

Producing Discourses on Spatial Justice in European Cities

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This paper aims to understand whether and how the concept of spatial justice is mobilised in urban development practice in a European context. The main research questions are as follows:

- What is meant by spatial justice at local level, i.e. in the spaces of (potential) resistance against injustice experienced in the form of urban exclusion, stigmatisation and ghettoisation?
- Does the language of spatial justice appear in local development projects and has it become part of local thinking?
- Can the discourse that local agents conduct about spatial justice play the emancipatory role that critical social scientists attribute to it?

The authors analysed case studies on urban development projects implemented in six European cities (Stockholm, London, Rotterdam, Barcelona, Cluj-Napoca, Pécs) as part of an H2020 project (RELOCAL¹) by means of a Critical Discourse Analysis. The multilayered knowledge embodied in these case studies (as academic discourses) and reconstructed in this analysis is derived from what local stakeholders think of their own development projects.

The research has shown that the language of spatial justice as a way of thinking is only found in traces, at best, in the urban development policy discourses in the cities studied. Instead, it is most frequently ‘translated’ into other narratives. Through the perspective opened up by studying the discursive field and discursive production related to spatial justice narratives in the context of the trialectics of the ‘production of discourses’, the ‘production of spatial justice’ and the ‘production of space’, the authors were able to interpret spatial justice not only in an abstract space, but also in a physical and social space. They could also reveal that incorporating spatial justice as a hollow term into urban (regional, national or EU) development discourses may also be able to strengthen existing power relations and contribute to the production of spatial inequalities. Injustice is reproduced when the concept of spatial justice is taken out of the context of the reproduction of capitalism, when space is ‘restricted’ to place in development projects, and when social and spatial injustice and procedural and distributive injustice are separated even though the intention is to mitigate the segregation of exploited and oppressed social groups.

Keywords: spatial justice, discursive space, space production, Critical Discourse Analysis, urban development

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