

DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING IN AFRICAN CITIES: EXPLORING THEORIES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES FROM SIERRA LEONE

WEEK 1 Introduction to development and planning

STEP 1.10 What is spatial justice? (ARTICLE)

by Andrea Rigon

Earlier on, we discussed how development and planning are political and normative processes which are therefore based on specific values. Because we argue that it is impossible to have a “neutral” perspective on development and planning, in this course we have adopted two normative lenses from which to explore development and planning issues in African cities. These are spatial justice and social diversity. The first concept will be briefly introduced here while the second will be explained by Julian Walker after this article.

Space is not a container of human activity but an active force shaping human life. Edward Soja, an academic who has done significant work on the concept of spatial justice in cities, argues that women and men are spatial beings as well as social and temporal beings. Humans produce space. Space is socially produced and therefore can be socially changed.

For Soja, the idea of socio-spatial relations is fundamental: that is, that space shapes social relations as much as social relations shape space. When we discuss space we include all the different scales within this, from the household to the global scale. Spatial justice involves “the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them” (Soja 2009).

The space we live in can have negative as well as positive consequences on everything we do. For Soja, spatial (in)justice is both an outcome and a process that results in such outcomes. While it is easy to identify the outcomes of spatial injustice, it is more complex to understand the underpinning processes which produce spatial injustices. Nonetheless, this is a fundamental point of analysis, in order for inequities to be addressed and to work towards justice.

“Locational discrimination created through the biases imposed on certain populations because of their geographical location is fundamental in the production of spatial injustice and the creation of lasting spatial structures of privilege and advantage” (Soja 2009). For example, this might occur through

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the lack of provision of infrastructure such as hospitals and good schools to certain parts of the city. As discussed earlier, in many African cities, patterns of spatial injustice created during colonial time are still present.

References

Soja, E. (2009) The city and spatial justice. Spatial justice, n° 01 September 2009, <http://www.jssj.org>.

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