⁹ For instance, a clause preventing someone from taking possession of *all* the shares of a (scarce) resource in such a way that it is impossible for others to access it *in some manner* (Nozick, 1974, p. 184ff).

²⁰ The advantage of this view is that it drastically simplifies the issue. The main problem is that this idea might work with intellectually produced objects, such as a book of poems, but much less so with natural element, such as soil. The argument that soil does not exist until it is discovered by an entrepreneur seems difficult to agree with. At most we could accept the idea that the entrepreneur discovers some previously unknown potential of that land; however, adopting this weaker version, we could argue that the entrepreneur only acquires some legitimate title to that land, but not, automatically, an exclusive and total property right over it.

²¹ The advantage of this view is that it introduces the idea that property can be acquired only through some kind of specific effort. The difficulty is that having added something (with our labour) to some item, could at most make us owners of the added value, but not necessarily of the entire item.

²² On these kinds of issues, see recently Low (2023) and Mehta (2023).

Table 1
Regulation of public spaces.

| | Rules focus | Type of rules | Target |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Public regulation of public space | <i>A priori</i> restrictions | Rules of access (mainly prohibitions) | Categories (e.g. people under age N, street vendors, homeless) |
| | <i>A posteriori</i> restrictions | Rules of conduct (prohibitions and obligations) | Behaviours (e.g. skateboarding, smoking, begging) |

publicly held space. In this case, specific rules of conduct are introduced to regulate users' behaviour (for example, rules that forbid skateboarding or art performances in a plaza). In short, *a priori* restrictions affect access and entail bans on certain categories of people from entering a given public space; *a posteriori* restrictions regard types of behaviour to be adopted in a given place, and they entail rules of conduct (and actions taken against whoever fails to desist from breaching the pre-set rules) (Table 1). Both *a priori* restrictions and *a posteriori* restrictions have to be discussed in terms of justice.²³

4.5. Fifth case: Space as a precinct

A final way in which space is involved in questions of social justice is when people are intentionally segregated (e.g. ghettoised) somewhere. Also in this final case, the problem is not one of distributive justice, but it is still an issue of justice.

As Marcuse (2009, p. 3) writes in this regard:

"Frequently we use statistics as a measure of ghettoisation, but that ignores the difference between a ghetto and an enclave. A group that wishes to live together and does so voluntarily is not ghettoised, not segregated, not being treated unjustly when it is allowed to cluster [...]. Involuntary clustering, segregation, however, is a major form of spatial injustice".²⁴

Clearly, spatial justice issues arise in this case also when segregation occurs as a consequence of public inaction; that is, when a group is spatially segregated because public institutions deliberately avoid doing something to impede its segregation.

Note that spatially segregated groups are affected by the problem of stigmatisation. As Lehman-Frisch (2011, p. 79) observes in this regard:

"Confinement to poorer neighbourhoods deprives people of their ability to build their own self-representation and collective identity. The estates of [for instance] the French suburbs are therefore deeply scarred by a negative image, a veritable 'taint of place': the inhabitants have to live with this 'territorial infamy' on a daily basis, in

looking for jobs, in their relationships, when facing the police or the social services, or simply in conversations with their friends".²⁵

5. Discussion and conclusions

Our analysis is summarised in Table 2.

A crucial point emerging from our investigation is that space *in itself* cannot be the subject of justice or injustice. Space is not just or unjust; the subject of (social) justice is always the way in which institutions treat persons. To quote Pirie (1983, p. 470), the prefix "spatial" denotes in this case the *concept's context* and not the *concept's content*.

In other words, "spatial justice is not a substitute for social justice" (Uwayezu & De Vries, 2018, p. 2). *Spatial justice* may instead be interpreted as a sort of "compressed expression" – a "shorthand expression" – used to denote issues of social justice (i.e. issues concerning just and unjust ways in which public institutions treat people) connected with space.²⁶ For instance, if we speak of the injustice of certain urban situations – for example, the inaccessibility of certain urban services for some categories of people or the poor quality of certain specific peripheral neighbourhoods – we are actually assuming implicitly that what is unjust, in reality, are the urban institutions that have allowed such situations to arise and do not intervene in order to remedy them. In short, spatial justice is not a fundamental concept but a derivative one.²⁷

Note that traditional theories of social justice are mainly *constitutional level theories*. For example, Rawls's (1971, 1993) renowned theory is a theory of this kind. Hence, there is nothing strange about the fact that theories of social justice usually do not directly discuss spatial issues, which are more relevant at the post-constitutional level (especially at the local level). Any development and integration of social justice perspectives that more directly consider also post-constitutional issues (Moroni, 2019, 2023), and, therefore, also spatial issues, is more than welcome. However, this is not a way to refute or even subvert what are sometimes deemed too intrinsically abstract approaches (Dikeç, 2001). It is simply a useful enrichment of them.

We believe it is not a "downgrade" of the notion of spatial justice to interpret it in the way suggested (as some seem to believe, assuming that something more is entailed when focusing the attention on "spatial justice": Soja, 2011). Nor do we believe that this is not radical enough; it is as radical as it can be.

The point here is not whether or not space is considered a mere container. We can easily agree that space is not a mere container, a mere background to human activities.²⁸ And we can agree that space stands in reciprocal relation with other (e.g. social and institutional) aspects. This notwithstanding, discussions on justice are very distinctive ways to assess *human conditions*²⁹ and can include space only in certain ways. From our perspective, a credible and viable "spatial turn" is therefore an attempt to take "(geographical) space" seriously and systematically into

²³ These kinds of questions are explored for instance by Ruddick (1996), Iveson (1998), Akkar (2005), Madden (2010), Madanipour (2010), Németh and Schmidt (2011), Hackenbroch and Hossain (2012), Galvis (2014), Ekdi and Çaracı (2015), Low and Iveson (2016), Onodugo et al. (2016), Nikšić and Sezer (2017), Attia and Ibrahim (2018), Deore and Lathia (2019), Mahadevia and Lathia (2019), Adama (2020), Jian et al. (2020), Piazzoni (2020), Jian et al. (2021), Chitrakar et al. (2022).

²⁴ Compare with Lehman-Frisch (2011, p. 73): "The [...] most common category [of segregation] is the sidelining of certain individuals or groups of individuals who are considered 'weaker', in an attempt to protect the whole of society from 'contamination' by this group. It must be noted here that this type of segregation very often carries with it racial or ethnic connotations. Examples span different geographical contexts, from notions of caste that continue to affect the socio-spatial organisation of Indian cities [...], to symbolic processes of institutional segregation such as the Jewish ghettos of Eastern Europe or the black ghettos of the United States [...] or apartheid in South Africa [...]". See also Varady (2005), Ananat (2011), Smets and Salman (2016), Fahlberg and Vicino (2016), Bayón and Saraví (2018).

²⁵ On stigmatisation in this sense, see also Wacquant (1993), Wacquant et al. (2014).

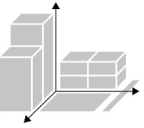




²⁶ Compare with Landy & Saglio-Yatzimirsky, 2014, p. 423): "Spatial justice is nothing but social justice as seen through space: social (in)justice has spatial expressions that can betray it; and conversely, space can engender social (in) justice". See also Pineda (2020, p. 25): "The term 'spatial justice' is used to link together social justice and the organisation and utilisation of physical space".

²⁷ This conclusion is similar to Marcuse's view (see Marcuse, 2010). For the debate on Marcuse's position, see Iveson (2011); on the general issue, see also Hay (1995). On the distinction itself between *fundamental* and *derivative* issues, see e.g. Williams (2010).

²⁸ See e.g. Hanson and Pratt (1992); Gotham (2003); Dodge and Kitchin (2005); Rutten (2017); Cnossen and Bencherki (2019); Brown (2020).

²⁹ This article is expressly focused on (*social*) justice involving *human beings*. Clearly, the discussion concerning (certain) ethical questions could be enlarged to also include non-human beings (e.g. animals). We aim to develop our future research in this direction also.

Table 2
Summary.

| How space is entailed/ involved | Central aspect | Justice issues | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| | | Instrumental issues to achieve justice | Non-distributive (social) justice issues | Distributive (social) justice issues |
| <p><i>factor</i></p>  | Conditions for granting positive rights (e.g. welfare rights) | X | | |
| <p><i>target</i></p>  | Area of allocation of resources or facilities (e.g. schools, hospitals, parks) | | | X |
| <p><i>(private) asset</i></p>  | Right to hold private property Titles to specific items | | X | X |
| <p><i>(public) domain</i></p>  | Publicly held (and controlled) spaces (right to access and to use) | | X | |
| <p><i>precinct</i></p>  | Segregation patterns (involuntary segregation) | | X | |

consideration in various fields, *political philosophy included*. However, this does not necessarily imply any epistemological revolution but rather, simply but not trivially, a crucial enrichment of our (explanatory and normative) views.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Stefano Moroni: Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Anita De Franco:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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