Searching for the Just City
Debates in urban theory and practice

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Introduction
Finding justice in the city
James Connolly and Justin Steil

The search for a Just City is, in part, an effort to realize the transformative potential of urban theory. It is a search that begins by examining the every-day reality of city life and then seeks a means to reshape that reality and re-imagine that life. It begins with the injustices that have come with rapid urbanization—the violence, insecurity, exploitation, and poverty that characterize urban life for many, as well as the physical expressions of unequal access to social, cultural, political, and economic capital that arise from intertwined divisions between race, class, and gender categories. Awareness of these everyday injustices “thickens our deliberations and provides us with a metric for evaluating our achievements” (Beauregard 2006). Whether displaced merchants are challenging the dominant economic development régime, local communities are seeking to direct the remediation of contaminated urban manufacturing sites, or domestic workers are struggling for fair labor standards, actions against specific injustices provide partial, yet continual, challenges to the inequalities in everyday urban life. Awareness of exploitation, and attempts to challenge it, bring us closer to realizing the too often unfulfilled promise that cities have long represented—the promise of liberation and opportunity. But to search for a Just City is to seek something more than individualized responses to specific injustices. It requires the creation of coherent frames for action and deliberation that bring the multiple and disparate efforts of those fighting against unjust urban conditions into relief and relate their struggles to each other as part of a global orchestration improvised around the single tenor of justice.

As urban residents with different backgrounds and conflicting ideologies seek to universalize their competing notions of justice, a crucial question has been the extent to which coherent and useful ideals can be imagined from this contested concept. Though spatially informed notions of social justice have become a unifying cry for a number of activist organizations and urban social movements around the globe, the meaning of social justice for urban life remains ill-defined. The search for this meaning is, as well, the search for a Just City. This volume brings together contemporary urban theorists and practitioners in order to sharpen the definition of justice in the context of twenty-first century urbanization by engaging with the philosophic and economic conflicts that emerge from the contemporary politics of city
building. Such engagement values the pluralism of ideas and the creativity that comes with sorting through these conflicts. Despite differences, the contributions to this volume all share a critique of power and exploitation, a critical reflexivity and an unwavering belief that there are more just alternatives. Bruno Latour (2004: 246) suggests that “the critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather.” This volume assembles critics of existing urban injustice and offers them an arena in which to gather, taking the concept of the Just City as developed by Susan Fainstein as a starting point for assembling a theoretical frame that can effectively direct deliberation and action in the process of reshaping existing urban realities. The conclusion and postscript of this volume offer an assessment of where we are and where we need to go next in this effort. To begin, though, some clarification on where we have been with regard to the literature on justice and the city is required.

**APPROACHES TO DEFINING JUSTICE**

The city has always been a fundamental heuristic within attempts to define justice. In Plato’s *The Republic*, Socrates uses a lengthy description of what a Just City would look like as scaffolding for his argument in favor of justice as an ethical guide for individuals. He argues that the qualities of justice are more easily discerned within the actions of the State (specifically the city-state in the context of Plato’s time) than they are from within those of the individual. Thus, in order to respond to claims by Thrasymachus that justice is simply an expression of what is best for those in power and therefore, that the unjust life should be preferred to the just, Socrates creates a Just City in words. Socrates’ Just City, and the definition of justice it entails, necessarily engages political questions concerned specifically with the distribution of power in order to respond to Thrasymachus’ claims (see Neu 1971; Lycos 1987). Justice, in this context, is defined as an internal quality of cities based upon the aggregated actions of individual residents—in some ways, an expression of the situated nature of justice echoed by several contemporary urban theorists discussed below. Ultimately, though, the parameters of a Just City are not so much specified within *The Republic* as they are set in contrast to those of existing cities of the time. Socrates ends by prescribing a much contested “organic model” for the State that entails a strong and growing role for the public sector (which Socrates envisioned as populated by political philosophers), in order to ensure a Just City and, thus, a just life for its inhabitants (see Dobbs 1994).

**Liberal political philosophy**

This initial concern for the distribution of power and the role of the State in creating a Just City is reflected (though not always specifically addressed)
in Western debates about justice that have developed over the last half-century, mostly within the fields of political philosophy and political economy. Contemporary definitions of justice are generally seen to fall under the domain of liberal political philosophers, from John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill to John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum. Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and his idea of the “original position” in which individuals choose principles of justice from behind a “veil of ignorance” emphasizes the value of liberty and equality. Rawls argues that everyone has an equal right to basic liberties and that social and economic inequalities, where necessary, should be distributed to benefit the least advantaged. His advancement of a normative social contract theory critiques Mill’s utilitarianism and, when it was published, reinvigorated liberal political philosophy in the Anglo-American context. It conceives of justice in abstract and universal terms, separated from existing political contexts but, at the same time, accepts much of the capitalist economic structure. Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) build on the social contract theory of liberal political philosophy to emphasize a more detailed capabilities approach to understanding justice. These capabilities, which include the ability to maintain political and material control over one’s environment, represent nontradeable, inalienable opportunities to which each person should be entitled. Like the Western liberalism from which it emerges, the capabilities approach largely treats individuals as abstract, universal, atomistic actors dis-embedded from their social relations and historical and spatial specificities. This account of essential human functionings and rights thus fails to fully come to terms with the importance of the situatedness of both author and subject and the implications that difference has for people’s everyday lives, needs, and wants.

Neither Rawls, Sen nor Nussbaum elaborate how their normative conceptions of justice, based on equality and fairness, can be realized or what forms they might take, a problem that has characterized the philosophy of justice since Socrates’ attempt to define a Just City in *The Republic*. All three recent formulations leave readers questioning what justice might mean as a concrete structure within everyday life. Such detail on what a Just City would look like in the context of the modern State is not a question these philosophically oriented political theorists seek to answer, though they offer important elaborations on the complexity inherent in the concept.

**Communicative rationality**

Another influential approach to justice that emerged within liberal political philosophy since the end of the Second World War and that has been a theoretical base for many seeking to create a more just urban form is the idea of communicative rationality, articulated most prominently by Jürgen Habermas (1985). Building on the tradition of pragmatism, and his own work on the public sphere (1962/1991), Habermas emphasizes the importance of discourse
ethics and the “ideal speech situation” for creating discursive theories of democracy. This emphasis on discourse and social relations allows for more historically and spatially situated understandings of justice while avoiding total relativism. With the rise of postmodern challenges to grand narratives, this focus on the processes that could lead to justice, instead of a definition of its ends, has become increasingly popular and led, among other things, to a school of communicative urban planning practice in which discursively democratic means constitute the path to a just end (Healey 1997; Forester 1999). This equation for urban justice, largely formulated as a postmodern defense of the “cultural politics” of difference (see Soja 1997: 184), has been criticized for failing to recognize the impossibility of creating truly ideal speech situations in the context of drastic political and economic inequality and the reality that unjust ends can result from relatively just processes. The implicit meaning of this approach for urban theory, then, is that the ends are left to be the de facto result of practice while only the means are theorized, a position further critiqued by authors in this volume.

Political economy

Recognition of the uneven power positions that complicate the ideals of discursive planning along with a historically and economically situated critique of political philosophy are at the heart of the political economy approach to justice. Karl Marx dismissed liberal conceptualizations of justice as bourgeois prejudices hiding bourgeois interests. Many of those inspired by Marx continue to emphasize the need to focus on the very concrete inequalities continually reproduced by capitalist modes of production and accumulation. David Harvey’s seminal work Social Justice and the City (1973) begins by trying to analyze urban problems from a Rawlsian liberal perspective, but fails to find satisfactory answers in this realm. Turning to a Marxist analysis, Harvey identifies unequal spatial development as fundamental to the functioning of capitalism. Instead of confronting the symptoms visible in urban decline, Harvey argues that justice demands the transformation of the processes that gave rise to urban inequality in the first place—the asymmetries of economic and political power embedded in the practices of capital accumulation. In the end, Harvey calls for the exploration of alternative modes of production, consumption, and distribution that would reorganize the class structure of society. Such an approach, common amongst Marxian urban theory of the time that Social Justice and the City was published (see also Castells 1977, 1978, 1983; Katznelson 1982), has been critiqued for its supposition that class is a single unifying category with the ability to universalize the particularities of other identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender (see Tajbakhsh 2001). As well, the political economic approach, including that of some early Marxian urbanists, has evolved in recent decades both along with and in response to a poststructuralist understanding of social systems.
This evolution, which in part is characterized by a “cultural turn” in the political economic perspective, has been shaped by a conscious effort to examine the inequalities of uneven development across a wider spectrum than the Marxian focus on class. Influenced by postmodernist epistemology and a growing body of theories on the social production of space, this perspective in urban political economy has looked toward race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other social groupings as essential markers in the uneven distribution of power and resources (see Soja 1999). In this vein, authors such as Iris Marion Young (1990, 2000) and Nancy Fraser (1999) articulate the “risks involved both in attending to and ignoring difference” (Young 1990: 86). They use empirical case studies to point out the limitations of a strictly redistributive model of social justice and highlight the crucial role of recognition. Conceptualizing social categories as produced through both material and discursive power relations, scholars working in this vein argue for the importance of recognizing claims asserted from the specificity of social group positions in order to challenge structural inequalities. Justice, from this perspective, requires not simply formal inclusion or equality but “attending to the social relations that differently position people and condition their experiences, opportunities and knowledge of the society” (Young 2000: 83). While the focus on recognition that has come with the “cultural turn” has done much to advance the interests of under-represented groups, Michael Storper (2001) highlights the attendant possibility for relativism that creates an inability to navigate conflict when group differences collide. The inclusion of recognition and difference continues to guide research, but remains a source of persistent tension amongst political economic analysts wary of moving too far away from the question of power in capitalist society.

CONTEMPORARY FORMULATIONS OF JUSTICE AND URBAN SPACE

Much has changed in global politics since Harvey wrote Social Justice and the City in 1973 and since the advent of poststructuralist calls for recognition in the 1990s, but the rise of neoliberalism to hegemonic status has only heightened the unevenness of spatial development. Government initiatives to deregulate financial and other industries, privatize public goods, restrain unions and limit workers’ rights have been combined with efforts to strengthen private property rights and extend free trade and market incentives to new economic sectors and new global regions (Harvey 2005). Within contemporary urban politics, the dominance of neoliberalism and discourses of the competitive city have effectively redirected attention away from traditional issues of social justice and toward a new liberal formulation of social problems as questions of “social cohesion, social exclusion and social capital” (Harloe 2001: 890), but this turn has also been met with resistance at the local and global level.

Movements against neoliberalism, like all liberation movements, are both struggles in space and also struggles for space (Merrifield and Swyngedouw
Understanding justice requires not only engaging with the dialectical relationship between social and economic conditions, but also with the spatial implications of that relationship. How does attention to the production and experience of urban space illuminate the philosophical articulations and concrete struggles for social justice? As Smith (1992), Purcell (2003), Brenner (2004), and others have pointed out, the rescaling of governance has brought renewed attention to the multiple levels at which politics and economy are negotiated. This rescaling has emphasized the significance of the municipal level in struggles over neoliberalism and social justice. Arguably, the city is the scale large enough for a government to have meaningful power, but still small enough for a democracy in which people can actually affect politics (see Dahl 1967 for an early discussion of this topic; see also Fainstein this volume; DeFilippis this volume). It is in cities that the place of community is organized relative to the space of capital investment and that the effect upon urban residents—be they in the rapidly expanding cities of developing countries or in the postindustrial regions of the advanced economy—is ultimately decided. Actions taken at all scales of governance are certainly pertinent, but the city is the scale where questions of justice are felt concretely as part of everyday life.

Considering scale, any theory of urban justice must wrestle with the extent to which a just arrangement for those within one city’s borders could coexist with, or depend upon, unequal or exploitative relations with inhabitants of other cities and non-urban areas. Much of the writing in this volume focuses primarily on North America and Western Europe. The world’s fastest growing cities, and the majority of the urban population, live outside these regions in very different urban contexts. Several chapters in this volume point to the imperative of considering the Just City arguments in light of non-Western urban contexts and of learning from the innovations of “ordinary cities” and the syncretization and creolization that increasingly characterize everyday urban life around the world (see Maricato this volume; Thompson this volume; Mayer and Novy this volume; and Yiftachel et al. this volume; as well as King 1996; Amin and Graham 1997; Robinson 2006, inter alia). Attention to non-Western cities raises the history of imperialism that has long structured global urban relations (see Maricato this volume; Thompson this volume). Neoliberalism heightens the continuing significance of empire, race, and migration in shaping urban development while also creating new opportunities for finding solidarity across national borders.

In this context of neoliberal restructuring, renewed debates about justice, utopian thought, and the “right to the city” have highlighted the need for contributions that bring political philosophic and political economic understandings of justice together. Susan Fainstein has developed this line of thought in a series of articles that seek to specify a model for urban planners that “reacts to the social and spatial inequality engendered by capitalism” (Fainstein 2005: 2). Fainstein’s modified form of political economic analysis, which
she labels “Just City” planning,9 takes the normative stance of political economists that favors social equity and seeks to overlay a detailed outline of the values rooted in philosophical notions of justice that guide the creation of the “good city.” In so doing, her theory of the Just City attempts to provide an alternative to both process-oriented paradigms of urban planning based upon Habermasian communicative rationality (i.e., the Communicative Model) and product-oriented paradigms based upon a physically determinist view of urban social life (i.e., the New Urbanism) (Fainstein 2000).

As well, within her development of the Just City model, Fainstein has been simultaneously critical of postmodern calls for diversity as an unquestioned orthodoxy in city planning as well as of the Marxian use of class as a “cross cutting category over other forms of social difference.”8 For Fainstein, the values that guide the creation of public space, housing, economic development, and social programs that should exist within a Just City can and must be made explicit in order to mobilize broad-based and inclusive movements for change rooted in social rationality and a definition of the collective good.

The Just City articulation that Fainstein presents perhaps shares the most with the recent writings of Heather Campbell (2006). Campbell explores the concept of justice in the practice of urban planning, especially with regard to the role of situated ethical judgment in connecting abstract principles to concrete cases, especially in contentious circumstances. Campbell argues for the importance of a relational understanding of planning that focuses on the interdependence of individuals and communities (Campbell 2006: 101). In that relational understanding, the crucial practice that links reasoning with justice and negotiates between the universal and the particular is the exercise of judgment informed by a contextual understanding of the values at stake and the divergent perspectives involved (Campbell 2006: 102–3). To the contributions of Campbell’s more philosophically rooted work, Fainstein’s writing adds significant attention to political economy and to the context in which a concept of the Just City must struggle to take root.

The writings of Fainstein and Campbell continue in a long line of urban planning literature that points urban theory and practice in the direction of justice, from Friedrich Engels’ (1872) “The Housing Question” and Ebenezer Howard’s (1898) “To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform” to the articulations of advocacy (Davidoff 1965) and equity (Krumholz 1982) planning theorists of the 1960s. All of these works in many ways set out to answer the questions that Fainstein has repeatedly posed for urban theory: (1) under what conditions can conscious action produce a better city for all citizens, and (2) how do we evaluate what outcomes would truly be better? These questions are also in line with the more recent reframing of social movement struggles around justice, as opposed to equality, which allows goals to be framed simultaneously in material (economic redistribution) and non-material (capabilities, opportunities, liberties) terms.
In this vein, several contemporary theorists have crafted descriptions of the “good city” in order to sketch an understanding of the relationship between justice, responsibility, and the urban (inter alia Harvey 1992, 1996; Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1997; Friedmann 2000; Amin 2006). Ash Amin highlights the centrality of “an urban ethic imagined as an ever-widening habit of solidarity” based around the concepts of “repair,” “relatedness,” “rights,” and “re-enchantment” that are part of everyday experience (Amin 2006: 1012). Amin imagines a well-functioning, inclusive and participatory city that “celebrates the aspects of urban life from which spring the hopes and rewards of association and sociality” (Amin 2006: 1019). In another exploration of the concept, John Friedmann (2000) focuses on the very concrete issues of housing, health care, wages, and social welfare as the four pillars of the good city. Friedmann emphasizes the central role of civil society organizations in struggling to reinforce these pillars in the context of democratic institutions.

Another related and increasingly influential approach to understanding justice and the city has found inspiration in the work of Henri Lefebvre (inter alia Dikeç 2001; Mitchell 2003; Purcell 2003; Smith 2003). Lefebvre’s provocative writings on the production of space (1992), the “urban revolution” (2003), and the “right to the city” (1996) have increasingly been a motivating “cry and a demand” (Lefebvre 1996: 158) both for scholars and for activists and organizers. Purcell (2003) has focused on the trends redefining the liberal-democratic conception of citizenship and proposes a “right to the global city” which encompasses a right both to appropriate urban space and to produce it through participation in decision-making at all the scales that affect the inhabitant. The emphasis on the concept of a right to the city, a right both to use it and to participate in its social and political production, has animated a dynamic coalition of community organizations and other civil society groups across the U.S. calling for economic and environmental justice. Members of this Right to the City Alliance have been active nationwide fighting gentrification and calling for a right to land and housing free from the pressures of real estate speculation and that can serve as cultural and political spaces to build sustainable communities. The Postscript to this volume takes up some of the implications of the right to the city concept for further theoretical and practical work.

The right to the city, Just City, and good city formulations share a desire to rearticulate the political and moral connections between inhabitance, social provision and social justice (Ong 2006). Dikeç (2001) articulates the shared goal within of this scholarly work—that is, the development of “a conceptual apparatus that could be given normative content to guide the actual production of urban space” (Dikeç 2001: 1803)—and the differing set of theoretical criteria from which these perspectives draw. For Dikeç, the challenge
is to articulate a right to difference and a right to the city within the spatial dialectics of injustice. While Fainstein’s work does not preclude such a focus, she looks toward an explicit engagement with the philosophical and political foundations that can justify criteria and visions of a good city. A strong philosophical grounding and carefully argued justifications, Fainstein suggests, are crucial for any effort to widen feelings of solidarity, mobilize civil society and effectively motivate a broad base of actors to overcome existing social divisions and press for more progressive urban policies. Dikeç’s theoretical mechanism, grounded in the right to the city concept, highlights, on the other hand, the role of emancipatory politics in mobilizing the marginalized rather than initially seeking to create a broader-based mobilization in the name of spatial justice. While the points of intersection between these perspectives are strong, the points of departure are important for urban politics. For this reason, Dikeç’s work is substantially reprinted in this volume as a means of highlighting some of the similarities and differences between the Just City, good city, and right to the city perspectives.

AN ARENA FOR THE JUST CITY: CRITIQUES AND DEBATES THAT ADVANCE THE DISCUSSION

To create the arena described by Bruno Latour in which critical scholars can gather, this book brings together authors from a variety of disciplines to explore the potential—and tensions—embodied in the concept of the Just City. In this exploration, the authors’ diverse perspectives help to illuminate the relation between the roots of urban injustices and the vision required to respond to those injustices. Categorical divides between schools of urban theory must be addressed and reconciled to some degree to unite actors in processes of both action and deliberation. The authors in this book seek such an engagement and, in providing an active example of critical reflection and interdisciplinary dialogue, implicitly invite readers to do the same.

The book is organized in three parts that correspond roughly to a scale of analysis and a set of distinct, but interrelated, questions. The first part addresses fundamental philosophical and political tensions in the discussion. The chapters in the second part examine closely a select set of contested aspects of those debates and expand the boundaries of the discussion in light of applied planning practices. Those in the final part look at concrete case studies and their implications. The three groups of questions with which this volume engages are:

Part I: Why Justice? Theoretical Foundations of the Just City Debate: Can justice be defined positively or must it be expressed only as the absence of injustice? Either way, can a Just City be universally articulated or does it depend fundamentally on positionality and local specificities? If it can be affirmatively defined, what would constitute “justice” in an urban setting?
Section 2: What are the Limits of the Just City? Expanding the Debate: Is the city level the appropriate scale for analysis and action by which to challenge contemporary processes of urban and regional development? To what extent can justice be defined within the context of existing societal relations without inherently reflecting the interests of the stronger?

Section 3: How Do We Realize Just Cities? From Debate to Action: Can the concept of the Just City actually stimulate visions of a better society? If so, how are such visions useful in practice? If the concept of justice is not a useful measure by which to guide and evaluate urban development, what should take its place? What social, political, economic, and other structures are needed to produce a Just City?

In Part I, Susan Fainstein works from a political economic lens to contextualize philosophical conceptions of justice within the major theoretical tensions to which the Just City project must respond. David Harvey critiques such a formulation of the Just City from a Marxist perspective, arguing that any attempt to realize justice within the context of capitalist relations will fail to address the root causes of injustice. Frank Fischer critiques the project from a deliberative democratic perspective rooted in the discursive paradigm of planning and public policy, but also seeks to find common ground between the political economic and discursive approaches. Finally, Mustafa Dikeç draws on Lefebvre to focus attention on the right to difference and the central role of those most marginalized in finding a route to a Just City.

Part II is about expanding the boundaries of the Just City debate. These authors question whether the Just City as articulated by Fainstein goes “far enough” and examine the complexity associated with using justice as a primary evaluation tool in cities. Peter Marcuse calls for these boundaries to be expanded in a structural sense by looking beyond calls for simple distributional equity to a wider delineation of “commons planning” as opposed to “justice planning.” Johannes Novy and Margit Mayer call for the boundaries to be expanded in a geographic sense. They seek to include cities outside of the U.S. and Europe in the discussion, questioning the choice of Amsterdam as a model for a Just City and critiquing Fainstein’s acceptance of growth criteria based on their assessment of developments in European urbanism. Analyzing urban policy in Israel, Oren Yiftachel, Ravit Goldhaber, and Roy Nuriel seek to expand the notions of difference and recognition that are used in developing a Just City. They show how “affirmative recognition,” “marginalizing indifference,” and “hostile recognition” for different ethnic groups has created a “creeping urban apartheid” and “gray space” in Israeli cities. Finally, James DeFilippis seeks to expand the issues being examined by, somewhat paradoxically, shrinking the language of globalization and re-infusing the local into economic development discussions. Drawing from research on largely unregulated employment sectors, he highlights the localized
nature of most capital–labor relations and the need to refocus our attention from the threat of competition between global cities to the reality of economic exploitation within cities and workers’ struggles.

The third section turns to the practical matters of achieving just outcomes on the ground. It asks what urban actors seeking to realize the goals of the Just City do and what challenges they face. Laura Wolf-Powers highlights the importance of public discourse as an active force in creating “counter-publics.” She shows how, in the case of Brooklyn, New York in the 1960s and 1970s, alternative discourses reframed urban issues in ways that changed how neighborhood residents felt about their own efficacy and was crucial for progressive planners and activists to gain traction in broader policy discussions. Justin Steil and James Connolly examine issues of institutional structure and just urban outcomes through a case study of grassroots environmental justice organizations in the South Bronx section of New York City. These community-based organizations have been working to reconfigure the organizational relations of brownfield redevelopment in order to create a more multilateral structure that includes insurgent voices. Looking at similar issues at the national scale, Erminia Maricato analyzes Brazil’s “right to the city” inspired legislation and its aim of restructuring property rights and social welfare provision, as well as the obstacles to its realization. Finally, addressing the very American disaster of New Orleans, Phil Thompson shows how any effort to create a Just City in the U.S. must recognize the extent to which politics and power are inextricably tied to the history of slavery and colonialism and continuing race-based labor exploitation.

The volume concludes with Johannes Novy and Cuz Potter looking again at the issues that the volume was chiefly concerned with and evaluating where the chapter authors’ contributions have brought us. Peter Marcuse has the last word in a Postscript that highlights the changes that the civil rights movement and the uprisings in 1968 brought to our understandings of socially just goals. Marcuse points towards the momentum generated by the “Right to the City Alliance” as advancing the aims articulated by those searching for just cities.

The debates in this volume are expected to both expand the scope of urban imagination and to help reinvigorate, unify, and empower shared desires for just urban outcomes. Lefebvre characterized himself as a “utopian . . . a partisan of possibilities” (cited in Pinder 2006: 239), and David Pinder and other scholars have recently emphasized again the value of progressive utopian visions for everyday urban life. In a context where neoliberalism has gained such power essentially as “a utopia of unlimited exploitation” and “a program for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic” (Bourdieu 1998: 1), progressive utopian visions can emphasize the value collective structures create and open new perspectives on what urban life can become. In presenting the Just City, Fainstein argues that “while utopian ideals provide goals toward which to aspire and inspiration by which to mobilize a constituency, they do not offer a strategy for transition within given
historical circumstances” and thus she seeks to develop a vision of what is desirable and feasible within the conditions in which present-day cities find themselves embedded. Both more utopian and more pragmatic approaches are necessary in efforts to realize more just cities and dialogue between the two will undoubtedly prove fruitful. As Fredric Jameson has written, “the question of Utopia would seem to be a crucial test of what is left of our capacity to imagine change at all” (1991: xvi).

On both the pragmatic and the utopian levels, the discussion of a Just City inherently raises essential questions about the geography of our responsibilities (Massey 2004)—about which actors at what scales urban inhabitants can hold accountable for the quality of their everyday life, their access to spaces and to opportunities. The concept of a Just City can create a moral and political lever that social movements can use to argue for changes in the relation between the state and the market (Yuval-Davis 1999; Brodie 2007). Paired with articulations of the right to use and participate in the production of urban space, formulations of a Just City can empower urban residents to more effectively make claims about access to space and the provision of collective resources.

Some contributors approach justice in the city by first highlighting injustice, while others examine visions of equitable alternatives. Both approaches sharpen our analyses of the processes creating injustice and challenge us to imagine unseen possibilities. The contributors to this volume help illuminate the choices that are being made every day about the form and social processes of the city. Protesting the lack of accountability of the World Trade Organization at its meeting in Seattle in 1999, demonstrators highlighted the need for broader participation in decision making and more attention to needs of the marginalized, rallying around the cry, “This is what democracy looks like!” What does just space, a Just City look like? Recognizing that cities are key sites in the reproduction of social relations of domination, this volume is an entry into the debate about what justice means in the context of the twenty-first-century city and what alternative urban futures could look like.

NOTES

1 This quote was taken from a talk presented at the Searching for the Just City conference (April 29 2006, Columbia University, New York City), which highlighted a key point of debate at the conference.

2 Of course, at least since Simmel (1903) raised the issue within the context of modern urban life, the issue of the effect of metropolitan living upon individual freedom and opportunity has been contested especially amongst sociologists. This debate notwithstanding, current shifts toward a majority urbanized global population demonstrate that the “promise” of urban life remains a large draw for people worldwide. See also the introduction by Loretta Lees in The Emancipatory City (2004).

3 Friedrich Hayek, as a key example of the conflicting ideologies at work here, argued from a decidedly pro-capitalist position that social justice is a term of art with
limited operational meaning. He further argued that the vagueness of the term’s meaning is maintained by those who utilize it in order to make it a tool for coercion in the name of utopian goals (Hayek 1978).

4 See Dikeç (this volume) and Yiftachel et al. (this volume); see also Soureli’s (2008) presentation at the American Collegiate Schools of Planning conference; see also Steil and Connolly (this volume) for a discussion of the growth of a large-scale environmental justice movement.

5 Utilitarianism as originally outlined by John Stuart Mill (1861/1969) is (and was in Rawls’ time) the dominant theoretical model for distributive justice, which generally upholds “free market principles” as a mechanism for providing the greatest good for the greatest number.

6 See Fainstein (2000) for a description of “Just City” planning relative to other dominant paradigms.

7 For more on discussions of the “good city” see Harvey (1992) and (1996); Merrifield and Swyngedouw (1997); Friedmann (2000); Amin (2006).

8 Quoted from transcripts of a talk presented at the Searching for the Just City conference, April 29, 2006 at Columbia University, New York City.

9 This goal is very near to Fainstein’s goal, which she informally stated as: “to provide a rhetorical method whereby my side [i.e. her normative position] might be able to win.” Quoted from transcripts of a talk presented at the Searching for the Just City conference, April 29, 2006 at Columbia University, New York City.

REFERENCES


James Connolly and Justin Steil