

5 REFRAMING SUSTAINABILITY: REALISING JUST CITIES

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Across the world it is increasingly being recognised that cities face a range of complex challenges. As explored elsewhere in this book, much of Mistra Urban Futures' work so far has been to investigate co-production as a strategy to address complex urban issues. Recognising ongoing injustices in cities everywhere and drawing on the reflections of the Local Interaction Platform Directors, the coming years of Mistra Urban Futures are guided by the framework of *Realising Just Cities*. As John Friedmann wrote in 2002 in *The Prospect of Cities*, 'If injustice is to be corrected ... we will need the concrete imagery of utopian thinking to propose steps that would bring us a little closer to a more just world.' The two key questions we hope to answer are: What do just cities look like in different urban contexts? And how might just cities be realised?

This chapter was written by Warren Smit and Rike Sitas of the Cape Town LIP. Part of the chapter is based on exploratory inputs from each of the Mistra Urban Futures Local Interaction Platform cities, documenting various workshops and pilot interviews with a range of stakeholders, undertaken by Chido Muzondo (Cape Town), Alfred Otom and Stephen Agong (Kisumu), Louise Marix Evans (Greater Manchester) and Leif Eriksson, Hans Abrahamsson and Sanna Isemo (Gothenburg).

What do just cities look like in different urban contexts? And how might just cities be realised? Workshops, interviews and research from Mistra Urban Futures' Local Interaction Platforms uncover how ideas of the just city are understood by different stakeholders in different places – and the strategies which might help tackle complex urban problems.

In this chapter we examine the concept of just cities and consider what it means in the different contexts of Mistra Urban Futures' Local Interaction Platforms around the world. Looking briefly at what has been written about justice and injustice in cities, we then turn to our initial findings from engaging with various stakeholders about what *they* saw as key issues in their cities and strategies for realising just cities. Finally, we reflect on the outcomes of the process. How are ideas of the just city understood by different stakeholders in different places? And how can we go about developing and implementing strategies to help us achieve just cities?

WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF JUST CITIES?

It is useful to reflect on what has been written about the concept of *just cities*. For centuries scholars have written about aspects of justice and injustice in societies and economies. The injustices associated with urbanisation and industrialisation in the nineteenth century were most visible in cities. In 1844, Friedrich Engels documented the appalling living conditions of the working class in Manchester in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

Studies such as these gave rise to concepts such as *social justice* and *distributive justice* in the work of scholars like the British philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill. Social justice can be defined as being about a fair and just relationship between individuals and society more broadly, while distributive justice relates to a specific aspect of social justice – what is distributed, between whom they are distributed, and what is the ideal distribution. Mill wrote in 1863 that 'Society should treat all equally

well.' Thinking on issues of social and distributive justice generally focused on the national scale, and not on the urban scale. Although it was obvious that injustices were widespread in cities, this was seen usually as an outcome of national economies and policies.

During the 1960s, cities became a key site of the struggle against injustice. In 1973, drawing on his work in Baltimore, the geographer, David Harvey, applied the concepts of social and distributive justice to cities in his book *Social Justice and the City*. Harvey used the term *territorial justice* to examine the spatial and geographical dimensions of justice. Since then, the term *spatial justice* has become more usual. The concept of spatial justice was proposed by Gordon Pirie in 1983, and has been elaborated on by a number of scholars, most notably in Ed Soja's 2010 publication called *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Spatial justice essentially is the spatial or geographical aspects of justice, and concerns the fair and equitable spatial distribution of resources and the opportunities to use them.

The notion of the *right to the city* is closely linked to spatial justice and attempts to achieve just cities. In his 1968 book, *The Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre said that:

The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (*citadin*) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos.

Lefebvre saw the right to the city as having two key dimensions: the right to participate in decision-making and the right to appropriation, that is to physically access, occupy and use urban space. This essentially implies that the social value of urban space be prioritised over its economic and financial value.

»How are ideas of the just city understood by different stakeholders in different places? And how can we go about developing and implementing strategies to help us achieve just cities?«

The right to the city has found traction in recent discussions around the commons. The notion of the commons stems from the idea of shared environmental resources such as air and water, and has been extended to include the social and cultural commons. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Commonwealth* in 2011, the city itself is the ultimate commons. Although contested, the overarching idea is that there are certain things and thoughts that should be collective or common to everyone, and this has become a rallying point for many social and spatial justice activists.

Closely related to the notion of spatial justice is the idea of environmental justice. The urban environmental justice movement began in the 1970s in the United States, in cities where negative environmental externalities (such as toxic waste, solid waste and air pollution) were highly unevenly distributed racially. In the words of Robert D. Bullard, writing in 1993, ‘Some communities are routinely poisoned while the government looks the other way.’

While some take the view that just cities can be achieved only through a radical upheaval of the current social and economic order, others believe that there are interventions which can be put in place immediately to make cities more just. The most comprehensive exploration of how we can try to make cities more just in practice is *The Just City*, by Susan Fainstein in 2010. Although focused on wealthier cities in the Global North, Fainstein sees injustice as ‘actions that disadvantage those who already have less or are excluded from entitlements enjoyed by others who are no more deserving’, such as ‘Taking away housing, employment or access to public space from the politically or economically weak.’ By contrast, she defines the just city as ‘a city in which public investment and regulations

produce equitable outcomes rather than support those already well off.’

Fainstein defines the three key dimensions of urban justice as *equity, diversity and democracy*. *Equity* is ‘the distribution of material and non-material benefits derived from public policy in such a way that it does not favour those who are already better off’, and can be achieved through interventions such as inclusionary housing, regulations to prevent gentrification, and providing affordable public transport. *Diversity* is the integration of races, classes and land uses, which can be achieved through interventions such as zoning schemes that allow for a range of uses, through the provision of a range of public spaces, and targeted assistance to groups historically discriminated against in accessing housing, education and employment. *Democracy* is defined as all people’s interests being represented, which Fainstein believes can be achieved through interventions such as ensuring participatory planning and budgeting processes at local and citywide scale to ensure that all interests are fairly represented.

An important complement to Fainstein’s analysis is Amartya Sen’s 1985 work on capabilities – that equal access to opportunities is meaningless without developing the capabilities of people to be able to make use of these opportunities. Fainstein notes that the objectives of equity, diversity and democracy may be in conflict, both internally and with each other, and there usually need to be trade-offs.

Over the past few decades, the *right to the city* and the concepts of spatial and environmental justice have been used in various ways by a wide variety of groups, including social movements and NGOs. The concept of the right to the city has particularly resonated in, and been taken up in, the Global South. Susan Parnell and Sophie Oldfield’s

edited volume, *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South* in 2014, draws together a wide range of voices from across the Global South, many of which draw on notions of the *just, fair, and good* city, often in relation to the *right to the city*.

One of the earliest examples of the explicit use of the right to the city as a theoretical and political framework was the formulation in 1995 of the *World Charter for the Right to the City* by Habitat International Coalition (this was eventually officially adopted at the World Social Forum in 2005). A number of aspects of this have been adopted by some governments, such as the 2001 City Statute in Brazil. UN-Habitat also adopted the right to the city concept in its *State of the World's Cities 2010: Bridging the Urban Divide*. The right to the city has largely been championed by academics and activists in the Global South. In 2010 Edgar Pieterse explored the relationship of these rights to the developmental state, while more recently in 2015 Cirolia, Smit and Duminy explored the right to the city in relation to housing.

In addition, the *New Urban Agenda* adopted by the UN at the Habitat III summit in Quito in October 2016 to guide international efforts to promote sustainable urban development over the next twenty years, incorporates a holistic approach within which urban spatial, social and environmental justice are embedded.

Mistra Urban Futures is conscious of the Northern-derived nature of most of these concepts and its book, *Realising Just Cities*, examines how three core components of urban sustainability, namely accessibility, greenness and fairness, can be framed to have universal applicability. The chapter on fair cities by Susan Parnell is of particular relevance here.

EXAMINING THE CONCEPT OF THE 'JUST CITY' IN THE MISTRA URBAN FUTURES CITIES

In order not to take for granted the global relevance of the concept of the just city, an important step in adopting a focus on *realising just cities* is to test its relevance in the different Northern and Southern cities where

Mistra Urban Futures works through its Local Interaction Platforms. To take this forward, in May 2016, Mistra Urban Futures undertook a series of workshops and pilot interviews in the different cities. The stakeholders involved included members of civil society (such as NGOs, community associations, social movements, trade unions), local and regional government (mayors, councillors, and/or other elected politicians and officials) and the private sector (chambers of commerce, business improvement districts, large corporations, large property owners, organisations representing informal businesses).

The questions discussed included:

- ▶ **What do the concepts of just, fair and equitable cities mean to you?**
- ▶ **Do you think that making your city more just, fair and equitable is an important objective?**
- ▶ **Do you think your city is currently just, fair and equitable? How was this achieved or how is it being achieved?**
- ▶ **If no, what are the key issues of injustice, unfairness and inequity in your city, and the key obstacles to achieving justice, fairness and equality?**
- ▶ **How do you think these issues can be addressed and obstacles overcome to make your city more just, fair and equitable?**
- ▶ **Are you aware of any key initiatives that are trying to make your city more just, fair and equitable?**

METHODOLOGY

Local Interaction Platforms

Co-creation

Comparative urban research

TRACKS

Socio-ecological transformations

Socio-spatial transformations

Socio-cultural transformations

CORE PROCESSES

Urban change

Urban knowledge

Urban governance

REALISING JUST CITIES

ACCESSIBLE GREEN FAIR

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK

We organise urban knowledge around Local Interaction Platforms in different continental regions, practising co-creation and comparative urban research. We have identified three sets of cross-cutting Core Processes that are essential for working towards the realisation of just (i.e., accessible, green and fair) cities in different contexts, and on which reflection, comparison, analysis and learning will be conducted: *urban change*, *urban knowledge* and *urban governance*. Key substantive areas for research and practice have been identified as

TRACKS – Transformative Research Activities through Co-producing Knowledge. The TRACKS contribute to, and are informed by, the Core Processes as each TRACK can be considered as including and intersecting with processes of change, knowledge production/ management and governance. Three TRACKS are our priorities: *socio-ecological*, *socio-spatial* and *socio-cultural transformations*. There is overlap between the TRACKS, hence they are to be seen as organisational principles rather than discrete or disconnected spheres.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Here we explore the notion of the *just city* by drawing on the research Mistra Urban Futures conducted in each city. We start by unpacking the varied ways in which the terminology around just cities surfaces in different contexts. We go on to reveal some of the core issues related to injustice in each of the cities and end with some examples of how just cities are being realised.

Just cities terminology

The workshops, interviews and research yielded some interesting commonalities and differences in the terminology surrounding issues of just cities. While Fainstein's conceptions of justice as equity, diversity and democracy are evident, the terminology is not always used in the same ways in different contexts or by different stakeholders.

In Cape Town and Kisumu, the terms *social justice* and *spatial justice* are widely used to refer to broader urban issues, and the concepts of *fairness* and *equality* are also often used. In Greater Manchester, however, a desk-based review revealed a largely criminological use of the term *justice* on official websites, with the exception of work within Mistra Urban Futures itself and elsewhere in academia. The words *fairness* and *equity* are used in Greater Manchester, but *equality* is the term that most commonly emerged in relation to issues of the just city in the research conducted thus far.

Equality means something slightly different from, and narrower than, equity – for example, in 2011 Carolyn Stephens suggested that equality refers to the distribution of outcomes among different social groups, whereas equity refers more broadly to the distribution of power, resources and outcomes among different social groups. A similar hesitance about the term *just city* emerged in Greater Manchester, where some felt the term *justice* is too strong and would be better positioned as fairness. This may come from an association of *justice* with the idea of punishment as opposed to a system of redress as is imagined in Cape Town and Kisumu. But the notion of fairness came with its own critiques within the interviews, where there was

a concern that it implies 'you get what you deserve' which further disadvantages the urban poor.

The pilot work in Greater Manchester revealed recurring terms such as access, self-sufficiency and providing enabling environments. One concern with such terminology is that it places responsibility on individuals who may have very different social and economic circumstances. While seen as more politically acceptable to those in official positions, these 'softer' terms do not take into account the myriad power relations at play that may hinder the reality of access or self-sufficiency for many people.

Those community organisations interviewed align values and sentiments at the core of their actions which can be interpreted within the context of the just city, but they do not necessarily explicitly use the terminology of just cities. Instead, a preference was found for expressing localised issues around the notion of a 'better quality of life'. On the other hand, there are other groups, such as advocacy, campaigning or activist organisations who have embraced the concept of just cities, which can be most evidently seen in manifestos for change, moral calls for action and in the endeavour to redress inequality through 'levelling the playing field'.

In Gothenburg, different terminology is used: the Swedish word *rättvisa* can mean justice, fairness, equity and equality. Equality in this context refers to equal opportunities, fairness refers to the capacity of people to make the most of the opportunities, and justice refers to the power dynamics that shape equality and fairness. For just cities, *rättvisa* as justice is the active levelling of the playing field to ensure that equality and fairness are enabled. Because *social justice* and *spatial justice* are not terms commonly used in Gothenburg, respondents had different reactions to whether the term *just city* captures current needs adequately. Although there was a sentiment that justice is important, the introduction of new terms was not always seen as the most productive way to address urban issues. The research showed that *rättvisa* is already an all-encompassing term.

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Despite this contested use of terminology across the cities, there is a general recognition that just, fair and equitable cities are important, but how this is prioritised may shift in different contexts at different times. In Greater Manchester the term *just city* may not be used in official accounts, but the general sentiment can be found in the aspirations of the policy-makers, business representatives, think tanks and community organisations interviewed.

For Kisumu and Cape Town, the urgency of achieving just cities may be more apparent, given the differing levels of poverty and inequality in comparison to the cities in the Global North, as well as the histories of colonisation, racial discrimination and segregation. In particular, apartheid South Africa was an extremely unjust society with highly unjust cities. Many of these injustices have continued to exist into the post-apartheid period.

While many aspects of South African life have been made more just, spatial and environmental injustices associated with the spatial form of South African cities and towns are still very starkly apparent. As a result, a number of social movements in South Africa have mobilised around the concepts of the right to the city, spatial justice and environmental justice. Particularly noteworthy examples are the *Right to the City* campaign of Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Environmental Justice Networking Forum. Many government policies have adopted principles such as the need to restructure cities to be fairer and more equitable, but in practice this has not had much impact.

In Cape Town, therefore, the notions of social and spatial justice are inextricably linked to redress from colonial and apartheid inequality that entrenched the majority of citizens in unequal relation to the wealthy minority. The term has found traction in social movements, as is

evident in the name of the Social Justice Coalition in Cape Town, a network of organisations advocating for housing, education and access to basic services under the banner of social justice. Ndifuna Ukwazi, a recently established organisation, has an explicit focus on spatial justice and the right to the city, with its *Reclaim the City* campaign.

While the just cities terminology is well established in these circles and appears in some policy documents, as in Greater Manchester, it is not the everyday terminology of public officials. The most prevalent language in official documentation relates rather to equality and integration. Public officials share similar concerns that are revealed in the strategic plans of cities even if they are not evident in their use of language.

There is a general consensus that cities are in urgent need of transformation, but how injustice can be recognised and how justice can be realised is more complicated in practice. The preliminary research in Gothenburg suggests that leveraging the notion of the *just city* can be a meaningful agent for change through its ability to identify unequal power relations in the process of seeking social, economic and spatial transformation.

Substantive issues of injustice

Here we unpack some of the key issues of injustice in the cities where Mistra Urban Futures is based. The cities may have different material realities, and levels of poverty are considerably higher in Kisumu and Cape Town, yet there are also a number of shared injustices linked to exclusion.

In Kisumu, five key issues hinder the realisation of a more just city. First, there has been a failure to protect and maintain public spaces, denying safe social spaces for residents. Second, poor infrastructure and development

has meant inadequate and unequal urban development that restricts the everyday lives and livelihoods of residents. Third, the voices of vulnerable community members have been neglected, and this is most evident in the lack of adequate representation of youth, women, and especially female children in decision-making processes. Fourth, institutional maladministration has led to cartels and vigilantes controlling important amenities; undue political processes can derail attempts at fairness; and discrimination and nepotism are counter to notions of equality in the *just city*. Finally, under-developed social welfare schemes are not able to adequately support marginalised people, and in particular, the elderly.

Although Cape Town shares some socio-economic challenges with Kisumu, the key issues in the former are

of residents unable to access sufficient food for their needs.

The City of Cape Town's *Spatial Development Framework* commits to 'just and equitable redress' in order to 'transform the apartheid city'. City officials have identified transport as one of the key issues, and there has been an accelerated interest in transit-oriented development as a means to address the social, economic and spatial injustices. Cape Town and Kisumu shared a concern about the disjuncture between policy and implementation. Regardless of how progressive policies may be, they may be unimplementable, due to constraints like inadequate financial resources and lack of political will.

In Greater Manchester, official strategies are concerned with reducing budget deficits. Although this is contested territory, the strategies are seen by some to allow spaces

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slightly different. One of the primary challenges is linked to access to land and housing, as large numbers of households live in informal settlements and other types of inadequate housing. Cape Town is still a racially segregated city and although some integration is evident along the main transport corridors, the city is still spatially organised according to colonial and apartheid urban planning.

Little has been done so far to transform this to ensure equitable access to jobs, amenities and services. This is linked to the challenge of high levels of unemployment (particularly amongst the youth), inequitable access to employment, and a weak education system. Safety is a fundamental issue for many residents, as Cape Town is ranked as one of the most violent cities in the world, with particularly high levels of gang violence. One of the hotly contested topics at the moment, and one that inhibits a 'just' Cape Town, is food insecurity, with a large proportion

for innovation and collaboration to emerge. In looking how to balance economic growth and social and environmental factors, six main challenges were identified by the interviewees in the pilot study. The first challenge involves tackling inequalities linked to health, income and housing. The second involves addressing spatial and geographical inequalities where neighbourhoods are developing at different rates, leaving a rift between affluent and poor areas. The third relates to alleviating poverty and, in particular, food and fuel poverty. The fourth is linked to housing, which in the private rental sector can be in poor condition, insecure and expensive. There is also a problem with homelessness. The final challenge involves addressing low wage, low skilled and insecure employment.

Even though Gothenburg has higher standards of living for the majority of residents than the other Mistra Urban Futures cities, there is widespread agreement that it is not

»To realise a just Kisumu we need to ‘empower citizens and promote active stakeholder participation and involvement at all levels of local governance’.« INTERVIEW, KISUMU, 2016

yet a fair and *just city* due to structural injustices visible in class divisions and in segregation where some areas are deemed ‘discriminated urban districts’. These districts are marked by diminishing public spaces and infrastructure being dismantled, which has become the basis for youth activism. Addressing issues of inequitable access to the city (participation in decision-making as well as physical access), housing, healthcare and education have been highlighted by the respondents in the initial research as the most important issues to address to ensure a ‘just’ Gothenburg.

Although there is an overall commitment from key stakeholders in each of the cities to realise more *just cities*, it is also recognised that there are tensions and trade-offs. Shared across the cities was the tension between economic, social and environmental development. One perspective is that economic growth is essential to providing social benefits. Others point to perpetuating inequality as evidence that the idea that money will ‘trickle down’, and eventually flow where it is needed, is optimistic at best. Increasingly there has been a focus on supporting local, often community-led initiatives. These pro-local and pro-social perspectives draw on examples that focus on empowering and entrusting local people and initiatives that are working towards urban sustainability that is not reliant on investment intensive approaches.

In Cape Town, questions were raised about the incompatible logics of the property market and social and spatial justice. The allegation is that high property prices in the centre prevent social and economic integration and maintain the spatialised divisions entrenched during apartheid. The City of Cape Town’s *Spatial Development Framework* seeks to address this but there are competing pressures from different interest groups such as ratepayers’ associations seeking to protect property prices and social

movements pushing for more centrally located affordable housing.

Despite differences in use of terminology and some different contextual realities, there are still vital similarities, specifically related to concerns about segregated neighbourhoods, which were expressed in each of the city’s research findings. Cape Town is largely segregated along apartheid lines. Kisumu faces challenges with differential development in different neighbourhoods. Gothenburg has marginalised migrant communities cut off from social infrastructure, and Greater Manchester shares neighbourhood area inequalities based on income. These spatial inequalities are linked to complex socio-cultural and economic inequalities. These similarities point to a common concern for socially responsive urban development and spatial transformation.

Realising the just city

Although there is an overwhelming commitment to achieving more just cities, even if there are differences in terminology, *how* to do this is more complicated. Here we investigate some examples from the different cities where this idea is being explored. The findings have been clustered around: governance and policy, litigation, strengthening civil society, public engagement, spatial transformation and social transformation.

Governance and decision-making processes were highlighted in all four cities. Addressing issues of governance could rectify Kisumu’s concerns about maladministration and nepotism. Kisumu’s research revealed a commitment to promoting public participation processes as a response to this. In Greater Manchester action research supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Mistra Urban Futures

(the *Jam and Justice* project) is seeking to test and learn from co-produced inclusive governance projects and bottom-up collaborative governance. Similarly, much of the work of the *Knowledge Transfer Programme* in Cape Town was about attempting to develop new tools of governance. Related to governance, **policy** is another terrain where innovation can occur. The *Governance and Policy for Sustainability* (GAPS) project worked to explore this in relationship to sustainability.

Litigation has also proven a successful path to furthering issues of justice. For example, the work of Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) in engaging with the legal system has pushed a more progressive agenda around street trade and waste pickers. This shows how informal workers

as either top-down or bottom-up. The *Philippi CityLab* in Cape Town, which focused on experiments in urban sustainability, revealed that a middle ground – a state-society synergy – is possibly a better way of speaking about and ‘doing’ urban development. Gothenburg’s *Knowledge about and Approaches to Fair and Socially Sustainable Cities* (KAIROS) project used similar strategies to support active citizenship centralised around issues of sustainability.

The previous points all suggest that new kinds of **partnerships** are necessary. These include a wide configuration of public-private-academic-activist constellations. The Mistra Urban Futures’ Local Interaction Platforms are good examples of where these partnerships are being explored, but there are also other examples.

All of these interventions can start fostering the kinds

»Everyone having access to the same opportunities.
No one being marginalised from education, decision-making
structures or good homes.« INTERVIEW, GREATER MANCHESTER, 2016

in various cities were able to secure rights to the city – such as the right to trade and not have goods confiscated – through litigation. These engagements set precedents for cities across the globe. The Habitat III *New Urban Agenda* could offer global commitments to underpin these kinds of endeavours.

One way to re-think relationships between cities and service delivery is to take localisation more seriously through **strengthening civil society**. Each city has identified a wide range of activist, advocacy and community-based organisations that are working towards alleviating injustice, albeit on a small and localised scale. Finding ways of empowering these offers an alternative in-road to alleviate the impact of injustice.

Public engagement is commonly seen through public participation processes, many of which have been criticised. It is too easy to pit the state against civil society. Often the discussion about public engagement is simplistically seen

of **spatial transformation** so necessary in all cities. For Kisumu, a priority is urban upgrading – primarily in public spaces such as parks, streets and pavements. For Gothenburg and Greater Manchester, the priorities are connecting and making neighbourhoods more equitable, in a context where material infrastructure is important but not as big a priority as social and economic integration.

In Cape Town, both physical upgrading and socio-economic integration are priorities – many neighbourhoods are in urgent need of upgrading, which has sparked experiments with in situ informal settlement upgrading as an alternative to relocation and continued sprawl on the urban periphery. It is also crucial to find ways to connect segregated neighbourhoods.

The Two Rivers Urban Park has become an important test site for thinking through these issues, as it is a green belt surrounded by Cape Town’s oldest black African township¹ (Langa), the affluent previously white neighbourhood of

Pinelands, and the previously coloured neighbourhood of Athlone. Having functioned as a buffer zone between race-based segregation, the urban park now offers an opportunity to foster social, economic, spatial and environmental integration in close proximity to the city centre.

Inextricably linked to spatial transformation is **social transformation**. Although these have traditionally been dealt with separately, urbanists are making increasingly convincing arguments why social justice has to be linked to spatial justice. What this ultimately means is that social divisions (such as those linked to gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation) are inextricably spatial and need to be addressed simultaneously. Although different cities may take some similar conceptual approaches, there are diverse contextual realities bound up in local specificity. Power and politics play out in different ways. A deep knowledge of each city and issues of injustice is required in order to enable locally appropriate strategies for realising just cities.

Perhaps one way to think about it is as a respondent from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in South Africa pointed out: it is often the ‘thresholds of potential concerns that offer spaces of possibility conducive to realising more just cities’ – in other words, instead of seeing conflict as crisis, it is more productive to see these moments as brimming with potential for better forms of urbanism. These thresholds bubble up in different ways in different cities: for example, in contested claims over pockets of state-owned land in Cape Town; in street upgrading in Kisumu; in poorly maintained rental stock in Greater Manchester; and in marginalised migrant communities in Gothenburg.

IN CONCLUSION

The concept of a just city is a relevant one; however, there are different understandings of what this means for different stakeholders and in different contexts. Similarly, the strategies for realising just cities will need to be different in each context. We have only just begun scratching the surface of opinions and views. Moving forward, Mistra Urban Futures’ research will be working collaboratively in and across various cities to help understand better what just cities mean in different contexts and how we can work toward making the concept a reality.

1) In South African terminology, a ‘township’ is a low-income residential area. ‘Black African’, ‘coloured’ and ‘white’ are apartheid-era racial terms. Despite being deeply problematic, they are still officially used in South Africa. Black African refers to ‘descendants of the groups of Bantu-speaking, iron-working cultivators who had begun to settle the northern and eastern parts of Southern Africa between 300 and 400 AD’; coloured refers to ‘an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous group of people descended from the indigenous Khoi and San people, the slave population, and the progeny of sexual contacts between these groups – and Bantu-speaking people – with European settlers’; and white refers to ‘descendants of European settlers or more recent immigrants of European stock’ (Wilkinson, P. 2000, 197).

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